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The British Government, the Newspapers and the German Problem 1937-1939

Michael Meznar

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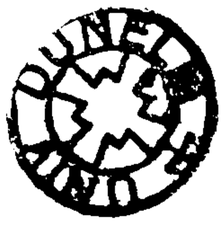
Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.
University of Durham, Department of History

2005



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Abstract: PhD thesis, University of Durham 2005

The British Government, the newspapers and the German problem 1937-39

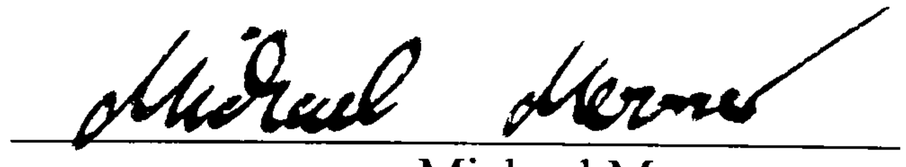
Michael Meznar

British newspaper attitudes towards Neville Chamberlain's 'appeasement' of Nazi Germany have long attracted historical criticism; and in the now-orthodox interpretation of Richard Cockett's *Twilight of Truth* (1989), the government is said to have exerted such influence, even 'control', over newspapers that criticism of its foreign policy was effectively suppressed, and freedom of the press subverted.

This thesis reassesses government-newspaper relations from 1937 to the end of appeasement in 1939. It argues that while government did seek to influence newspaper comment, this was hardly a new development; and if new in intensity, this was a reaction to the greater interwar political independence of newspapers. While making full use of government records and private papers, in contrast to Cockett's work the thesis also pays close attention to actual newspaper content. Newspapers with different political stances and forms of ownership are examined, from the 'establishment' *Times*, the Conservative *Daily Telegraph*, the main Beaverbrook newspapers, *The Yorkshire Post* and *Manchester Guardian* as examples of provincial papers, the Liberal *News Chronicle*, to the main Labour opposition paper, *The Daily Herald.*

It is argued that newspaper independence remained strong, and 'press freedom' continued to be jealously guarded. Papers which supported government policy did so for their own long-established reasons; others were constrained by their inconsistent foreign-policy stances, or at dangerous periods (especially the Czechoslovakian crisis) temporarily moderated their criticism from a sense of national responsibility, not because of government pressure; and other newspapers remained persistently critical. Government efforts to influence the press had very limited and sporadic success. Moreover, not only did all major newspapers continue to report the views of anti-appeasers; tellingly, these anti-appeasers made no substantial complaints of government suppression of alternative views. Government-newspaper relations in the late 1930s were more complex and subtle than recent accounts have suggested.

I declare that no portion of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.



Michael Meznar

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List of abbreviations

APA	Außenpolitisches Amt, Berlin
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAB	Cabinet papers, National Archives, Kew
CRD	Conservative Research Department
DBFP	*Documents on British Foreign Policy*
DGFP	*Documents on German Foreign Policy*
EHQ	*European History Quarterly*
GGD	Geoffrey Dawson papers, *The Times* Archive
HJ	*Historical Journal*
JCH	*Journal of Contemporary History*
MGA	*Manchester Guardian* Archive, John Rylands University Library, Manchester
NC	Neville Chamberlain Papers, Birmingham University Library
PA	Politisches Archiv, Auswärtige Amt, Berlin
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
PREM	Prime Minister's private office papers, National Archives, Kew
TTA	*The Times* Archive
TUC	Trade Union Congress

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INTRODUCTION

It has been a common assumption that Neville Chamberlain's appeasement policy received overwhelming support from the British public. Most leading politicians in the late 1930s believed this was so, and historians long accepted the claims of former policy makers that until 1939 public opinion was a constraint on any firmer stance towards Nazi Germany.[1] However, more recent studies have shown that Chamberlain had less support than he claimed, especially at the time of the 1938 Czechoslovakian crisis.[2] This leads to doubt about what had always been one of the main justifications of Chamberlain's policies – that he was doing what most British people wanted.

A central question is: why was 'appeasement' apparently so strongly supported, given the manifestly evil and aggressive nature of Nazi Germany? After 1940 the policy was very widely repudiated and condemned, so much so that for a long period it seemed difficult to understand why and how it had obtained any significant support. One assumption was that the political public was deluded or misled about the character of the Nazi regime, its threat to Britain and the prospects of appeasement. But how was this achieved, if such was the case?

A possible argument is the strength of government propaganda, upheld – perhaps encouraged – by newspapers. The press's attitude towards appeasement was important because in the 1930s, newspapers were for most of the British public the major source of

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[1] E.g. Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (London, 1954), pp. 327-8, 375, and David Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain* (London, 2001), p. 2.

[2] See Anthony Adamthwaite, 'The British Government and the media', 1937-38', *JCH* 18 (1983), 281, and Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain*, p. 53. See also N.J. Crowson, *Facing Fascism: The Conservative Party and the European Dictators 1935-1940* (London, 1997), for growing criticism within local Conservative constituencies.

information about foreign affairs.[3] Though valuable as a source, newspapers are difficult to assess as an indicator of public opinion, because of the problems in detecting the reactions of the readers. The fact that a newspaper was bought reveals nothing much about whether the readers read the leaders, or agreed or were influenced by them.[4] As Dutton has stated, 'there seems no entirely satisfactory answer to the question of whether the press sets out to shape political opinion or merely to reflect it. In all probability there is truth in both propositions'.[5] No attempt has been made in the present study to determine what impact the newspapers had on the political consciousness of Britain as a whole, although occasional and instructive observations on this issue from journalists themselves are noted. Not even people closely involved were confident about the impact: 'I sometimes think that we have a tremendous influence', Lord Beaverbrook said in 1948, but 'then I get quite despondent about it'.[6]

One authoritative verdict on the impact of media on its audience has concluded that it is 'more likely to reinforce opinions than convert them', therefore limiting its power to change political ideas.[7] Nevertheless, it is important that in the 1930s newspaper owners, journalists and readers not only believed that newspapers had considerable influence on public opinion, but that it was assumed that they could change the way politicians acted. This assumption, in turn, had an effect on politicians. Hence, obviously, the great concern

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[3] See Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge, *Britain by Mass Observation* (London, 1939), p. 30.
[4] See Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945. British politics and the Second World War* (London 1982), p. 15
[5] Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain*, p. 3.
[6] Beaverbrook in Royal Commission on the Press, *Minutes of Evidence*, (London, 1949), q. 8662 (18 March 1948).
[7] Colin Seymour-Ure, *The Political Impact of Mass Media* (London, 1974), pp. 41-63, 74.

of politicians about the state of the press.[8] 'Mistaken or not, this conviction created its own reality.'[9]

* * *

During the last fifteen years, British newspapers have been strongly criticised for their stances on foreign policy in the 1930s, especially during the premiership of Neville Chamberlain. The main charge has been that most newspapers too readily supported his policy of appeasement towards Hitler and Mussolini. A stronger and more specific charge has been that they did so because the government was able to 'manipulate' or even 'control' news and comment, to the point – it has been argued – of suppressing true press freedom.

Such charges were not entirely new. Criticism of the role of the press, or of particular newspapers, began during the reactions against appeasement during the Second World War and played some part in the post-war Labour government's decision to appoint the Royal Commission on the Press (1947-49). However, that enquiry was unable to confirm the alleged government pressure,[10] a verdict apparently confirmed by an important contemporary and authoritative study of the newspapers by a leading proprietor.[11]

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[8] Colin Seymour-Ure, *The Press, Politics and the Public. An Essay on the Role of the National Press in the British Political System* (London, 1968), p. 14.
[9] Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*, vol.ii, *The Twentieth Century* (London, 1984), p. 7.
[10] See Royal Commission on the Press, 1947-49, *Report* (Cmnd 7700; London, 1949), para. 18, p. 4.
[11] See Viscount Camrose, *British Newspapers and Their Controllers* (London, 1947), and Tom Harris, 'The Popular Press', *Horizon* (1940), 158-74. Cf. Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend. A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939* (London, 1940; 1950 edn.), p. 432.

Since the 1940s, a considerable amount has been written about British newspapers in the early twentieth century.[12] Much of this literature has been in the form of histories of particular newspapers, or biographies of their proprietors or editors. Though valuable as sources of information, by their nature they can give only limited assessments on the central issue for the appeasement years, the relationship between the government and the press in general, or at least the major national newspapers.[13]

In one important instance, however, such studies did generate a debate about government influence: that of Britain's most respected newspaper, *The Times*. After 1940 *The Times* had joined the general criticism of appeasement, and in the early 1950s its own official history denounced its earlier support for Chamberlain's policies. It did so partly in terms of the newspaper's journalistic structure at the time – notably its lack of a foreign editor[14] – but it also condemned the editor, Geoffrey Dawson, not just for his commitment to appeasement but even for trying to do the government's job: 'to assist a government of whatever complexion to find a national policy had become one of the important functions

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[12] Most notably Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War. The Gathering Storm* (London, 1948); Cato, *Guilty Men* (London, 1940); and Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1946).

[13] Significant studies have been: David Ayerst, *Garvin of the Observer* (London, 1985); ibid., *Guardian. Biography of a Newspaper* (London, 1971); Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Lord Beaverbrook. A Life* (New York, 1993); Richard Cockett, *David Astor and the Observer* (London, 1991); Duff Hart-Davis, *The House the Berry Built. Inside the Telegraph, 1928–1986* (London, 1990); Lord Hartwell, *William Camrose. Giant of Fleet Street* (London, 1992); David Hubback, *No Ordinary Press Baron. A Life of Sir Walter Layton* (London, 1985); Markus Huttner, *Britische Presse und nationalsozialistischer Kirchenkampf. Eine Untersuchung der 'Times' und des 'Manchester Guardian' von 1930 bis 1939* (Paderborn, 1995); R.J. Minney, *Viscount Southwood* (London, 1954); A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook* (London, 1972; Colin Seymour-Ure and Jim Schoff, *David Low* (London, 1985); Huw Richards, *The Bloody Circus. The Daily Herald and the Left* (London, 1997), p. 7; Adrian Smith, 'The Fall and Fall of the Third Daily Herald, 1930-64', in Peter Catterall, Colin Seymour-Ure and Adrian Smith (eds.), *Northcliffe's Legacy. Aspects of the British Popular Press, 1896-1996* (London, 2000), 169-200; John Stubbs, 'Appearance and reality: a case study of the Observer and J. L. Garvin, 1914-1942', in George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate (eds.), *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (London, 1978), pp. 320-338; James Thomas, 'A Bad Press?: Popular Newspapers, the Labour Party and British Politics from Northcliffe to Blair' (PhD thesis, University College Swansea, 1999).

[14] *History of The Times*, vol. iv (London, 1952), p. 815.

of *The Times*'.[15] In a more specific allegation, the *History of The Times* accused Dawson of doctoring articles by the paper's Berlin Correspondent Norman Ebbutt, to suit the cause of British appeasement.[16] Wrench, in his biography of Dawson, was quick to defend his actions.[17] Similar, McLachlan in his later study of the deputy editor, Robert Barrington-Ward, claimed that what both did was common journalistic practice: though articles were cut, they were not censored or distorted to support appeasement.[18] An early German commentator, Abshagen, went still further, denying any influence of the British government on the editorial policy.[19] Though he saw the danger of Dawson's involvement with the government through his personal friendships with ministers, he argued that this was not a one-way-channel of influence; it was difficult to say who influenced whom, and in some cases the leading hand came from *The Times* office.[20]

Nevertheless, in the 1960s, the accusation that Dawson's intervention in the news columns was politically motivated became dominant. Both A.J.P. Taylor and Martin Gilbert accused Dawson of applying improper means like 'suppression' to achieve influence,[21] while Francis Williams criticised Dawson of being 'a committed man', too closely involved with the government and lacking a vital journalistic prerequisite:

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[15] Ibid., p. 1008.
[16] See ibid., p. 908.
[17] Evelyn Wrench, *Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times* (London, 1955), p. 373.
[18] Donald McLachlan, *In the Chair, Barrington-Ward of The Times 1927-1948* (London, 1971), pp. 131-8; more recently see Oliver Woods and James Bishop, *The Story of The Times. Bicentenary Edition 1785-1985* (London, rev. ed. 1985), pp. 294-5.
[19] Karl Heinz Abshagen, 'Geschichte einer Zeitung als Weltgeschichte. Die „Times" in der ersten Jahrhunderthälfte', *Aussenpolitik* 3 (1952), pp. 721-32, here p. 721.
[20] See ibid., p. 729.
[21] A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-46* (Oxford, 1965), p. 418, and Martin Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement* (London 1966), p. 143; see also Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott, *The Appeasers* (London, 1963), pp. 77-81; and see Keith Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion: The British Government and Germany, 1937-39* (London, 1972), pp. 102, 288.

detachment.[22] But both explanations originated from a belief that Dawson's personal ambitions were his guiding principle, rather than from an argument about governmental pressure. On the press in general, Williams did not deny government or political influence but claimed that this was just one of many different kinds of influences.[23]

For the most part, the burgeoning literature on appeasement during the 1960s and 1970s used newspapers as source material, rather than investigating whether they themselves played a part in the policies. A notable exception was *Appeasement on Trial*, by the American historian William R. Rock. Analysing the position of the British press in 1938-9, he stated that press coverage 'generally followed partisan political lines'.[24] Yet even here the role of the government in influencing each paper's position remained mainly in the dark. It is indicative that where he referred to an active government press policy, as with an initiative by Hoare in speaking with press controllers in September 1938, Rock concluded that the British newspapers' position 'might well have been the case even without Hoare's efforts'.[25] His assumption of an independent press was further supported by his discussion of episodes like the May crisis of 1938, or the calls for an alliance with Russia or for the inclusion of Churchill in the government, where the change of newspaper attitudes was because they were 'considerably ahead of the government in its recognition of the failure of appeasement'.[26]

It was primarily German historians who gave extended consideration to British newspaper attitudes towards Germany. Early German historical studies concentrated upon

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[22] Francis Williams, *Dangerous Estate: the Anatomy of Newspapers* (London, 1957), pp. 272-5; see also *History of The Times*, p. 1008.
[23] Williams, *Dangerous Estate*, p. 271.
[24] William R. Rock, *Appeasement on Trial: British Foreign Policy and its Critics, 1938-1939* (Hampden, Conn., 1966), p. 43. See also his *British Appeasement in the 1930s* (London, 1984), p. 82.
[25] Rock, *Appeasement on Trial*, p. 124.
[26] Rock, *British Appeasement*, p. 82, and Rock, *Appeasement on Trial*, pp. 98, 158.

discussions of the rise of Hitler and the NSDAP in the coverage of foreign observers as one means of considering how this could have happened, as well as from interest in how Britain dealt with the problem.[27] Central to this early research was the question of how British newspapers reported the personality of Hitler and the character of his party.[28] Later studies saw newspaper images of Germany as being determined mostly by foreign-policy responses to German expansionism; in other words, the initial analysis of German domestic politics was overshadowed by the supposedly more weighty events of foreign policy.[29] Holzweißig, for example, concentrated on 1935, a date to which he attached great importance for the development of a British answer to Hitler's foreign policy. With the help of files from the German Foreign Office, Holzweißig argued that German government propaganda had significant influence on published opinion in Britain.[30]

British historians of newspapers took no obvious account of this German literature. Their interest mainly focused on British press commentaries on Germany, rather than on the press's relationship with the government. Although Gannon could have had access to

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[27] Brigitte Granzow, *A Mirror of Nazism. British Opinion and the Emergence of Hitler 1929-1933* (London, 1964); Eva Pfeifer, 'Das Hitlerbild im Spiegel einiger konservativer Zeitungen in den Jahren 1929-1933' (PhD thesis, University of Heidelberg, 1965); Helmut Illert, 'Die deutsche Rechte der Weimarer Republik im Urteil der englischen Presse 1928-1932' (PhD thesis, University of Cologne, 1987); Herbert Behrendt, 'British Opinion and the Rise of Hitler in the 1920s. The Assessment of the Foreign Office, the Press and Intellectuals' (D.Phil, University of Oxford, 1982).

[28] On this aspect see the research report of Gerhard Schreiber, *Hitler. Interpretationen 1923-1983. Ergebnisse, Methoden und Probleme der Forschung* (Darmstadt, 1984), pp. 73-87, which is focused on the foreign perception of Hitler. See also William F. Sheldon, 'Das Hitler-Bild in der „Time" 1923-1933', in Joachim Hütter, Reinhard Meyers and Dietrich Papenfuss (eds.), *Tradition und Neubeginn* (Cologne, 1975), p. 74.

[29] Rolf Kieser, *Englands Appeasementpolitik und der Aufstieg des Dritten Reiches im Spiegel der britischen Presse (1933-1939). Ein Beitrag zur Vorgeschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Winterthur, 1964); and Markus Huttner, *Britische Presse und nationalsozialistischer Kirchenkampf. Eine Untersuchung der 'Times' und des 'Manchester Guardian' von 1930 bis 1939* (Paderborn, 1995), p. 19.

[30] Günther Holzweißig, *Das Deutschlandbild der britischen Presse im Jahre 1935. Ein Beitrag zur Grundlegung der englischen Appeasementpolitik* (Hamburg, 1967), pp. 86-107. See also Dietrich Aigner, *Das Ringen um England. Das deutsch-britische Verhältnis. Die öffentliche Meinung. Tragödie zweier Völker* (Munich-Esslingen, 1969); Manfred Lessle, *Englands Weg zum Appeasement, 1932-1936. Ein Beitrag zur Vorkriegsgeschichte Englands, dargestellt unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Presse* (Heidelberg, 1969).

unpublished government papers, he did not consult them and the role of the government is largely excluded from his study. Gannon set out very concisely what the papers said about Germany during the 1930s, but he could make only hesitant comments about exactly why they said it.[31] Gannon did, though, reject on general grounds the claim of deliberate censorship of news and commentary critical of the dictators. For a quality paper like *The Times*, despite the close relationship between Dawson and Chamberlain, such influence seemed to be unthinkable:

> To think that Dawson would intervene to censor news he found disagreeable from his own or the paper's point of view is to understand neither the paper nor the man. It also neglects to take into account the journalistic integrity of the people whose work would thus be censored for policy, and, especially in domestic affairs, a well-informed readership which would be immediately aware of any such tendentiousness.[32]

In the case of popular newspapers, supposedly chiefly interested in maximising profits, any manipulation was again disregarded, because 'both financially and intellectually it was unwise or impossible for the British Press to adopt a strongly critical line towards Nazi Germany: the readers did not want to read it, and the intellectuals did not want to write it'.[33] Open conflict between the idea of making profits and a vigorous news policy was avoided 'by a tacit mutual restraint'.[34]

Those historians of newspapers who were interested in British politics were mostly inclined to minimise the role of government influence. Seymour-Ure in his assessment of *The Times* concluded that the paper's support for appeasement arose out of Dawson's own

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[31] See Franklin Reid Gannon, *The British Press and Germany 1936-1939* (Oxford, 1971); a similar U.S example is Barbara Benge Kehoe, 'The British Press and Nazi Germany' (PhD thesis, University of Chicago 1980).
[32] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 70; also Iverach McDonald, *A Man of The Times. Talks and Travels in a Disrupted World* (London, 1976), pp. 52-3.
[33] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 2.
[34] Ibid., p. 4.

conceptions about foreign policy: 'it was certainly not a *tool* of the Government'.[35] Similarly, Koss rejected any successful government influence on the whole press, due to the independent attitude of newspaper men: 'Whatever tutelage they may have received from whatever minatory power would have been superfluous, for they were resolved to commit their own mistakes.'[36] Though he did not deny that attempts were made to influence editorial policy, the outcome was unsure, and it could even back-fire: 'There was no harm in trying, but also no guarantee that the effort would not serve to stiffen a paper's resistance.' He further claimed that '[i]nstructions were indeed issued, but whether they were accepted was more or less a matter of editorial discretion', leaving the initiative with the newspaper owners and editors.[37]

In his studies of British government propaganda, Philip Taylor reached similar conclusions. What was published was due to the views of owner or editor, not the government or any politician.[38] Therefore, if the public was not fully aware of the dangers it was blamed on 'the existence of a free and independent press in a democratic society which cherished the traditions of free speech and freedom to publish what it liked'.[39] Pronay too, acknowledged the proprietorial independence of the press in the inter-war years.[40] Though he emphasised that the government tended to approach newspapers at the top (to their proprietors) and not the editors or journalists, support for the government was

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[35] Seymour-Ure, *Political Impact*, p. 91.
[36] Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 576.
[37] Ibid., pp. 575, 579, also p. 542.
[38] Philip M. Taylor, *The Projection of Britain. British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919-1939* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 38-9; see also idem., 'Publicity and Diplomacy: The Impact of the First World War upon Foreign Office Attitudes towards the Press', in David Dilks (ed.), *Retreat from Power* (London, 1981), pp. 42-63, and more recently idem., 'Propaganda', in Robert Boyce and Joseph A. Maiolo (eds.), *The Origins of World War Two. The Debate Continues* (Houndsmill, 2003), p. 352.
[39] Taylor, *Projection*, pp. 38-9.
[40] Nicholas Pronay, 'Rearmament and the British public', in James Curran, Anthony Smith and Pauline Wingate (eds.), *Impacts and Influences. Essays on Media Power in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1987), pp. 53-96, here pp. 66-7.

only secure if both the owner and editor were convinced.[41] Newspaper men have to believe what they write if they want to be consistently persuasive, therefore influence can only be successful if it confirms the editors' and proprietors' view.

However, from the late 1970s the critical verdict re-emerged. James Margach was the first to make a new case for government manipulation. Having been a political journalist in the 1930s, he ostensibly offered an insider's account of the press-government relationship – though, writing 40 years after the events, his study could not help but be affected by hindsight and the post-war denunciation of appeasement. He was extremely critical of Chamberlain, calling him 'the first Prime Minister to employ news management on a grand scale. … From the moment he entered No.10 in 1937 he sought to manipulate the Press into supporting his policy of appeasing the dictators'.[42] Further, Margach argued that Dawson's enthusiasm for appeasement was a result of his becoming 'an active participant in the affairs of government and Whitehall', and accused him of distorting reports from his own correspondents.[43] Similarly, Adamthwaite's historical study of government–media relations attributed the lack of criticism and restriction of alternative views partly to 'the exercise of extensive official influence on the press, broadcasting and the newsreels'.[44]

The allegation of government manipulation of the press in general was made still more strongly in Richard Cockett's book, significantly entitled *Twilight of Truth*.[45] This has become highly influential, indeed it established an orthodoxy which has now been adopted

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[41] Ibid., p. 76.
[42] James Margach, *The Abuse of Power*: *The War Between Downing Street and the Media from Lloyd George to Callaghan* (London, 1978), pp. 50, 60.
[43] Ibid., p. 54.
[44] Adamthwaite, 'British Government and the Media', pp. 281-2.
[45] Richard Cockett, *Twilight of Truth. Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press* (London, 1989).

into more general studies of appeasement. This is at first sight surprising, because his attitude towards Chamberlain appears almost to be an updated version of the *Guilty Men* charges of 1940, which most modern scholars have largely discounted. His central themes are that the Chamberlain government shamefully – sometimes almost treacherously – manipulated the British press in order to pursue a misconceived and dangerous strategy of conciliating Hitler and Mussolini; and that many newspaper proprietors and editors, equally shamefully and treacherously, yielded to manipulation to the point of losing touch entirely with public opinion and becoming 'not so much the watchdogs of democracy as the harlots of democracy'.[46] According to Cockett there was no 'free' and 'independent' press in Britain during this period. It was 'at best merely a partisan political weapon controlled by politicians for their own purposes, and at worst a mere arena at the disposal of Whitehall to play out a game of interdepartmental warfare'.[47]

The book is clearly written from a radical direction – radical in the senses (a) of an effort to contribute to present debates about unlimited 'freedom of information';[48] and (b) an assumption that appeasement was not simply wrong but discreditable, perhaps even immoral. Because Chamberlain and his ministerial allies tried to influence the press – which the author considers improper – in favour of a particular policy which the author considers mistaken and bad, the implication is that Chamberlain and other ministers were themselves bad and acted from bad motives. This colours the overall argument.

There are a number of difficulties about this approach. Firstly, Cockett does not sufficiently engage with the historiography of appeasement. Politics is a more complex process than Cockett, with his tendency to judge everyone by their ability to see through

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[46] Ibid., p. 187.
[47] Ibid., p. 1.
[48] The comments on pp. 2, 142 and elsewhere are indicative.

appeasement, allows. In the late 1930s people were still genuinely unsure as to whether war could be avoided, and if it could not be, on what terms it should be fought. Even Churchill's own record was not as clear-cut as he later claimed,[49] and memories of the Great War were still fresh. Studies on Chamberlain and appeasement have shown that Chamberlain recognised that Britain's ability to control events on the continent was limited; that he distrusted U.S. foreign policy and doubted the prospects of U.S. assistance; that, like many other Europeans, Chamberlain feared the Soviet Union; and that his efforts to appease Germany were part of an intelligible effort to maintain a balance of power on the Continent.

Secondly, Cockett takes the undoubted fact that the government tried to influence newspapers and concludes not just that these efforts were successful, but that they provide an adequate or even complete explanation for 'press' support for appeasement. The implication is always that the explanatory weight lies less with the press itself than with Chamberlain and his ministerial and official allies. So an 'incestuous relationship between Whitehall and the press' is said to have meant that 'the press … *could do nothing but help* Chamberlain pursue appeasement'.[50] There is repeated slippage from such phrases as 'informal contacts'[51] between ministers and newspapermen, to assertions of government 'control'. Yet such 'control' would appear to be problematic or difficult to establish. because it appears to require free actions by the press – with the effect that Cockett's argument contains an internal tension. 'Although one might despair at the level of control government was able to exert ... it is nonetheless true that it could do so only with the

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[49] David Reynolds, 'Churchill's writing of history: appeasement, autobiography and *The Gathering Storm*', *Transaction of the Royal Historical Society*, 6s (2001), pp. 221-47; John Ramsden, *Man of the Century. Winston Churchill and his Legend since 1945* (London, 2002), ch. 4.
[50] Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 1: italics inserted.
[51] Ibid., p. 2.

willing connivance of journalists, editors and newspaper proprietors'.[52] The grounds for such 'willing connivance' are insufficiently explained; alternative explanations for newspaper support remain possible.

Thirdly, Cockett implies that the press was under such tight government control that alternative attitudes towards Germany and Italy were marginalized or even suppressed – that there was no 'independent' or 'free' press. Yet it is striking that his book contains no sustained analysis of the actual content of the newspapers. His evidence is overwhelmingly from private exchanges, rather than the published news reports, commentaries, articles and leaders. References to and quotations from newspapers seem to be presented to support instances of press self-censorship; there is no systematic indication of the rest of the content. For example, newspaper coverage of parliamentary debates, public speeches and party meetings – by members of all parties – was wider and fuller than it is today, so that varied opinions, including criticisms of the government, appeared in all newspapers almost as a matter of course.

Fourthly, Cockett frequently writes of a monolithic 'press': 'the press supported Chamberlain and appeasement'; 'the press ... could do nothing but help Chamberlain'.[53] Yet it is notable that in his early pages there are no references to Labour and Liberal newspapers. There is also a telling phrase that 'the *Daily Telegraph* was the only national paper with Conservative loyalties to treat Chamberlain and appeasement with a modicum of caution'.[54] Should we be surprised that papers with Conservative loyalties tended to support a Conservative prime minister, and the causes of peace and avoidance of total war? But what about newspapers without Conservative loyalties? Why the careful limitation? There

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[52] For example ibid., p. 2.
[53] Ibid., p. 1.
[54] Ibid., p. 13.

is another curious sentence in Cockett's conclusion. Asserting that Chamberlain exerted 'tight control of the press', it is stated that 'no alternative policy to appeasement as pursued by Chamberlain could ever be consistently articulated in the British press'.[55] Absolute statements ('no', 'ever)' are followed by a conditional qualification, 'consistently' – which implies that sometimes alternatives were articulated. In fact, earlier in the book it had emerged that 'the press' was not monolithic. It seems that newspapers which usually supported Chamberlain did, for some periods, became critical, and even that some newspapers were persistently critical.[56] These are rather large qualifications.

Despite these tensions in Cockett's book, subsequent studies have often accepted his argument. Stewart, for example, writes of 'the government's successful attempts to manipulate the press'. [57] Robert Rhodes James wrote in the same vein, about 'Chamberlain's deliberate, and largely successful manipulation of the newspapers'.[58] Foster, in his discussion of press coverage of the British guarantee to Poland in March 1939 claims that through 'Chamberlain's careful cultivation and manipulation of Fleet Street', the importance of the guarantee was minimised.[59] Nevertheless Foster restricted the success to only three sources, suggesting that 'it had obviously been highly selective'.[60] McDonough also adopted the claim of media manipulation.[61] Yet he too had to qualify the verdict: 'the

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[55] Ibid., p. 188.
[56] E.g. the *Daily Mirror*: see ibid. p. 102.
[57] Graham Stewart, *Burying Caesar. Churchill, Chamberlain and the Battle for the Tory Party* (London, 1999), p. 340; see the most recent works: Robert J. Caputi, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement* (London, 2000), p. 169: 'example of the detailed sophistication of very recent scholarship', and Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain*, p. 183.
[58] Robert Rhodes James, *A Spirit Undaunted. The Political Role of George VI* (London, 1998), p. 150.
[59] See Alan J. Foster, 'An unequivocal guarantee? Fleet Street and the British guarantee to Poland, 31 March 1939', *JCH* 26 (1991), pp. 33-47, here pp. 42-3.
[60] Ibid., p. 36.
[61] See Frank McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement and the British Road to War* (Manchester, 1998), pp. 114, 159. In an earlier article he tried to re-establish the accusation that *The Times's* cutting of Ebbutt's despatches were politically motivated: see Frank McDonough, 'The Times, Norman Ebbutt and the Nazis, 1927-37', *JCH* 27 (1992), 407-424. See also Crowson, *Facing*, p. 85.

freedom enjoyed by the press ensured that total government control was never feasible and critical comment continued to appear'.[62]

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Cockett's argument has not received universal acceptance. This thesis proceeds from the doubt also expressed by D.C. Watt: the relationship between the press and politicians is 'far from settled'.[63] The first chapter sets out the framework of press-government relationship in the 1930s, and puts it in a larger historical context. It is notable that influential studies (notably these of Gannon and Cockett) give little consideration to any period before 1936. This assists the argument of a special degree and success of government 'manipulation' under Chamberlain, because it ignores evidence which would weaken the interpretation. A contrast needs to be established between the short period of appeasement (January 1938-March 1939), and earlier periods of substantial newspaper criticism towards or at least uncertainty about the Conservative leadership, even from Conservative newspapers. Moreover, Cockett begins his account with the 1936 Abdication crisis, which he assumes provides an early demonstration of the sort of press control which was intensified in 1938.[64] Yet a quite different interpretation of the press silence on the King's love affair can be offered.

A problem with most studies is that they place considerable emphasis on the power of the British government and its desire to influence the press. Yet ministers and officials

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[62] McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain*, p. 124.
[63] Donald Cameron Watt, 'Churchill and appeasement', in Robert Blake and Wm. Roger Louis (eds.), *Churchill* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 199-214, here p. 213.
[64] See Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 2, 13-15.

had no legal instruments to control newspapers, at least until the outbreak of war in September 1939. And attempts to obtain a 'positive press' were far from being an invention of the late 1930s. Ever since newspapers began in Britain, it had been in the interest of ministers and political leaders to seek support from as many newspapers as possible, or at least to try and minimise press criticism. Indeed, until the early part of the twentieth century some newspapers were more or less party organs, subsidised from party funds and used by parties to advance party interests. Conversely, some of the more independent newspaper owners and editors had always sought access to and influence with (or over) ministers, or with opposition 'ministers-in-waiting'. Government efforts to influence the press, and 'incestuous relationships' with newspaper controllers were far from novel in the late 1930s, and any claim that this period was marked by a new departure or new intensity needs to be compared to earlier developments.

The desire of governments to influence newspapers intensified during periods of international crisis – especially when there was a risk of war – for obvious reasons. What was unusual in the late 1930s was the interest of a foreign power in British newspaper comment, to the point where it became a diplomatic issue. After German leaders had told Halifax, during his visit to Germany in November 1937, that they regarded some British newspapers as poisoning Anglo-German relations, it is intelligible that ministers should take a still closer interest in the press. And given the enormous stakes – the prospect of avoiding what was likely to be a hugely costly and horrible European war – a ministerial appeal for press restraint in the 'national interest' was also intelligible; nor was it necessarily 'discreditable'. Since it was widely believed in Britain that Hitler and other Nazi leaders were psychologically unstable, there was real fear that excessively critical

British newspaper comment on German events might dangerously exacerbate Anglo-German relations, even trigger Nazi hostility to the point of war. It is arguable that in such circumstances, any British prime minister – not just Chamberlain – would for foreign policy reasons have taken greater interest in the British press. But this concern to ease diplomatic negotiations is hard to distinguish from a concern to shape British public opinion. Asking the press for restraint for whatever reason has the same effect. Concern with Anglo-German relations could mean that criticism of Nazis was not published for British readers; concern for national interest could seem like partisan political efforts to muzzle the press in the government interest.

Furthermore, close examination is needed of the relationship between the newspapers and different parts of the government, and different politicians. As Cockett shows, there were actually two 'government views' on foreign policy: those of the press office of 10 Downing Street and the Foreign Office News Department. Their views and statements to the press frequently differed and were sometimes contradictory. Yet how far can 'the government' be said to 'manipulate' or 'control' the press, when there was no single, clear, government effort to do so? Still more important, the position of politicians critical of appeasement must be considered. Cockett's focus is very much on government ministers; Churchill does appear (usually indirectly), but the Labour and Liberal opposition leaders are barely mentioned at all. Were the anti-appeasers denied access to newspapers? Were they effectively silenced? Did they believe that alternative views towards Germany and appeasement were being 'suppressed', and that the government was successfully manipulating or controlling the press? Did they complain of government intervention?

And what about the newspapermen themselves? Did they feel that they were being 'manipulated' or 'controlled'? Did all 'the press' support appeasement? Some newspapers did: but did they do so because of government pressure, or an 'incestuous relationship' with the government? An unusual feature of the late 1930s press was the emergence of a number of newsletters, established by journalists themselves. It has been argued that this was a result of government pressure on newspapers, forcing journalists critical of appeasement to find alternative outlets for their news. As will be argued in later chapters, however, there are other explanations for the creation of these newsletters.[65]

The main chapters of this thesis examine particular newspapers or newspaper groups. Where Cockett focuses on the government and its contacts with newspaper controllers and argues that newspaper treatments of Germany and policy towards Germany were the result of government pressure, here the emphasis will be more upon newspapers themselves. How far had they developed their *own* editorial policies towards Nazi Germany by 1938? If they supported appeasement, perhaps they had independent and well-considered reasons for doing so?

Where Cockett focuses upon Conservative newspapers, this thesis will also examine the main Liberal and Labour newspapers. Where Cockett concentrates upon the evidence of private contacts between ministers and newspaper controllers, this thesis will give considerable attention to newspaper content. Focus on private contacts may give a misleading perspective on newspaper attitudes. For example, Cockett implies that Beaverbrook and his newspapers supported appeasement substantially because he was friendly with, and wished to retain influence with, the Cabinet minister Hoare;[66] but

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[65] See further down, pp. 105-6, 195-6.
[66] Ibid., pp. 57-9.

Beaverbrook and his newspapers had their own long-established and firm views on British policy towards continental Europe. A systematic analysis of the different political stances and policy preferences of particular newspapers, including those opposed to appeasement, will provide a fuller understanding of government–newspaper relations, and a more accurate assessment of the extent of government influence.

This thesis is based upon a wider range of private and published sources than previous studies of the newspapers in the late 1930s. These include official government records, and the private papers of ministers and other leading politicians. Unpublished German sources, from the German Foreign Office and the *Bundesarchiv*, were examined for evidence of possible German government pressure, and contacts with British newspapermen. Numerous private papers and memoirs of newspaper owners, editors and journalists have been used, including records not available for earlier studies. Much of the evidence is derived, however, from the newspapers themselves – news columns, speech reports, articles, commentaries by foreign correspondents, cartoons, and editorials.

In order to obtain a balanced assessment of newspaper opinions and government–newspaper relations, a representative sample of a variety of major newspapers is examined – different in audience, circulation, political stance, and 'proximity' to government. These include the 'quality' daily newspapers, *The Times* (independent Conservative) and *Daily Telegraph* (Conservative), and the popular mass circulation national newspapers, the *News Chronicle* (Liberal), the *Daily Herald* (Labour). Then there were Beaverbrook's main newspapers, both 'independent Conservative': the *Daily Express* (national daily) and the *Evening Standard* (London and South-East evening). *The Observer* (independent Conservative) is chosen as a Sunday newspaper, because its editor, J.L. Garvin, was a

particularly influential commentator. Two provincial newspapers are also considered, both because they had national reputations and because they have figured prominently in criticisms of government influence: the *Manchester Guardian* (Liberal), and the *Yorkshire Post* (Conservative).

Government 'pressure' or 'manipulation' was not the only reason for the attitudes adopted by newspaper owners and editors towards Germany, British foreign policy and the prospect of war. They had their own views and purposes: so the crucial question is – how important were these, in comparison with attempted government pressure? Perhaps readiness to respond to ministerial calls for restraint was conditioned by their own, prior, concerns? The earlier history of each newspaper and opinions of their controllers – their stances before Chamberlain became prime minister in 1937 – are the essential context for understanding their attitudes towards appeasement in 1938-39, and their willingness to listen to the government's views.

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CHAPTER I

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND THE PRESS

Previous studies of the relationship between the newspapers and the government during Chamberlain's premiership have not always engaged sufficiently with the subject's pre-history. Cockett's *Twilight of Truth,* in particular, was compromised by beginning sharply in 1936-7, without considering earlier conditions. The effect is that his argument about a substantial change in government-press relations and a new degree of government 'manipulation' is carried very largely by assertion. This chapter will begin by briefly reviewing the development of the relationship before 1937. It then considers German government complaints about British newspapers during the 1930s, and examines the two British government organisations which dealt with newspaper reports on foreign affairs – the No. 10 Downing Street Press Office and the Foreign Office News Department. The last section will describe and begin to assess ministerial efforts from 1937 to influence newspapers' comment on 'appeasement'.

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During the past 200 years there has usually been a close, if varying, relationship between newspapers and political parties – and governments. [1] Politicians and government were a staple of newspaper report and comment; political parties and governments have regarded newspapers as vital for influencing – shaping, creating or limiting – opinion. Three main historical phases can be discerned. The first, until the 1850s, was characterised by state restriction on newspapers by means of taxation (the

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[1] Koss's monumental work *Rise and Fall of the Political Press* is indispensable for the study of this subject; for a shorter assessment see R. Negrine, *Politics and the Mass Media in Britain* (London, 1989), ch. 3.

so-called 'taxes on knowledge') and by forms of censorship. Ever since their creation in the early eighteenth century, a plurality of political views were expressed through a variety of newspapers: these were Tory papers and Whig and radical papers. A 'free press' – like free speech – was increasingly a feature of British political culture; nevertheless, governments on occasion tried to repress 'popular' radical newspapers and to weaken (or buy out) the papers of their party rivals – while the newspaper taxes, by raising their prices, suppressed their potential readership.

The second phase covered the 1850s and 1860s, with the reduction and abolition of the newspaper taxes and relaxed state intervention. This helped stimulate a greater amount of political comment, and more open debate in the newspapers. Yet many of these newspapers remained – or became – attached to particular parties or groups within parties, which could mean – when that party was in office – attachment to the government. Some received party subsidies, or had politicians as major shareholders or directors. Most of the others willingly identified themselves with particular parties and governments. Their owners and editors had ready access to party leaders or ministers: editorial comment was tailored to what they considered to be party or government interest; their well-known party allegiances were part of their appeal to readers.[2]

Nevertheless, 'freedom of the press' was preserved. Because different newspapers expressed the views of different parties, there was open debate. No party or government could control all the newspapers, and governments always faced some critical, opposition elements in the press. Moreover, whatever the party bias of editorial comment and feature articles, newspapers were expected to report the news truthfully, and to note the views of all important politicians, of all parties. This was especially true of *The Times*, which came to be regarded – and to regard itself – as the 'newspaper of

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[2] Stephen Koss, *Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*, vol. i: *The Nineteenth Century* (London, 1981), pp. 3-4; see Ivon Asquith, '1780-1855', in Boyce, Curran and Wingate (eds.), *Newspaper History*, pp. 98-116, on the press during the pre-Victorian time.

record', but these attitudes and expectations also influenced the content of most other newspapers. It is in this sense that some contemporary commentators came to regard newspapers as a 'fourth estate', operating in an arena of free speech and open debate.[3] Party or government influence – even control – over particular newspapers was compatible with a 'free press'.

The third phase, reaching up to the present, began around the turn of the twentieth century when commercialism became the key factor in shaping the finance, strategies and content of newspapers.[4] New newspapers were established which sought to maximise their sales and their income from advertisers, a trend which in time affected some of the older quality newspapers. On the one hand, this tended to reduce the amount of newspaper content devoted to politics: the concern of these papers was to attract and preserve readership by entertainment as well as topical comment on serious issues. On the other, increased financial independence began to make some newspapers more independent of political parties and government. It is important not to overstate the change: a few newspapers remained close to particular parties; Lloyd George in 1918 acquired control of the *Daily Chronicle*, and in the 1920s leading trade unions obtained overall political control of the *Daily Herald*, in order to give the Labour party its own national press organ. But other popular newspapers became such successful commercial properties that their owners were able to buy further local, regional and national newspapers and create chains, giving them large and geographically wide and deep readership.[5]

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[3] Cf. G. Boyce, 'The Fourth estate: the reappraisal of a concept', in Boyce, Curran and Wingate, *Newspaper History*, pp. 19-40, here p. 26. See also Koss, *Rise and Fall*, i, p. 10.
[4] Alan Lee, '1855-1914', in Boyce, Curran and Wingate, *Newspaper History*, p. 117.
[5] Colin Seymour-Ure, 'The press and the party system between the Wars', in Gillian Peele and Chris Cook (eds.), *The Politics of Reappraisal, 1918-1939* (London, 1975), pp. 232-57, here 232. The history of the chains is succinctly described in the Royal Commission on the Press, *Report* (London, H.M.S.O., 1949), ch. 7 and appendix IV; and see also in Political and Economic Planning, *Report on the British Press* (London, 1938) pp. 95-105, a useful source on the interwar press generally.

The existence of truly independent newspapers – independent of party or government control, or willingly subordinating themselves to political influence – was not, therefore, long-established. It was a recent creation, dating only from the Edwardian period. It was the product of technological and commercial changes that enabled some newspapers to become highly profitable – what Curran calls the 'industrialisation' of the press[6] – thereby reducing the need for political subsidies and, consequently, the scope for party and government influence.[7]

This was particularly true of certain of the 'popular', mass circulation newspapers, under the control of the 'press lords' or 'press barons'. The concept is associated above all with Lords Northcliffe and Rothermere of the *Daily Mail* group (Associated Newspapers) and Lord Beaverbrook of the *Daily Express* group.[8] Yet there were other newspaper owners with peerages ('lords' and 'barons') who were not labelled 'press lords', for example the Astors (*Times*, *Observer*) and the Berry brothers, Camrose and Kemsley (*Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Times*). The term 'press lord' or 'press baron' had a particular meaning. It referred not simply to an ennobled newspaper proprietor, but to a specific type of behaviour – to their political independence.[9] Indeed, they went further: they were not just detached from party or government, but were more than ready to be critical of them, to take an active political stance in opposition to them, and even to run their own political campaigns and organise their own political pressure groups, whether 'leagues', 'crusades' or 'parties'. In a sense, they treated politics as a form of entertainment and a means to maximise their sales, exploiting the grievances or ambitions of those who felt neglected or alienated by the parties on particular issues.

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[6] James Curran and Jean Seaton (eds.), *Power Without Responsibility. The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (London, 1981), p. 43-62.
[7] See Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, pp. 11-2.
[8] On the *Daily Mail*, see Paul Addison, 'Patriotism under pressure: Lord Rothermere and British foreign policy', in G. Peele and C. Cook (eds.), *The Politics of Reappraisal 1918-1939* (London, 1975). On Northcliffe see J. Lee Thompson, *Northcliffe. Press Baron in Politics, 1865-1922* (London, 2000).
[9] Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 49. See D.G. Boyce, 'Crusaders without chains: power and the press barons 1896-1951', in Curran, Smith and Wingate (eds.), *Impacts and Influences*, pp. 99-100.

The existence of such capacity for independence from party or government – which the 'press lords' chose to exercise, but which, nearly as significantly, other ennobled newspaper owners did not – is vital to the main arguments of this thesis. If popular newspapers supported a government or party, it was more likely to be because their owners *chose* to do so for their own reasons than because they felt obliged to submit themselves to government influence or control.

These new conditions had large consequences for the relations between political parties or governments and the newspapers. Previously party leaders or ministers (say Conservative) had expected criticism from the newspapers of rival parties (say Liberal and Labour). There was in practice nothing they could do to restrain these rival newspapers, and provided the criticisms appeared to be 'fair comment', any public complaints about it might be interpreted as weakness, and even invite ridicule. What the party leaders or ministers could do was, of course, to counteract the opposition newspapers by encouraging friendly newspaper owners and editors to respond. Now, however, the party leaders and ministers might find that the new independent newspaper controllers were less willing to come to their aid. Worse, still, newspapers read by many of their own party supporters (such as, in the Conservative case, the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* groups) might themselves become critical. If the criticism attracted support from their own party members, this could become a major problem. Broadly 'Conservative' newspapers could become disruptive forces within the Conservative party.

In such circumstances, it is not surprising that party leaders and government ministers should have stepped up their efforts to influence newspaper owners and editors. Paradoxically, increased efforts to 'control' or manipulate newspapers occurred because newspapers had become more independent: greater political concern about newspaper content is evidence of greater press freedom. The most obvious indications

of government attempts to obtain the good opinion of these now independent owners and editors were the proliferation of honours conferred upon them – knighthoods and peerages, notably the Northcliffe barony in 1905.[10] Nor is it surprising that government attempts to influence newspapers should intensify at periods of national danger, especially during the First World War, with its accompanying severe political strains. As prime minister from December 1916 Lloyd George established particularly close relationships with newspaper owners and editors, and became profuse in his efforts to reward or win their support. Not only did he confer more honours on newspaper owners than ever before (including the Rothermere and Beaverbrook peerages). He also appointed some to posts in the government – Northcliffe was entrusted with Britain's Enemy Propaganda at Crewe House, while Rothermere became Secretary of State for Air and Beaverbrook Minister of Information in 1918.[11]

All this, however, created a new difficulty – that these 'press lords' now expected their political status to be maintained, indeed they felt encouraged to think that they could become more powerful by being more independent. From 1919 Northcliffe, Rothermere and Beaverbrook turned against Lloyd George and the Coalition government; and the pattern was repeated with Rothermere's and Beaverbrook's campaigns later against the Conservative leader, Baldwin. The appropriate context for understanding government-newspaper relations in the 1930s is not just the 1936 abdication crisis, which (as we shall see) Cockett presents as the beginning of a new phase. It is also the long period of tension between the 'press lords' and the Conservative leadership, which peaked in 1929-1931.

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[10] See Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 52.

[11] See Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the 20th Century. Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 5-6, and Mariel Grant, *Propaganda and the Role of the State in inter-war Britain* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 28-9.

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From the mid 1920s 'managing' the broadly Conservative press was treated as a leading issue by Conservative party organisers and leaders.[12] J.C.C. Davidson, the party chairman from 1926 to 1930, put considerable effort into trying both to conciliate Beaverbrook and Rothermere, and to assist the Berry brothers in developing their newspaper empire as a counterweight to the Beaverbrook and Rothermere press.[13] There was a larger concern too – a recognition of how important friendly mass circulation newspapers were in reaching the much enlarged electorate of the 1920s, and in resisting the potential attraction of the Labour party and socialism to new, young and female voters. As a Conservative Central Office memorandum noted: 'The possibilities of using the Press are practically unlimited and conditioned only by the amount of money that Party organisations are prepared to spend on staff and writers.'[14] Davidson found the money and recruited the personnel for very active and innovative party publicity and press departments. Davidson's most important recruit was Joseph Ball, a former member of the intelligence service, who was appointed Director of Publicity in 1927.[15] Ball then became the first director of the new Conservative Research Department (CRD) in 1930, and remained active in the party's propaganda throughout the 1930s.[16]

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[12] Timothy Hollins, 'The Presentation of Politics: The Place of Party Publicity, Broadcasting and Film in British Politics, 1918-1939' (PhD thesis University of Leeds, 1981), p. 29.
[13] See J.C.C. Davidson, *Memoirs of a Conservative*, ed. R.R. James (London, 1969), pp. 294-5; Thomas Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, ed. Keith Middlemas (3 vols., Oxford, 1969) II, p. 181 (14 April 1929); Hartwell, *William Camrose*, pp. 187-8; and Richard Cockett, 'The party, publicity, and the media', in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.), *Conservative Century. The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 547-577, here pp. 545-55.
[14] Quoted in Cockett, 'Party, publicity', p. 551.
[15] For Ball and the creation of the Conservative Research Department, see A. Beichmann, 'Hugger Mugger in Old Queen Street', *JCH* 15 (1978), pp. 671-88. For Ball's contacts with the British Intelligence Service, see Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service* (London, 1985), p. 340, and also Richard Cockett, 'Ball, Chamberlain and *Truth*', *HJ* 33 (1990), p. 132.
[16] John Ramsden, *The Making of Conservative Party Policy. The Conservative Research Department since 1929* (London, 1980), p. 60; also Christina Bussfeld, '*Democracy versus Dictatorship*': *Die Herausforderung des Faschismus und Kommunismus in Großbritannien 1932-1937* (Paderborn, 2000), pp. 80-1.

In the winter of 1929-30, however, when the Conservative party was in opposition, its efforts to restrain the 'press lords' broke down, as Beaverbrook first launched his 'Empire Free Trade' campaign and Rothermere then began his 'United Empire Party'.[17] Both aimed to force changes in the party's policy, and both sought to remove Baldwin from the party leadership. Davidson was a casualty of this campaign, and was forced to resign in May 1930. His replacement as party chairman, Neville Chamberlain, was as chairman of the CRD already establishing a close alliance with Ball, and he now became directly involved in negotiations with Beaverbrook and Rothermere, and in dealings with the Berrys and with various journalists. Chamberlain, in other words, had a long experience of relations with newspapers controllers before he became prime minister in 1937.

This initial experience, in 1930-31, was very painful, as the hostile newspaper campaigns added to considerable party discontent over European and imperial policies, produced repeated crises within the party and nearly forced Baldwin's resignation. Baldwin famously fought back. His oratorical onslaught on the 'press lords'' attempt to exercise 'power without responsibility' – defending himself on the high ground of political and constitutional principle, and the putative limits of legitimate newspaper political influence – punctured their campaign. Chamberlain was able in March 1931 to conclude an agreement with Beaverbrook and to neutralise Rothermere. But the struggles of 1929-31 had emphasised just how independent supposedly 'Conservative' newspapers could be, and how dangerous their activities could be to the Conservative leadership and its capacity to develop and sustain its own policies. Even after the formation of the Conservative-dominated National coalition government and its huge general election victory in October 1931, Conservative party managers remained nervous about the extent of support from ostensibly Conservative newspapers. Ball and

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[17] See e.g. John Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902-1940* (London, 1978), pp. 297-8, 306-14.

Chamberlain – though Chancellor of the Exchequer 1931-37, and no longer party chairman – continued to be much involved in managing relations with the press. During 1934, in anticipation of the next general election, Ball proposed to Chamberlain measures for securing a more favourable press comment, by establishing close contact with those in control of broadly sympathetic newspapers. He was, however, realistic enough to conclude: 'Some attempts will fail, but many might succeed, if properly planned.'[18] In the following year the National Publicity Bureau (NPB.) was formed.[19] Although created to coordinate propaganda for all the partners in the National coalition government, this was clearly Conservative orientated.[20] Ball was its first director, and Kingsley Wood, Postmaster-General and a close Chamberlain ally, was chairman.

Even though the National government retained a large majority at the November 1935 election, Ball remained dissatisfied with the level of support for the government in the newspapers. As he put the case to Baldwin, the prime minister, in December:

> the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* attack us more frequently than they support us, while, although *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* are admirable newspapers and give us their full support, their circulations are so small … that their influence among the masses is almost negligible.

To improve this fragile position Ball proposed to take over 'a suitable weekly publication, and … to build up a staff of really good writers capable of exposing effectively the fallacies upon which the public is being fed'.[21] It is probable that the widespread and sharp newspaper and popular reaction to the Hoare-Laval pact during that month, when even *The Times* became critical, emphasised the point. The paper that Ball eventually acquired, without publicity, was *Truth*, which over the next two years he

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[18] Ball notes about propaganda, 14 April 1934, NC 8/21/9.
[19] Ball to Chamberlain, 14 April 1934, NC 8/21/9. See Ralph D. Casey, 'The National Publicity Bureau and British Party Propaganda' *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, October 1939, p. 624; also Taylor, *British Propaganda*, p. 93.
[20] See Hollins, 'Presentation', p. 83; also Cockett, 'Ball, Chamberlain', pp. 131-42.
[21] Quoted in Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 551. For newspaper support at the election, see Tom Stannage, *Baldwin Thwarts the Opposition. The British General Election of 1935* (London, 1980), pp. 190-210.

increasingly used as an instrument to support Chamberlain and his policy of appeasement.[22] Although *Truth* has recently acquired notoriety, it is important to note that this idea of reviving the pre-1914 arrangement of a politically-controlled newspaper was not new. Apart from the cases of Lloyd George's majority share-holding in the *Daily Chronicle* from 1918 to 1927 and the Labour movement's purchase of the *Daily Herald* in 1922, Baldwin and Davidson had entered into negotiations – later made unnecessary by Baldwin's victory – with the Berrys in early 1931 for the creation of a London-based evening paper to counteract the Rothermere and Beaverbrook press.[23]

In the mid 1930s, then, the press in general was regarded within government as vigorously independent, to such a degree that renewed efforts were being made in press 'management'. Where does the notorious silence of the British newspapers over King Edward VIII's affair fit into these conditions? For Cockett, this 'can be seen as a precursor for the … damaging and long-term control of the press that was to occur between 1937 and 1940'. 'The King and the government', he writes, 'had effectively preserved a blanket censorship on the press'.[24] Examination of the evidence, however, produces a different interpretation, one which indicates another important feature common to the press during the 1930s and another leading theme in this thesis – its capacity, where important issues of national interests were at stake, to exercise voluntary restraint from a sense of public responsibility.

The avoidance of British newspaper reports on the King's relationship with Mrs Simpson – especially the failure to comment on their summer 1936 holiday cruise on the *Nahlin*, extensively reported and photographed in European and North American newspapers – began well before any involvement by the King or the government. The

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[22] For details see 'Control of Newspaper "Truth"', Vansittart papers, VNST II 2/31, and Cockett, 'Ball, Chamberlain and *Truth*', p. 131-42. Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 23 July 1939, NC 18/1/1108, noted that the paper was 'secretly controlled by Sir Joseph Ball'.
[23] See *Jones diary*, 11 March 1931; *Davidson Memoirs*, pp. 359-60; Hartwell, *Camrose*, p. 170.
[24] Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 14, 2.

press silence was the spontaneous decision of the various newspaper owners and editors themselves. Baldwin as prime minister only became aware of the foreign press coverage in mid October, and was evidently surprised at the continuing British newspaper silence.[25] There is no evidence of him speaking with any newspaper controller before Dawson asked to see him on 25 October.[26] The King only became involved on 27 October, when he asked Beaverbrook whether it would be possible to 'limit publicity' about Mrs Simpson's imminent divorce case.[27] Beaverbrook agreed to help, and with Esmond Harmsworth, Rothermere's son and chairman of the newspaper proprietors' association, met other London and provincial newspaper owners,[28] and convinced them to continue their silence about this matter.[29] Significantly, they did not feel a need to influence the London quality newspapers, like *The Times*, *Morning Post* and *Daily Telegraph* because these could be relied upon to exercise self-restraint for their own reasons: 'their discretion was not in question'.[30] There was, indeed, nothing remarkable about this: newspaper discretion about the private (and sexual) affairs of public figures was still routine.[31] To take a specific example: many in the newspaper world knew that Lloyd George lived with his mistress, Frances Stevenson, but this was never mentioned in the press, not even by his most bitter political opponents.

So the King and ministers only encouraged the maintenance of an existing newspaper restraint, one which had not been originated by government influence or control. At one point Cockett concedes this, contradicting his main assertions: 'this

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[25] See Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, *Baldwin. A Biography* (London, 1969), p. 985.
[26] The same day Dawson received a letter from a British citizen living in the US, summarising public opinion, which he forwarded to Baldwin: printed in Wrench, *Dawson*, pp. 339-42, and see *History of The Times*, p. 1028.
[27] Lord Beaverbrook, *The Abdication of King Edward VIII,* ed. A.J.P. Taylor (London, 1966), p. 30.
[28] See *History of The Times*, p. 1027; Beaverbrook, *Abdication*, p. 31.
[29] In *A King's Story* (New York, 1947), p. 317, the Duke of Windsor states: 'With the co-operation of Esmond Harmsworth and several others he [Beaverbrook] achieved the miracle I desired – a "gentlemen's agreement" among newspaper editors to report the case without sensation'.
[30] *History of The Times*, p. 1027.
[31] Jones, *Diary*, p. 286 (13 November 1936), supports this assumption: 'The silence of our press is extraordinary and is not enforced by the government but by a sense of shame.' See Chisholm and Davie, *Beaverbrook*, p. 335 for Beaverbrook's handling of requests from women not to make their divorces public.

unity of silence *was volunteered by the press to the government*'.[32] Moreover, the end of the press silence and its aftermath – not considered by Cockett – provides further evidence of newspaper independence. Baldwin and the Cabinet feared newspaper revelations as likely to provoke public divisions and precipitate a constitutional and political crisis. But they did not feel able to achieve an indefinite press silence. The King himself urged Baldwin on 16 November to protect Mrs Simpson from newspaper criticism but Baldwin 'told him that he couldn't control the British Press (who have behaved admirably in not mentioning the subject) & they are clamouring to air the subject but out of respect for the throne had refrained'.[33] Once it became apparent on 2 December that the press silence was about to end, the King asked Baldwin to stop what he expected to be a critical *Times* editorial, but without success. As Dawson noted, 'In vain S.B. had explained that the press in England was free, and that he had no control over *The Times* or over any other newspaper'.[34]

It was not only the King who could not ultimately 'control' the press; the same was true of the Cabinet. Indeed, a newspaper controller caused much of the difficulties for ministers – when Harmsworth proposed the idea of a 'morganatic' marriage, with Mrs Simpson not becoming queen. Once the issue was in the open, neither the King nor the ministers could command unified press support, as the newspapers divided according to proprietor's or editor's preferences between a 'King's Party' (*Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *News Chronicle)*, and the 'Baldwin Press' (*The Times*, *Morning Post*, *Daily Telegraph,* and even the *Daily Herald*, as well as most of the provincial newspapers).[35]

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[32] Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 2. (italics inserted)
[33] See Lucy Baldwin memo, 17 November 1936, in *The Baldwin Papers. A Conservative Statesman 1908-1947*, ed. Philip Williamson and Edward Baldwin (Cambridge, 2004), p. 390.
[34] Dawson memo, 2 December 1936, quoted in Wrench, *Dawson*, p. 349.
[35] For discussion among the press see 'Constitutional crisis, attitude of the British press', no date, PREM 1/446; Beaverbrook, *The Abdication*, pp. 78-9; *Channon diary*, p. 87 (30 November 1936).

A comment by Simon, the Home Secretary and a member of the inner group of ministers consulted throughout the episode, is noteworthy:

> It was indeed a most extraordinary fact that in a country where there is no censorship of news, ... and where any attempt by Government to control topics of discussion would have been fiercely resisted and disregarded, the British Press by a voluntary ordinance ...had maintained complete silence for six months on a subject which would otherwise have been largely canvassed in every household in the land.[36]

* * *

The concern of some politicians and party managers over the excessive independence, or 'unreliable' nature, of many newspapers increased as the European situation deteriorated. A new element developed: German complaints about British newspaper criticism of German government leaders. The Nazis had been quick to realise the importance of a good relationship with foreign observers for advancing their political and international aims, and made the cultivation of such relations part of the propaganda aims of the Third Reich.[37] This is exemplified by the numerous party and government offices dedicated to this end. As early as 1 April 1933 Hitler had established the *Außenpolitisches Amt* (APA), headed by Rosenberg, to persuade foreigners that his movement was peaceful in character. Attempts were made to improve the relationship with foreign newspaper reporters through receptions,[38] arranged interviews with leading Nazis,[39] or organised trips for English and American journalists, showing them the German countryside, the aim being to strengthening connections and influence through this social activity.[40] On the other hand, officials

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[36] Simon diary, no date, MSS Simon 8:1936.
[37] For an example of an organisation to improve Anglo-German relationship, see G.T. Waddington, '"An idyllic and unruffled atmosphere of complete Anglo-German misunderstanding": aspects of the operations of the Dienststelle Ribbentrop in Great Britain, 1934-1938', *History* 82 (1997), 44-72.
[38] E.g. guest list for a speech of Ernst Röhm, 7 December 1933, Bundesarchiv NS43/155.
[39] E.g [?] to Wiedemann, 3 May 1937, Bundesarchiv NS43/158, Bl.7+9.
[40] See Karl Falk to Bömer, 22 October 1936, Bundesarchiv NS43/158, Bl.15.

criticised foreign reporters who did not report events in the way the Nazis wished to see them reported. The German press chief, Otto Dietrich, characterised the newspaper commentaries of the democracies as a 'problem of high political consequences for world politics'. The weakness of the 'governments of democracy' enables the press to operate as the 'greatest and most dangerous war-monger', because it generated ill-feelings between Germany and other nations.[41]

German complaints about alleged British 'Pressehetze' (smear campaigns in newspapers) were a regular topic in diplomatic circles. The German ambassador in London, Hoesch, told the Foreign Secretary as early as the end of March 1933 'how unfortunate the British coverage was in respect to the good relationship between Britain and Germany'.[42] Hitler himself had declared on 2 March 1933 that he regarded the 'press-agitation in the world against the German government as very dangerous'.[43] In the official press statements on this meeting, the German Cabinet discussion was presented as an unmistakable warning to 'representatives of the foreign press' that the government had decided to take action against correspondents who 'in a malicious way agitate against the Reich government'.[44] Such warnings remained part of Nazi rhetoric throughout the 1930s. Hitler, in his speech of 20 February 1938, announced that he would no longer tolerate the abuse of Germany in other countries. He even declared that the behaviour of newspapers was more dangerous than bombs to the relationships between states.[45] Hitler's rhetoric, in which an alleged smear campaign in foreign newspapers was implicitly linked with the unstable state of international

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[41] Quoted in Huttner, *Britische Presse*, p. 86.
[42] Bernstorff memo to German Foreign Office, 6 April 1933: PA, Presse, England 4, Bd.1.
[43] German Cabinet minutes, 2 March 1933, printed in K.-H. Minuth (ed.), *Akten der Reichskanzlei. Regierung Hitler, 1933-1938*, I/1 (Boppard, 1983), pp. 146-56, here p. 147-8.
[44] *Völkischer Beobachter*, 3 March 1933, p. 1, quoted in Huttner, *Britische Presse*, p. 100.
[45] Printed in Max Domarus (ed.), *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen 1932-1945*, vol. I: *Triumph (1932-38)* (Munich, 1962), pp. 792-804, here pp. 798-800.

relations, clearly emanated from a Nazi belief in the nearly unlimited effectiveness of media manipulation.[46]

These would seem to provide ground for a more detailed exploration of the connections between the German government and not just British ministers and officials – the standard subjects in studies of Anglo-German relations – but also newspaper owners, editors and journalists. That some contact did occur is certain. It is well known that Rothermere, owner of the *Daily Mail* group, met Hitler and other German leaders in mid-1930s, as did Kemsley, owner of the *Sunday Times* in July 1939. But there is very little evidence for any further contacts in the German archives. Nor does this appear to be an effect of the potential destruction of these records, since the private papers of British newspapermen and British government files similarly give few indications of direct German government attempts to influence the British press.

Instead, it was British ministers, especially Chamberlain and Halifax, who did most to try and influence the attitude of British newspapers towards the Nazi regime. They did so because they were impressed by the obsessional force of the Nazi leaders' criticism of British press reports on their policies, and speculation about their ambitions and objectives. Chamberlain and Halifax feared that these Nazi criticisms aggravated Anglo-German tension, and that the German leaders might over-react – helping to trigger a diplomatic breach, and increasing the likelihood of war. After Halifax's visit to Germany in November 1937, when Nazi complaints were forcefully expressed, British government interest in newspaper commentaries on Anglo-German relations noticeably increased.

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[46] A characterisation of National Socialism as a propaganda movement in Norbert Frei, 'Nationalsozialistische Presse und Propaganda', in Martin Broszat and Horst Möller (eds.), *Das Dritte Reich* (Munich, 1986), pp.152-75, here pp. 152-61.

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The British government's efforts to influence British newspapers were based around the Press Office of 10 Downing Street and the Foreign Office News Department. The 10 Downing Street Press Office had been established in 1929 by the Labour prime minister Ramsay MacDonald, who feared that the predominantly Conservative-orientated press might prove problematical for a Labour government.[47] The Press Office's establishment of a close relationship with the Lobby – the body of accredited parliamentary correspondents, from leading national and provincial newspapers – was an attempt to make sure that the government's point of view was frequently and reliably reported in the newspapers.

Cockett criticises the Lobby system for the power it gave politicians and ministers to give non-attributable press briefings, to have a secret influence over newspaper reportage, and so to wield 'power without responsibility'. As he himself wrote, the Lobby had existed since 1885 – yet he says nothing about how this had operated before 1937, so again claims about changes in 1937-40 are dependent upon silence about earlier history.[48] It is not surprising that ministers and party leaders should seek anonymity when briefing the press: this had *always* been the case, even predating the creation of the Lobby, and reaching back to the origin of newspapers in the eighteenth century. The reasons are obvious – to influence debate in ways and in directions which it might be embarrassing to acknowledge publicly. It is also understandable that newspapers accepted these unattributable sources, because it gave them an 'inner' access to news and opinion which would otherwise be unthinkable. An

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[47] See Jeremy Tunstall, *The Westminster Lobby Correspondents: A Sociological Study of National Political Journalism* (London, 1970), p. 94; see also Michael Cockerell, Peter Hennessy, and David Walker, *Sources Close to the Prime Minister. Inside the Hidden World of the News Manipulators* (London, 1984), p. 37.

[48] Cf. Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 5.

even more remarkable instance of this relationship was the activity of the Conservative Central office in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when it was anonymously feeding reports and editorial comment to some 200 local and regional newspapers.[49]

The Lobby system was so well established by 1937 that it seems unlikely that there was much change in the *essence* of government-newspaper relations. Nevertheless there was some change, because in Neville Chamberlain there was a prime minister with greater interest, more experience and closer contacts with newspapers than his closest predecessors, MacDonald and Baldwin – though these were not, it should be emphasised, on a markedly different scale to Lloyd George's involvement with newspaper controllers from 1916 to 1922. Not only had he dealt directly with the troublesome 'press lords' in 1930-31; as Chancellor of the Exchequer since then he had personally briefed editors and Lobby journalists on important issues.[50] He has been described as the 'first prime minister to employ news management on a grand scale' – though Lloyd George has a very strong rival claim.[51] Chamberlain not only had the assistance of Ball, with his similarly long experience of newspaper manipulation and control of *Truth*, but also the loyal support of George Steward, director of the No. 10 Press Office with some ten years familiarity with the Lobby.[52]

Chamberlain's habit of personal attention to the newspapers was given renewed impetus by his determination to reduce Anglo-German tension. There was not just the foreign policy concern of German government complaints about British newspaper commentaries on its policies. Some newspapers were ambivalent or critical about his own policy of appeasement, and gave space to Labour and Liberal opposition and to his

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[49] See Cockett, 'The Party, Publicity, and the Media', pp. 551-2.
[50] Hollins, 'Presentation', p. 83. Both Chamberlain's diaries and his letters to his sisters show a continual and early attention to press relations: see Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 18 October 1930, 26 September 1931, 12 January 1932, NC 18/1/713, 756, 767.
[51] Margach, *Abuse,* p. 50. It should be noted that Margach's personal experience of prime ministers and the Lobby system did not extend back to the period of Lloyd George's government.
[52] See Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 4-9.

critics among Conservative backbench MPs. He was also conscious of resistance among some Foreign Office officials, who were suspicious or hostile towards Germany and who had their own access to newspapers. In his view, the Foreign Office seemed to have 'no imagination and no courage to pursue a settlement with Germany'.[53] His proposed policy of 'double policy of rearmament and better relations with Germany and Italy which will carry us safely through', depended to a large degree on the Foreign Office, which he feared 'would not play up'.[54]

Chamberlain's efforts to influence opinion were not just confined to the newspaper media. He also gave his support to efforts to counter the influence of the Left Book Club, which published not only a series of books but also a regular newsletter, *The Left Book News*.[55] So successful was this movement in disseminating radical Left, including Communist, ideas that it prompted the formation of other political book 'clubs' – the Right Book Club, Liberal Book Club, and Labour Book Service.[56] To these was added the National Book Association, with Baldwin as president and with hidden support from Chamberlain and Conservative Central Office, in an attempt to appeal on a wide basis to readers of many political persuasions, and so to consolidate (and create) opinion behind the National government.[57]

Another initiative is still more significant. After the 1938 Czechoslovakian crisis Chamberlain and Ball remained concerned about the extent of sympathy for appeasement in the media – which surely raises doubts about how far they had been successful in influencing and manipulating, still less 'controlling' the newspapers. In December 1938 Chamberlain proposed the 'immediate formation of an organisation

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[53] Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 12 September 1937, NC 18/1/1020.
[54] Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 1 August 1937, NC 18/1/1014
[55] See Stuart Samuels, 'The Left Book Club', *JCH* 1 (1966), pp. 65-86, Paul Laity (ed.), *The Left Book Anthology* (London, 2001), p. ix, and Bussfeld, *'Democracy versus Dictatorship'*, pp. 124-32.
[56] See Samuels, 'Left Book Club', p. 77; Laity, *Left Book Anthology*, p. xii.
[57] See E.H.H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism. Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2002), p. 144. Also Clarisse Berthezene, 'Creating Conservative Fabians: the Conservative party, political education and the founding of Ashridge College', *Past and Present* 182 (2004), 233-4

whose objectives would be to provide accurate and unbiased information about foreign affairs'. Baldwin was to become president of the British Association for International Understanding.[58] Ball, probably the mastermind behind the organisation, saw the Association 'to be the best way of diverting the central body of British opinion from the special pleading of Left-Wing propaganda with which the [League of Nations] Union, among other groups, has become infected'.[59] The creation of this body indicates a defensive, even beleaguered, attitude: they felt they were *losing*, not winning, the propaganda battle.

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The Foreign Office had a still longer-established system for dealing with the press. With the creation of its own News Department in August 1914, the relationship between the Foreign Office and the newspapers became institutionalised.[60] After the Great War it became the principal recipient of any foreign government's criticisms of British newspapers. If a complaint was received, Willert, the head of the News Department until 1934, would reply:

> We always explain to them (I) that HMG have no power of censorship over the press; (II) that if a foreign government wants to approach the British press, it must do so itself. The only concession which we ever make is to promise to try unofficially, as occasions offers, to prevail upon our press to use the right spectacles.[61]

The existence – and the briefings – of the Foreign Office News Department complicated the attempts of Steward, Ball and Chamberlain to control the dissemination of

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[58] Chamberlain to Baldwin, 7 December 1938, Baldwin papers 174/19-21.
[59] Joseph Ball memo B, Baldwin papers 174/24-27.
[60] The origin of the News Department has been described by Taylor, *Projection*, ch. 1, and Taylor, 'Publicity', p. 48.
[61] Willert minute, 11 June 1929, FO 395/436, P703/703/150. For a similar attitude from a prime minister, see transcript of Poincare-Baldwin conversation, 19 September 1923, in *Baldwin Papers*, p. 107.

government opinion and news. Sometimes it appeared that on important foreign issues, Whitehall was speaking with two different voices.[62] This was especially so because of the attitude of Rex Leeper, who had succeeded Willert as director of the News Department in January 1935.[63] Leeper became closely associated with the views of Vansittart, the Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office. In contrast to Chamberlain's ambition of appeasing the German government, Vansittart supported a policy of reconciliation with Mussolini's Italy, to create a counterweight to what he and other Foreign Office officials considered to be an aggressive and impossibly hostile Nazi regime.[64] This was the policy which both Leeper and Vansittart wished to be 'soundly interpreted' by the press.[65] But while Vansittart advocated military rearmament as the main means of strengthening Britain's bargaining position in the government's dealings with Hitler, Leeper urged greater official commitment to the use of propaganda abroad in order to increase British influence in areas vulnerable to German political and economic penetration. This he termed 'psychological rearmament'. By this he meant preparing the public, both at home and abroad, for the issues which he believed lay ahead. He stressed that there were methods available to counter the campaign of the dictatorships, but 'at present there is a great deal of news available on foreign affairs, but insufficient guidance; while visibility increases, vision lags behind'.[66]

Leeper had a critical view of the British press, arguing that it was 'showing itself quite incompetent to deal with foreign affairs', and was not exercising its proper degree of influence. The failure of newspapers to guide public opinion, was, in his view, because it 'was owned by men whose main interest is not journalism, but business and

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[62] Cf. Shepherd, *Class Divided*, p.111, who claimed that both worked together.
[63] Taylor, *Projection*, p. 28.
[64] For his assessment of the dictators, see Lord Vansittart, *The Mist Procession* (London, 1958).
[65] Eden described Leeper in his memoirs as 'an early prophet of the Nazi menace': Anthony Eden, *Facing The Dictators* (London, 1962), p.182.
[66] Leeper memo, 27 January 1936, FO 395/541, P332/332/150, quoted in Taylor, *Projection*, p. 187.

finance'. He obviously had in mind the 'press lords', who had been involved in a fierce circulation war since the beginning of the 1930s. Leeper therefore saw it as his task to guide the press 'so that an intelligent public opinion may be formed on foreign affairs.'[67] For that reason he formed his own coterie of specialist reporters, the diplomatic correspondents.[68]

Establishing such a group was not an easy task, because journalists and the Foreign Office normally regarded each other with suspicion.[69] Leeper tried to promote his own approach within the diplomatic service, advising British missions abroad that it was 'a highly important duty of His Majesty's missions to assist British correspondents'.[70] Apparently he did not succeed in fulfilling this aim, and he also became fearful of the effect of anti-British propaganda across continental Europe. His thoughts resulted in a lengthy memorandum dated 2 January 1938, where he claimed that Britain had lost its prestige 'while we have done far too little to counteract the efforts of this hostile propaganda'. He saw a growing 'deterioration' in the quality of British journalistic standards, due to the continuing commercial preoccupation of 'press dictators' with circulation and advertising income. Editors and proprietors 'must be made to realise that this country cannot afford to let foreign affairs be treated with the same irresponsible freedom as home affairs.' Leeper proposed a change in a way government relations with the press had worked so far. Instead of merely continuing the existing system, where ministers confined their contacts to journalists individually in the parliamentary Lobby, he wished to see increased ministerial contact with leading editors and with the Newspaper Proprietors' Association.

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[67] Leeper memo, 12 October 1932, FO 395/458, P2143/2/150.
[68] Part of this group were F.A. Voigt of the *Manchester Guardian*, Victor Gordon-Lennox of the *Daily Telegraph*, Norman Ewer of the *Daily Herald*, Charles Tower of the *Yorkshire Post*, and Vernon Bartlett of the *News Chronicle*. See Detlev Clemens, *Herr Hitler in Germany: Wahrnehmungen und Deutungen des Nationalsozialismus in Großbritannien 1920 bis 1939* (Göttingen, 1996), p. 402.
[69] E.g. Andrew Crozier, *Appeasement and Germany's Last Bid for Colonies* (London, 1988), p. 226.
[70] Quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 17.

> We can only hope to induce the press to exercise restraint in foreign affairs by taking those irresponsible persons into our confidence. A free press is an enormous asset to the country provided that freedom does not degenerate into irresponsible licence. At present we are not tackling the heart of the problem.[71]

Leeper's proposals found support from Vansittart and from Eden, who was 'in full agreement with this excellent paper'.[72] Nevertheless, for all his efforts to improve the quality of newspaper coverage – and, indeed, despite the largely independent efforts of Downing Street – Leeper remained disappointed. After Munich he commented that 'the amount of stupid or dishonest articles that I read in the English press is almost incredible'; and again 'the press are so horribly cautious when they are not wilfully misleading'.[73] The Foreign Office news experts, at least, did not consider British newspapers to be 'controlled'; rather they considered them to be too independent.

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The attempts by the prime minister's press office and the Foreign Office News Department to influence the newspapers are best assessed by examination of a series of incidents from 1937 to 1939. Shortly after Chamberlain's accession to the premiership, Ribbentrop, Hitler's principal representation in Britain, started a more positive approach to improving Anglo-German relations with the intention of neutralising British influence in Europe, and therefore increasing the Nazi freedom of manoeuvre. He wanted to invite to Germany such influential politicians as Halifax, Baldwin and even Churchill - 'whose transition into a German-friend still seems to be possible'.[74] The

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[71] Leeper memo, 'Co-ordination of British publicity abroad', 2 January 1938, FO 395/596, P 359/359/150.
[72] Vansittart note, 19 January 1938, and Eden note, 8 January 1938, both in FO 395/596, P 359/359/150; see Taylor, *Projection*, pp. 33-4.
[73] Leeper to his sister, quoted in Taylor, *Projection*, p. 38, and Leeper to Lady Milner, 13 October 1938, Lady Milner papers, C410/3.
[74] Ribbentrop to Auswärtige Amt, 18 May 1937, Auswärtige Amt R102773.Pol.II1506.

initial invitation to Halifax appeared a good start, since Chamberlain gave his approval and strongly supported a new initiative. Foreign Office officials were more reserved about the plan, because Halifax was 'not one of them: he was too close to the Prime Minister and could not be relied upon to put over a Foreign Office rather than a No.10 line'.[75] This negative Foreign Office attitude made Chamberlain furious, because he saw 'another opportunity to be thrown away'.[76]

To assist in the preparation for Halifax's visit, which was intended to be unpublicised, Chamberlain could rely on Nevile Henderson, British Ambassador in Berlin. Henderson was usually the first to receive German complaints about British newspapers, and frequently had to point out that in Britain newspapers were 'not controlled'.[77] His views about what he considered to be newspaper irresponsibility were soon confirmed when news of Halifax's visit was leaked in the *Evening Standard.* Hitler was furious, and so too was Henderson, who described the paper's step as 'the height of sensation mongering and of tendentious poisoning of the atmosphere'. For a time he even wanted the visit postponed until 'the Press in Great Britain ... evinces that calm which is usually called decency and truthfulness in other countries'.[78]

Chamberlain, however, was able to use his personal contacts with the newspapers to turn the situation to his advantage. *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* published almost identical favourable stories about the visit, and commented upon the prospects for an improvement in Anglo-German relations. These obviously 'authoritative' reports, particularly that in *The Times*, had a positive effect in Berlin.[79] Henderson was able to say that 'the attitude this morning of the British press.

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[75] Andrew Roberts, *The Holy Fox. The Life of Lord Halifax* (London, 1991), p. 66.
[76] Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 24 October 1937, NC 18/1/1025. For the Foreign Office's critical attitude see also Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 14 November 1937, NC 18/1/1028.
[77] Henderson to the FO, 13 November 1937, FO 371/20763, C7799/270/18; Peter Neville, *Appeasing Hitler. The Diplomacy of Sir Nevile Henderson, 1937-39* (Houndmills, 2000), p. 41. In his memoirs Henderson was still critical of the British press: see Nevile Henderson, *Failure of a Mission* (London, 1940), pp. 65, 135.
[78] Henderson to Foreign Office, 14 November 1937, FO 371/20751, 7798/7324/18.
[79] Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 14 November 1937, NC 18/1/1028; Roberts, *Holy Fox*, p. 66.

particularly *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* are regarded here as very satisfactory and the moderates hope that the Chancellor having ventilated his annoyance will take a calmer view'.[80]

When Halifax's visit finally went ahead, he found in his first talk with Hitler that it was British newspaper comments which annoyed him most in Anglo-German relations. Halifax described him as usually 'quiet and restrained', but he did 'get excited now and again over Russia and the Press'. For Hitler the degeneracy of democracy was manifested in the fact that it 'paralysed the capacity to face the facts by its love of talk', and only existed on a 'distorted view of facts presented to it by a licentious Press'.[81] He further claimed that 'nine-tenths of all tension was produced simply and solely' by the newspapers.[82] Halifax's own sceptical view about 'press freedom' had originated some years previously, when as Viceroy of India in April 1930 he stated how 'few things have given me greater pleasure than shoving out the press ordinance ... and I look forward with sober optimism to real improvements in consequence of again bringing the press under control'.[83] Obviously he was writing about the Indian rather than the British press; nevertheless a critical attitude towards the more popular newspapers predisposed Halifax towards a sympathetic response to German complaints. He 'alluded to the need for the Press to create the right atmosphere if any real advance were to be made towards a better understanding'.[84]

An underlying purpose of the German invitation became clear when Halifax met Goebbels the next day and press freedom was the only topic discussed. The Propaganda Minister claimed that

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[80] Henderson to Foreign Office, 15 November 1937, Halifax Papers A4.410.3.3 (ii); see Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 34-5.
[81] Halifax's diary, 19 November 1937, Halifax papers A4.410.3.3 (vi).
[82] Record of Hitler–Halifax conversation, 19 November 1937, enclosed in Neurath to Henderson, 20 November, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-45, Series D, vol. I*, p. 67.
[83] Quoted in Roberts, *Holy Fox*, p. 79.
[84] Henderson memo, 21 November 1937, FO 371/20736,C8094/270/18.

> the influence of the Press was under rather than over-rated. Its power to mould public opinion was greater even than was realised, and if public opinion was moulded wrongly, incalculable harm could be done since, in the end ... it was public opinion ... which directed policy.

To improve the situation he asked whether 'something could be done to put a stop in the British Press to personal criticism of Hitler. Nothing caused more bitter resentment than that'. In his reply, Halifax reminded Goebbels that because of the 'complete independence of the British Press', he could not promise a positive outcome. Nevertheless, he promised to 'represent to the P.M. and his colleagues the views which Dr Goebbels had expressed'.[85] During his talks with leading German politicians Halifax, in contrast with earlier diplomatic statements, repeatedly denied that the government had no means at all for stopping criticism of foreign regimes.[86] After returning to England Halifax wrote hopefully to Henderson that the past developments had been 'good'. But he ended with the condition, 'if only we can get the press in both countries tame'.[87]

As a way to influence newspapers, and improve government–press relations, Halifax could build on the fact that he knew some of the major newspaper owners and editors personally. As well as speaking with them, he approached others he knew less well, if at all, including the controllers of the *Daily Herald* and *News Chronicle* and also the *Evening Standard*'s cartoonist, David Low. These conversations, and their effects, will be considered in later chapters. But it should be noted that Henderson, knowing the sensitivity of British newspapers towards any official attempt to influence them, regarded it as dangerous to make any 'formal arrangement' through the Foreign Office to deal with correspondents: this would easily look like 'an attempt at censorship and

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[85] Henderson memo of conversation between Halifax and Goebbels, 21 November 1937, Halifax papers A4.410.3.3 and FO 371/20736,C8094/270/18.
[86] E.g. Woermann to German Foreign Office, 29 January 1937, R102772.Pol.II 340 [Politische Beziehungen England zu Deutschland].
[87] Halifax to Henderson, 24 November 1937, Halifax papers A4.410.3.2 (ii); also Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 41.

control'.[88] One can therefore agree with Roberts that the last word in this process of ministerial-newspaper contacts lay with the newspaper: 'If they responded and engaged in a self-censorship helpful to British diplomacy, it can hardly be blamed on Halifax.'[89]

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When in early February 1938 the *Daily Mail* printed a story about a possible agreement with Italy, the Foreign Secretary, Eden was 'very annoyed', because he thought this news might raise Italian government hopes of an easy settlement and weaken his own diplomatic efforts.[90] When Oliver Harvey, Eden's private secretary, tried to discover where these stories had come from, he was told by the Foreign Office News Department that they could 'only have come from No. 10'. Although this was denied by Horace Wilson, Chamberlain's chief industrial adviser, Leeper remained convinced that he had 'very circumstantial evidence from journalists that they did come from No. 10'.[91] As it turned out, technically speaking Chamberlain had told the truth. Harvey found out a few days later that the 'press campaign about Italy was given out by Sir Joseph Ball at Conservative Head Office, not from Number 10'.[92]

Nevertheless, through whatever channel, it was evident that Chamberlain was using his own means to brief the press, and this clearly weakened the Foreign Secretary's position. The final factors in Eden's resignation a few days later were not just Chamberlain's rejection of the Roosevelt offer; it was also the simultaneous launch

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[88] Henderson to Halifax, 2 December 1937, Halifax papers A4.410.3.2 (ii). Halifax agreed to this and hoped for 'a fuller realisation of the difficulties caused by the papers' by the Foreign Office: Halifax to Henderson, 3 December 1937, Halifax papers A4.410.3.2 (ii).
[89] Roberts, *Holy Fox*, p. 79.
[90] *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-1940,* ed. John Harvey (London, 1970), p. 87 (9 February 1938) [hereafter: *Harvey diaries*].
[91] *Ibid.*, p. 88 (12 February 1938).
[92] *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90 (13 February 1938).

of his campaign to influence the press.[93] Subsequently, Chamberlain, with the help of Ball, made sure that it was widely reported in the newspapers that the Foreign Secretary had resigned over minor differences, not major foreign policy issues. As Ball explained it, he had taken 'certain steps privately' to destroy 'the cases of Eden and Cranborne' in the Conservative press.[94] It is difficult to assess what these measures were, but they were evidently successful: Harvey remarked on the morning after Eden's resignation that 'the government took every possible step to secure the London papers'.[95] Eden's resignation and Vansittart's ostensible 'promotion' to 'Diplomatic Adviser' – in practice sidelining him – increased Chamberlain's influence over foreign policy. It also left Leeper, as a critic of Chamberlain's style of appeasement, in a vulnerable position.[96]

Despite Halifax's and Chamberlain's efforts in early 1938, elements of the press continued to write critical commentaries on the German government and British foreign policy. Consequently, Halifax, as the new Foreign Secretary, approached the leading newspapers again, to ask for moderate and fair coverage of German affairs. He discussed with Leeper 'the steps which might be taken to moderate the tone of the BBC and the Press'. Leeper urged Halifax to meet with both newspaper representatives and Reith of the BBC, and to try and persuade them 'to avoid provocation against Germany and Italy ... and to have a sense of national responsibility'. But he also urged that it should be made clear that 'no attempt was being made … to control the press. It was merely an appeal to help the national interest while a sincere effort was being undertaken to search a settlement with these two countries'.[97] Leeper was fully aware

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[93] For the events and circumstances of Eden's resignation see N. Rose, 'The resignation of Anthony Eden', *HJ* 25 (1982), pp. 911-31; David Dutton, Anthony Eden. *A Life and Reputation* (London, 1997), pp. 82-111'

[94] Ball to Neville Chamberlain, 21 February 1938, NC 7/11/31/10.

[95] *Harvey Diaries*, p. 102 (27 February 1938).

[96] See Adamthwaite, 'British Government', p. 289, and Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 52.

[97] Leeper minute, 28 February 1938, FO 371/21709,C1431/1261/18.

that British newspapers would react sharply if they suspected any kind of official exertion of influence.

This growing government 'interest' in newspaper reports was noted by the newspapers themselves. Already during January and February articles began to appear which commented on the freedom of the press and purpose of newspapers in a democracy: but these themes became more noticeable at the start of March 1938.[98] Halifax briefed the press on 8 March to remind them that 'unguarded criticism of other countries, especially … the Heads of States' would only make international relations 'worse by needless provocation'.[99] Nevertheless, at a Press Gallery dinner Chamberlain dismissed rumours of government attempts to exert tighter control over newspapers. A remark he made in favour of press freedom was well received in the newspapers. According to the *News Chronicle* this response was a sign of the 'widespread hostility' with which the press regarded the government's recent attempts to influence newspaper opinion.[100] It is therefore no wonder that the 'rumours' about government interference with the newspapers were raised in the House of Commons, where the prime minister was asked whether 'any instruction, request or suggestion, direct or indirect, has been made since 21 February 1938, to British newspapers to suppress or modify news or comment on the Government's foreign policy'. He denied this categorically: 'no attempt has been made by instruction, request or suggestion to prevent newspapers from expressing their considered views.'[101]

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[98] Henderson saw Hitler on 5 March 1938, and heavily criticised the British press: see Ian Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet* (London, 1971), p. 101.
[99] Leeper draft in FO 371/21709.1431, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 53. See also *Harvey diaries*, p. 111 (8 March 1938): 'A difficult business, as he appealed to them to refrain as far as possible from reporting "rumours" which might embitter relations with Germany and Italy.'
[100] E.g. *News Chronicle*, 22 March 1938, p. 10.
[101] *HCDeb* 333, col. 1171 (23 March 1938); also Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 65.

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The Halifax visit to Germany in November 1937 had made it clear that British newspapers had an important role to play in the wider context of Anglo-German relations. Consequently the British government did what it could to influence the nature of press coverage. It had only relative success – but this was in accordance with its own limited expectations. Two incidents in May 1938 are indicative. After the weekend 'crisis' over rumoured German troop movements against Czechoslovakia, according to Chamberlain 'the press had been told "not to overdo it"'. Then, after German complaints of a *Times* article criticising the German press, Halifax saw British newspaper representatives and 'exhorted them to adopt a moderate tone'.[102] Yet the decision on how to respond to such an 'appeal' lay ultimately with the person who ran the policy of a particular newspaper. All ministers hoped for was that newspapers would be more restrained, not to 'overdo' or else to 'moderate' their comments – not that they would accept government instructions on what news and views they should publish. A few days later, Chamberlain again commented that 'we have done our best to damp down the enthusiasm of the press here and in France.'[103] But this was all he could do. The visit of Wiedemann, another emissary from Hitler, during summer 1938 produced another example of the limited influence which could be brought to bear on the press. Wiedemann's discussions were supposed to be secret, but Cadogan – Vansittart's replacement as permanent secretary – could only give an assurance that 'they would ... do their best to induce moderation in the Press.'[104] In other words, the government was far from sure that it could control newspaper comment. Cadogan's fears about the unreliability of certain sections of the British press proved to be correct, for on the next

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[102] Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 22 May 1938, NC 18/1/1053; Halifax to Henderson, 24 May 1938, *DBFP*, III, vol.1, no.305, pp. 369-71.
[103] Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 28 May 1938, NC 18/1/1054.
[104] Cadogan to Wiedemann, 18 July 1938, *DBFP*, III, vol.1, no.511, pp. 589-90.

day the *Daily Herald* leaked the news of the visit. As Chamberlain remarked: 'It was annoying that the press discovered the Wiedemann visit... They are perfectly intolerable in their comments on delicate matters.'[105]

Ball, who was already beginning to prepare for the next general election, was certainly very conscious of the continuing independence of the press. His pessimistic assessment of newspaper support for the National government in June 1938 reveals a more accurate assessment of the realities of government-newspaper relations than is found in some later historical studies. The Labour *Daily Herald* was 'working the whole time against us', while the criticisms of the opposition Liberals were published in the *News Chronicle*, *Star*, and the *Manchester Guardian*. His account of the Conservative press was very accurate, reflecting its different shades:

> although a number of the national dailies (e.g. "The Times", "Telegraph", "Daily Mail", "Daily Express", "Evening News", "Evening Standard", "Yorkshire Post", etc.) are nominally supporters of the Government, none of them can be relied upon for full, continuous, and deliberately planned support... Indeed, some of them deliberately adopt, from time to time, the role of "candid friend" (e.g. "The Daily Mail", "Evening News", "Daily Express" and "Evening Standard", and even "The Daily Telegraph"), while the "Yorkshire Post", since the Eden crisis, has adopted a distinctly hostile attitude.

The situation was exacerbated by the attitude of the BBC, described by Ball as 'one of our great handicaps'.[106] Chamberlain therefore, had good reason to worry about the level of support for appeasement in the press.

His concern increased further over the relatively quiet few weeks in international affairs during the early summer, when Halifax began to develop his own doubts about German intentions, although this was a matter of tone and emphasis and not strictly a different policy. In Halifax's eyes there was the danger of Germany dominating Central and South-Eastern Europe. To avoid this 'an attempt should be made to check this

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[105] Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 24 July 1938, NC 18/1/1060A; on the visit see Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 66.
[106] Ball memo, enclosed in Ball to Chamberlain, 1 June 1938, NC 8/21/1-8.

process before it is too late'.[107] This was not Chamberlain's view of how to make progress with the German government, as he was more prepared to concede in the face of Hitler's demands. In these circumstances *The Times* at the beginning of September 1938 published an awkward leading article for Halifax, arguing the case for allowing 'the Germans of Czechoslovakia – by plebiscite or otherwise – to decide their own future, even if this should mean secession to the Reich'.[108] Halifax feared that the article might be interpreted by the Czech and German governments as evidence of a change in British foreign policy, and issued an official denial that it represented the government's attitude.[109] Nevertheless, Hesse, the press attaché at the German embassy, reported to Berlin that the article was the result of a meeting between Chamberlain and newspaper representatives, and that 'no part of the article has been disavowed' by Chamberlain himself.[110]

With tension emerging between prime minister and foreign secretary, Henderson, from Berlin, came out strongly in favour of Chamberlain's line. He argued once again the importance of not upsetting Hitler by the issue of diplomatic warnings as was being proposed by the Foreign Office.[111] Rather, he advised, the British press should be asked 'to write up Hitler as the apostle of Peace. We make a great mistake when our Press persists in abusing him'.[112] The comment was a reaction to a complaint about newspaper comment on the Runciman mission from Ribbentrop in late August 1938. Ribbentrop requested 'a complete change in the attitude of the English press towards Germany',[113] but Foreign Office officials had little confidence that this could be achieved. Roberts minuted that 'It would be difficult to get the British press to take the

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[107] CAB 27/623 30th, 1 June 1938. See Roberts, *Holy Fox*, pp. 105-6.
[108] *The Times*, 7 September 1938, p. 13.
[109] Halifax to Newton (Prague), 4 June 1938, *DBFP*, III, vol.1, no.374, p. 444; see also Newton to Halifax, 12 June 1938, ibid., no. 401, p. 472.
[110] Account by Dr Hesse, 'On probable genesis of the oft-quoted Article in The Times of June 3rd', *DGFP*, vol. II, Series D, p. 399; see Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 68.
[111] See May Crisis, and the consequence for Hitler's further determination to destroy Czechoslovakia.
[112] Henderson to Cadogan, 6 September 1938, *DBFP* III, vol.2, no.793, p. 257.
[113] Ribbentrop to Halifax, 21 August 1938, *DBFP*, III, vol.2, no.661, pp.127-29.

line suggested'.[114] Strang, supported by Leeper, suggested 'I doubt whether we could ... influence the press in this sense. The best we can do is to instil the need for cautioned moderation, – so frequently [?] disregarded by the "Times" this morning'.[115]

Although Chamberlain's attitude towards the Czechoslovakian problem had been supported by *The Times* leader of 7 September, with its proposal for a secession of Sudeten areas, he thought that other 'papers do their best to ruin all one's efforts'. Indeed Rothermere's *Daily Mail*, normally a firm supporter of Chamberlain's government, came out with the proposal on 10 September that if Hitler used force, the British government would declare war.[116] Nor could Chamberlain now rely on his Foreign Secretary. Halifax was appalled by German activities, and instructed the British minister in Prague to inform the Czech government that the French and British governments could not continue to advise it against military mobilisation.[117] Later on the same day he advised Chamberlain that public opinion was changing and that German aggression would be regarded as 'an unpardonable crime against humanity'.[118]

On 26 September, the Foreign Office released a press communiqué pledging that Britain and the Soviet Union would 'certainly stand by France' if there was a German attack on Czechoslovakia.[119] This can be regarded as an attempt by the Foreign Office – Halifax, now in cooperation with Leeper – to force Chamberlain's hand and establish a firm British stance, not least because neither the French nor Russian governments were

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[114] Roberts minute, 7 September 1938, FO 371/21764.C9290/4470/18.
[115] Strang minute, 7 September and Leeper minute, 8 September 1938, ibid..
[116] Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 11 September 1938, NC 18/1/1068. The Nazis explained the change of heart of the *Daily Mail* on Jewish influence on advertising: see Dirksen minute, 10 December 1938, Auswärtige Amt, R122499.A 4761; on *Daily Mail*, see T. Jeffrey and K. McClelland, 'A world fit to live in: the Daily Mail and the middle classes 1918-39', in James Curran, Anthony Smith and Pauline Wingate (eds.), *Impacts and Influences. Essays on Media Power in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1987), pp. 27-52.
[117] Halifax to British Embassy, 23 September 1938, *DBFP*, III , vol.2, no.1049.
[118] Halifax to British Delegation (Godesberg), 23 September 1938, *DBFP*, III, vol.2, no.1058, p. 490; see CAB 23/95 43(38), 25 September 1938.
[119] Halifax to Henderson, 26 September 1938, *DBFP*, III, vol.2, no.1111, p. 550. Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 82, is wrong to deny the publication of the communiqué: see *Times*, 27 September 1938, p. 12, for proof of publication.

given advance information about this statement.[120] At this point, one of Chamberlain's Cabinet allies, Hoare, started to see newspaper representatives frequently. He recalled that 'the incident warned us of the need for improving relations with the press, and it was for this purpose that I held daily meetings with the representatives of the leading papers'.[121] So as late as 26 September 1938, Chamberlainites were not confident about how newspapers would react to developments in the Czechoslovakian crisis. Even during the critical Munich period, the government had contact – but not control – over the press.

The immediate consequence was felt by Leeper, who (inaccurately) was regarded as responsible for the communiqué. Cadogan reported that 10 Downing Street was not happy with the way the Foreign Office News Department dealt with the press, indicating that there were two markedly different sources of government media management. In particular, 'blame has been particularly attached to Leeper'.[122] Other Cabinet ministers also expressed doubts about the News Department, because its newspaper guidance in the past 'had not always been in complete harmony with Government policy'.[123]

Towards the end of the year 'public opinion', as expressed in parliamentary by-elections from October to December 1938, reflected the critical attitude that many now took towards Chamberlain's foreign policy.[124] At the end of November a member of the Conservative Research Department sent its director, Ball, an urgent message: 'The

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[120] In 1947 Halifax took full responsibility for sending the message: see Roberts, *Holy Fox*, p. 119; cf. Taylor, *Projection*, p. 36, who claims that it originated with Leeper.

[121] Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years*, p. 318; see also Nicholas J. Cull, 'The Munich crisis and British propaganda policy in the United States', in *The Munich Crisis, 1938. Prelude to World War II*, ed. Igor Lukes and Erik Goldstein (London, 1999), p. 224.

[122] Cadogan minute to Halifax, 28 November 1938, quoted in *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-45*, ed. David Dilks (London, 1971), p. 99 (16 September 1938): hereafter: *Cadogan Diaries*. For the German reaction see Dirksen to German Foreign Office, 8 December 1938, Auswärtige Amt, R.122499.P11261.

[123] CAB 23/96, 59 (38) 5, 14 December 1938.

[124] See Roger Eatwell, 'Munich, public opinion, and popular front', *JCH* 6 (1971), pp. 122-39, here p. 138; also R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement. British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (London, 1993), p. 188.

outlook is far less promising than it was a few months ago, and there are a large number of seats held by only small majorities, so that only a small turnover of votes would defeat the Government'.[125] He advised that any idea of holding an early general election should be abandoned – which hardly indicates that the government was successfully manipulating opinion through the newspapers. Consequently, further efforts were made to obtain more favourable media coverage. The British Association for International Understanding was one of these initiatives.

These renewed attempts to influence opinion again attracted comment. As in March 1938, the issue was raised in the House of Commons in late November. Geoffrey Mander, a Liberal MP, asked 'to what extent recent advice has been officially tended by members of the Government towards owners of newspapers as to what attitude they should take up on the subject of foreign policy'. Chamberlain denied that such advice had been given. When Mander rephrased his question and asked if any advice had been given 'unofficially', Chamberlain said 'no such advice had been tendered ... neither officially or unofficially'.[126] Given the government efforts over the past few months, Cockett was certainly right to state that Chamberlain 'was now telling an outright lie'.[127]

Chamberlain's doubts about the extent of support for his foreign policy were evident at the end of 1938 when he again complained about newspaper criticism. He even commented on the 'advantages' of dictatorships in dealing with public opinion: 'If only we could exclude from our own papers quotations from the foreign press except such as were agreeable – the world would go round a great deal faster.'[128] From Chamberlain's private papers one never gets the impression that he was satisfied with British newspaper coverage of his policy. In February 1939 he 'wish[ed] the Press could

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[125] Quoted in ibid., p. 188.
[126] *HCDeb* 341, col. 1528, 22 November 1938.
[127] See Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 87.
[128] Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 11 December 1938, NC 18/1/1079.

be controlled a bit better'; now he was not happy with *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, newspapers which were supposed to back him.[129]

At the beginning of March 1939, Chamberlain, under the influence of optimistic reports from Henderson[130] and encouraging intelligence reports,[131] used his private contacts with newspapers to brief them in a highly positive way, speaking of the coming of a 'Golden Age' in Anglo-German relations.[132] Several newspapers of 10 March 1939 displayed this optimism. The Foreign Office was startled: the 'ridiculous rainbow story' was 'much too optimistic'.[133] Vansittart described its assessment of the international situation as an 'entirely misleading estimate'.[134] Initially it was assumed that the story had come from a Foreign Office briefing, but it soon became evident that Chamberlain had 'received all Lobby correspondents'.[135] Halifax questioned Chamberlain about the incident,[136] and Chamberlain defended himself by claiming that he was surprised that 'my talk with the Press which was intended only as general background but was transcribed by them verbatim' – a remarkable and revealing statement in itself – and saying that he was contradicting the pessimistic general view, by which he certainly meant to include the Foreign Office attitude. Chamberlain assured Halifax that the press briefing would not be repeated.[137] Halifax and his officials were sceptical: they were now well aware that Chamberlain was independently seeking to influence public discussion of foreign policy.[138]

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[129] Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 12 February 1939, NC 18/1/1085.
[130] See Vansittart minute, 17 February 1939, FO 800/315, commenting on Henderson to Halifax, 15 February 1939, *DBFP*, series III, vol. iv, Ap.I, i.
[131] For an example see DBFP, series III, vol. iv, 160-1.
[132] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 248.
[133] *Cadogan Diaries*, p. 155, (10 March 1939).
[134] Crozier interview with Vansittart, p. 143 (28 March 1940) in *W.P. Crozier. Off the Record. Political Interviews, 1933-1943*, ed. A.J.P. Taylor (London, 1973).
[135] *Harvey diaries*, p. 260 (10 March 1939).
[136] See Halifax to Chamberlain, 10 March 1939, NC 7/11/32/111.
[137] Chamberlain to Halifax, 11 March 1939, Halifax papers, A4.410.17.1, and NC 7/11/32/112. In a letter to his sister Chamberlain stated about the Lobby journalists that '[t]hey were pretty clumsy in repeating what I said verbatim instead of using it as a background': Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 12 March 1939, NC 18/1/1089.
[138] See *Harvey diaries*, p. 261 (13 March 1939).

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Close examination of British government relations with the newspapers in 1938-39 reveals that Chamberlain's increased involvement was partly – and significantly – an aspect of a disagreement between himself and leading figures in the Foreign Office. Chamberlain had been used to briefing newspapers himself on important issues, at the Treasury and also during the abdication crisis. Once he became prime minister, he had at his disposal the No. 10 Press Office as well as the assistance of Ball. But on foreign-policy issues there was already a well-established system of news 'management' and newspaper briefings – and senior Foreign Office officials, and in time Halifax too, had attitudes towards Germany different from these which Chamberlain wanted to promote. In attempting to counteract Foreign Office views – as well as these of Labour, Liberal and Conservative anti-appeasement critics – Chamberlain, Steward and Ball revealed these differences in government views, and so drew increased attention to government news management.

Consequently, it is arguable that the greater evidence of government attempts to manipulate the newspapers can be interpreted in other ways to these emphasised by Cockett. There is no doubt that Chamberlain did want greater government influence over the press; but it may be that the evidence reveals not an entirely new level of manipulation as a new degree of disagreement among government news managers – a disagreement which made the normally discreet process of press briefings more obvious. Indeed, the evidence may even be an indication of Chamberlain's *failure* to achieve greater press control.

What can confidently be stated is that during the 1930s Conservative party managers and government officials shared considerable sensitivity towards the newspapers, and that Chamberlain took a leading part in efforts to influence newspaper

comment. In this sense, Cockett's argument is justified. Nevertheless, his study does not take adequate account of the complexities of the relations between on the one hand the government and the rival political parties, and on the other newspapers of quite different political opinion. It was not just that on occasion 'government' spoke with two voices. Further questions should be asked. If particular newspapers supported government policy, perhaps they did so for their own reasons? How did the newspapers react to attempted government influence? How far were critics of appeasement in all parties free to express their views? Did the Labour, Liberal and Conservative anti-appeasers feel that their opinions were being suppressed or ignored? Was a 'free press' – or 'truth' – really in 'twilight'?

CHAPTER II

THE TIMES: OFFICIAL MOUTHPIECE OR INDEPENDENT VOICE?

The Times has often been regarded both abroad and at home as the 'semi-official' newspaper of the British government,[1] and consequently historians have tended to regard it as the paper most susceptible to government influence. Cockett, for instance, argued that Chamberlain made use of *The Times* to promote a divergent point of view from that of the Foreign Office while maintaining his anonymity.[2] For him, accordingly, *The Times* was one of the newspapers which 'became mere ciphers for Chamberlain's policies, whilst camouflaging their partisanship in the guise of a democratic "free press"'.[3]

The paper's high reputation was due to its long-established readership in official circles and among politicians and leaders in many professions, as well as the close connection that usually existed between the government and the paper's editor. Quite often editorials in *The Times* were regarded in Britain and Germany as an early indication of government thinking. Although it supported the National government throughout the 1930s and became one of the strongest supporters of Chamberlain's appeasement policy, it was actually an independent Conservative newspaper and its deputy editor was surprised in 1938 to learn that it was regarded as 'an organ of High Tory opinion'.[4] It has indeed too easily been assumed that the British government used

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[1] See e.g. Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 12-3; Seymour-Ure, *Political Impact*, p. 77. For a more critical judgment, see Koss, *Rise and Fall*, vol. ii, pp. 531-2.
[2] See Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 73, 108.
[3] Ibid., p. 65.
[4] Barrington-Ward to G.V. Ferguson, 27 July 1938, quoted in Gannon, *British Press*, p. 60.

the paper, and that it promoted a strongly pro-German and pro-appeasement line throughout its pages.

This chapter will concentrate on editorial policy, and argue that what has been seen as *The Times*' particularly Germanophile course during the late 1930s was, in fact, a long-established policy of the paper. *The Times* had its own understanding of British foreign policy and Britain's need to pursue better relations with Germany, which was to some extent due to outside influence – an aspect of its status as an 'establishment' paper, in close touch with official and ministerial opinions – but which is more fully explained by other, internal, reasons. As the newspaper had by 1937 long been committed to Anglo-German understanding, it may well be wondered why it has been argued that from 1937 the government felt it needed to 'inspire' or even 'control' it. All that changed in 1937 was that Chamberlain's new positive attitudes on foreign policy were more in line with its editorial views than these of his predecessor, Baldwin, had been, and that accordingly the newspaper was encouraged to press more vigorously for Anglo-German reconciliation.

What, then, was the political stance and conception of the editor, Geoffrey Dawson? He has been criticised on several grounds. One group of critics have claimed that although Dawson was not a politician, he used his position as if he were a politician, an *éminence grise*.[5] Williams in particular argued that he was socially too closely connected with responsible people in the government, and therefore lacked the necessary quality of detachment.[6] Some have described the editor as an autocrat who accepted no advice on the paper's policy. This, it has been argued, was shown particularly by his failure to find a new foreign editor after 1928. *The History of The Times* is strongly critical of this arrangement, calling it 'the most important decision of

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[5] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 57, and A.L. Rowse, *All Souls and Appeasement* (London, 1961), p. 9.
[6] Williams, *Dangerous*, p. 275.

Dawson's second innings',[7] and implies that a foreign editor could have prevented Dawson from supporting the Munich policy. Others have judged Dawson to have been a man with limited intellectual background, especially on European issues.[8] It may be true that Dawson possessed no specialised European knowledge, but it is important to keep in mind that conducting a paper's foreign policy did not rely solely on detailed knowledge of European affairs. Equally important were 'political facts at home, the views of the Government and Opposition leaders, the state of finances and armaments, the relative importance of European and imperial commitments'.[9] Who could claim to be an expert on them all? A further group have criticised the editor for using his power irresponsibly. Did Dawson cut or alter news from the paper's correspondents in order to tone down reports and opinions which were at odds with his own views?

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Support for 'appeasement' was not a new policy adopted by *The Times* when faced with the threat of Hitler. It had in fact developed during Dawson's first period as editor (1912-1919), in the aftermath of the First World War. This stance derived from a sense that the Treaty of Versailles had not been 'just' towards Germany, and also from a concern about the unprepared condition of Britain's defence should hostilities break out again. It argued that the Treaty had been concluded in defiance of the principle of self-determination, and improperly left a big minority of Sudeten Germans under control of the Czechoslovakian government. Revision of the Treaty and collective security through

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[7] See *History of The Times*, p. 815, and Woods and Bishop, *Story*, p. 266.
[8] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 58, and Woods and Bishop, *Story*, p. 208.
[9] McLachlan, *Chair*, p. 169.

the League of Nations became 'the twin pillars of *Times* policy' during the inter-war period.[10]

Dawson's conduct as editor was also influenced by his post-war disagreement with its proprietor at that time, Northcliffe, which ultimately led to his resignation. Even though ownership of the paper changed after Northcliffe's death in 1922, Dawson learnt from the experience and when he returned as editor, he accepted the advice of Lord Milner (with whom he had been closely connected during his time in South Africa) and insisted upon firm and explicit conditions before taking the post.[11] He was to have a 'free hand' in directing the paper's policy, though this led to occasional disagreements with the paper's staff.[12] The strength of his position became clear in instances when he would write leaders against the advice of the paper's specialists, notably during the Munich crisis, when he ignored the advice of his military correspondent.[13]

Dawson's political stance was founded upon belief in the British Empire. This was especially due to the influence of Milner, and for Dawson it meant two things: on the one hand the expression of values such as order and decency; on the other hand a defensive role for Britain. 'The maintenance of the strength, the preservation of a unity of the Empire is not the only contribution, but is by far the greatest and most practical contribution, which British statesmanship can make to the welfare of mankind.'[14] As Seymour-Ure argued this was 'intellectually the key to his commitment to appeasement'.[15] Even so, Dawson's interest in continental European affairs should not be under-estimated. His diary is full of references to meetings with diplomats and

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[10] Woods and Bishop, *Story*, p. 291

[11] Milner's Diary, 31 October 1922, quoted in *History*, p. 774; see Dawson memo, 18 November 1922, and for Astor's approval of terms: J.J. Astor to Dawson, 2 December 1922, *The Times* Archive [hereafter TTA] GGD/1.

[12] See Woods and Bishop, *Story*, pp. 248-50, for his return; also Jeremy Tunstall, *Newspaper Power. The New National Press in Britain* (Oxford, 1996), p. 101.

[13] See Basil H. Liddell Hart, *The Memoires of Captain Liddell Hart*, vol. ii (London, 1965), p. 149.

[14] *Times*, 24 May 1934, p. 13.

[15] Seymour-Ure, *Impact*, p. 71; see also Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 29, 58; Wrench, *Dawson*, pp. 374, 376.

politicians from continental Europe. He was certainly worried about developments there, especially in Germany. But as Rose has convincingly shown, these only interfered with his policy 'insofar as they touched upon the more vital interests of the Empire'.[16] Through his frequent consultations with representatives from the Dominions, he was well aware that they were not prepared to enter a war in Central Europe. Further, his contempt for Bolshevism, and linked with this, his view that Germany should stand as a bulwark against Russia, played a large part in shaping his outlook.

Dawson's importance, which Williams described as 'certainly far larger than that of any other newspaper editor, or proprietor of modern times',[17] arose out of the right of access he enjoyed to 10 Downing Street, frequently calling there to speak with the prime minister's secretaries, and when he wished normally being given an interview with the prime minister himself. Such a right of access was not allowed to editors of (say) the Beaverbrook and Rothermere papers, let alone the Liberal and Labour papers. Not even the Camrose and Kemsley editors had this right, despite the fact that they represented quality Conservative newspapers. Baldwin and Chamberlain frequently consulted Dawson, and valued his opinions.[18] Baldwin discussed major policy issues with him, and even Cabinet appointments.[19] He was trusted so much that he was even shown diplomatic correspondence.[20] He was also a life-long friend and neighbour of Halifax, with whom he often had long conversations.[21]

The relationship with Baldwin is well indicated by Davidson's comment on the height of the abdication crisis: 'SB believed very strongly in the freedom of the press',

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[16] Norman Rose, *The Cliveden Set. Portrait of an Exclusive Fraternity* (London, 2000), p. 80.
[17] Williams, *Dangerous*, p. 271.
[18] See Wrench, *Dawson*, p. 373.
[19] Examples are in *History of The Times*, pp. 892-3, and *The Times and Appeasement. The Journals of A.L. Kennedy, 1932-39*, ed. Gordon Martel (Cambridge, 2000), p. 125 (27 March 1934): hereafter *Kennedy Journal.*
[20] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 59.
[21] See Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 12.

and abstained from using any pressure, especially with the trusted editor of *The Times*. Baldwin only wished to be informed: 'all he did was to telephone Dawson and ask him what line he proposed to take'.[22] Chamberlain, for his part, was 'strengthened in his own views by the knowledge that Geoffrey agreed with his policy and would support it in *The Times*'.[23] Through his contacts Dawson was extremely well–informed about ministerial opinions on the details of leading issues. His range of contacts allowed him, on occasion, to stimulate or even originate the flow of ministerial ideas: he was not automatically just the receiver of the prime minister's ideas.[24] In October 1937 the editor wrote an influential leader on German policy which was manifestly compatible with the government's view.[25] Yet the circumstances, as recorded in Dawson's diary, hardly support a conclusion that he was 'in Chamberlain's pocket':

> My leader produced a good deal of attention and approval. One sentence in it suggesting that public opinion was ahead of the Government in seeing the urgency and importance of a settlement with Berlin caused the P.M. to ask me to come and see him … so that he might tell me what he at any rate had been trying to do.[26]

The Times shared the very widespread public reasons for supporting a conciliatory policy towards Germany. Dislike of conflict was strengthened by memories of the horror of the still recent First World War. This was particularly true for the paper's deputy editor, Barrington-Ward.[27] According to McLachlan, 'the conviction in later years that the fighting had not been worthwhile because the peace had been bungled was burnt deep into him. It was at the root of his determination that war between the same

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[22] *Davidson's Memoirs*, pp. 414-15; see Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 566.
[23] Wrench, *Dawson*, p. 373.
[24] See D.C. Watt, *Personalities and Policies. Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1965), p. 12, and Iverach McDonald, *The History of The Times*, vol. v, *Struggles in War and Peace 1939-1966* (London, 1986), p. 11.
[25] See *The Times*, 28 October 1937, p. 17.
[26] Dawson diary, 28 October 1937, MS Dawson 41.
[27] See Seymour-Ure, *Impact*, p. 69.

contestants – the return match that some Germans dreamed of – must be avoided'.[28] Accordingly, Barrington-Ward argued consistently for Anglo-German reconciliation.[29] In a 1936 letter to Churchill, which can be read as a summary of *The Times*' appeasement policy, Barrington-Ward argued for understanding with the European dictators:

> We should, ... certainly be against premature abandonment of the hope, supported by many authoritative pronouncements on the German side, that Germany is prepared to reach a general understanding and settlement with the British Empire. *The Times* has consistently endeavoured to argue - and I well remember your stating the same case in several speeches some years ago - that there is no other ultimate basis for stability in Europe but an understanding between France, Germany and Britain on lines designed eventually to embrace Europe generally.[30]

Barrington-Ward's influence on the conduct of the paper grew considerably when he became more and more responsible for editing *The Times* in the later 1930s,[31] acting as 'the virtual "Foreign Editor"',[32] and often supervising the last stages of the papers' preparation, late in the evening. In contrast to Dawson, Barrington-Ward was strongly interested in the European situation. The main pillar of his approach to continental affairs was revision of the Treaty of Versailles. He came to this conclusion quite early after the war, and Hitler's appearance did not change it. Gannon summarised his view as being that 'justice did not become injustice because a dictator demanded it'.[33]

It was from this perspective that *The Times* accepted the German occupation of the Rhineland in 1936: 'It is no condonation of the method by which the first of these moves was effected to say that they were inevitable sooner or later.'[34] As Gannon argues 'to understand everything was to forgive a good deal', and 'what British opinion

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[28] McLachlan, *Chair*, p. 50.
[29] See ibid., p. 99.
[30] Barrington-Ward to Churchill, 22 September 1936, quoted in McLachlan, *Chair*, p. 107.
[31] See McLachlan, *Chair*, p. 99.
[32] Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 506.
[33] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 64.
[34] *Times*, 3 April 1936, p. 17.

seized upon was the opportunity of wresting good out of evil, of proceeding to a comprehensive liquidation of all reasonable German claims'.[35]

It is important to note a distinction between the editor's private opinions and the newspaper's published statements. Privately Dawson had doubts about the nature of Hitler's government; but for the purpose of encouraging the preservation of peace, he thought it important to put the best emphasis on any conciliatory statements coming out of Berlin. As Dawson wrote to Kennedy, his diplomatic correspondent, on 16 March:

> I should be very sorry myself to place any confidence in the present regime in Germany. Their occupation of the demilitarised zone was a characteristically stupid blunder, as a great many Germans seem to have realised. At the same time I think it sheer folly to refuse to get the utmost out of the professions which accompanied it, whether they are sincere or not.[36]

What Dawson had in mind – a search for reconciliation, yet an underlying suspicion and caution – becomes clearer when *The Times*'s attitude towards armaments is considered. The paper held that a demonstration of British strength and resolve, in the form of continued rearmament, was vital in order to bring the German government to serious negotiations. In mid-1936 it stated that the best way of keeping the peace 'is the speediest possible completion of our defence arrangements, … in present circumstances, an adequate level of British armament is paradoxically indispensable if the advance to agreement and disarmament is to be resumed'.[37] A month later *The Times* again pointed out in these days that 'British foreign policy must have the backing of far greater strength to enforce it'.[38] During the late 1930s rearmament became the newspaper's second pillar, next to treaty revision.

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[35] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 98; *Times*, 21 April 1936, p. 13.
[36] Dawson to Kennedy, 16 March 1936, TTA, GGD/1.
[37] *Times*, 4 June 1936, p. 13.
[38] *Ibid.*, 6 July 1936, p. 15.

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Most studies of *The Times'* stance on the appeasement issue draw attention to claims of a systematic censorship of articles written by the paper's own correspondents, most notably Norman Ebbutt, based in Berlin,[39] and a well-known correspondence between Dawson and H.G. Daniels, *The Times*' special correspondent.[40] The claim of improper manipulation was dismissed by Gannon on the grounds of the editor's integrity. Moreover, he argues, a highly-educated readership would have detected such censorship, with serious effects upon the paper's reputation that Dawson could not have wished.[41] Nevertheless, Margach, one of the strongest critics of Dawson, made a still stronger accusation:

> Not only did Dawson excise vital pieces from foreign correspondents' despatches, … he even slipped in comments of his own, completely distorting the balance of the reports in the hope of comforting and currying favour with the Nazi leaders.[42]

Koss merely stated that *The Times* was doing what its competitors also did, but that this attracted more attention on account of its high reputation.[43] The accusations were denied in the biographies of Dawson and Barrington-Ward, and in the memoirs of former journalists who pointed out that while articles were cut, this was not for the purpose of suiting a certain policy.[44] More recently, McDonough, in his examination of Ebbutt, casts doubt on these studies and renews the claim that they were indeed politically motivated.[45]

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[39] Norman Ebbutt (1894-1968). Joined foreign department of *The Times* in 1919, and became the paper's chief correspondent in Berlin, 1926-1937.
[40] See McDonough, '*The Times*', p. 407.
[41] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 70.
[42] Margach, *Abuse*, p. 54. See also Colin Coote, *Editorial* (London, 1964), p. 169, who also claimed that Dawson made his own insertions.
[43] Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 544.
[44] Gannon, *British Press,* pp. 118-24; McLachlan, *Chair*, pp. 131-8.
[45] See McDonough, '*The Times*', p. 407.

The allegation of manipulation and suppression of news relates most strongly to the correspondence between Dawson and Daniels in May 1937. On 11 May Dawson declared that 'I am and always have been, most anxious that we shall "explore every avenue" in the search for a reasonable understanding with Germany'.[46] Dawson felt that Britain had never truly sought friendship with Germany, particularly in assuaging the German sense that they had been unfairly treated at Versailles. So he himself tried to do his best: 'for my own part, I lose no opportunity, when I see it, of trying to mitigate this sort of grievance, which is mainly psychological'.[47] Only two weeks later Dawson reacted in a surprised manner to German criticisms of reports in *The Times*:

> But it really interests me to know precisely what it is in *The Times* that has produced this antagonism in Germany. I did my utmost, night after night, to keep out of the paper anything that might hurt their susceptibilities. I can really think of nothing that has been printed now for many months past which they could possibly take exception to as unfair comment.[48]

Critics of Dawson and appeasement see here evidence that the paper would stop at nothing – even suppression of news – to appease the Nazis.[49] They too easily disregard the context and Dawson's justification: 'No doubt [the Nazis] were annoyed by [a report on the bombing of Guernica], but its essential accuracy has never been disputed, and there has not been any attempt here to rub it in or to harp upon it.'[50] The bombing was widely reported in the British press, but where other newspapers left the question of responsibility unspoken, *The Times* had directly charged Germany with the outrage.[51]

Dawson did, then, allow criticism of Germany, where it was true and fair.[52] Critics are usually concerned with editorial comment or journalists' articles, ignoring

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[46] Dawson to Daniels, 11 May 1937, MS Dawson 79.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Dawson to Daniels, 23 May 1937, MS Dawson 79.
[49] See Margach, *Abuse*, p. 163; Coote, *Editorial*, p. 169.
[50] Dawson to Daniels, 23 May 1937, MS Dawson 79.
[51] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 113.
[52] See McLachlan, *Chair*, p. 133.

the way in which *The Times* was committed to accurate factual reports. In any case 'facts' were 'not left out because no newspaper can suppress important news'.[53] Iverach McDonald, who worked for the newspaper in these years, gave an important insight into how Dawson edited it: 'He held to the old (and never entirely workable) convention that the news column should be reserved for news and that all comment should be confined to the leader columns'. It follows that in the Dawson–Daniels correspondence, 'Dawson was referring not to news despatches at all but to contributed articles to the editor which he selected or turned down, as was his right'.[54] Even when *The Times* was regarded as a mouthpiece of appeasement in the minds of British public, the paper did not shrink from expressing strong judgements on German domestic affairs. Thus, only a few weeks after it had supported the Anglo-German naval agreement, the newspaper pointed to the striking structural similarities between the National Socialist and the Bolshevist dictatorship.[55] In Berlin, the Nazi government reacted with considerable annoyance to this sharp analysis.[56] Furthermore, the paper criticised and exposed the darker side of National Socialism, like the treatment of the churches and persecution of the Jews. As Martin Gilbert admits, 'Even *The Times* gave prominence to stories of religious persecution inside Germany'.[57]

Not only was analysis critical of German internal policy published in the paper; articles critical of British foreign policy appeared if it ran counter to the editor's views. The paper's stance during the Abyssinian crisis illustrates this very clearly. In 1935 the British government pledged its support for collective security and the League of

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[53] Ibid., p. 134.
[54] McDonald, *Man*, p. 53; see also McLachlan, *Chair*, pp. 131-137, 282, 283.
[55] See *Times,* 7 August 1935, p. 11.
[56] See Huttner, *Britische Press*, pp. 667-9. For the German reaction see Markus Huttner, *Totalitarismus und säkulare Religionen. Zur Frühgeschichte totalitarismuskritischer Begriffs-und Theoriebildung in Großbritannien* (Bonn, 1999), p. 91.
[57] Gilbert, *Roots*, p. 165. See also Andrew Sharf, *The British Press and Jews under Nazi Rule* (Oxford, 1964).

Nations,[58] and the outcome of the general election indicated that the public supported this policy. Yet this did not solve the problem of the Italian armies fighting in Abyssinia. so Hoare as Foreign Secretary was sent to Paris to negotiate a peace plan for presentation to the Italian and Abyssinian governments. The resulting Hoare–Laval pact proposed a substantial transfer of land to Italy, leaving Abyssinia with just a narrow zone for access to the sea – and one in which it would not be allowed to build a railway line. After the terms of the pact were leaked in French newspapers, it became apparent that British 'public opinion' was hostile towards it as an excessive concession to Italian demands. *The Times* also criticised the plan and the government's apparent willingness to accept it, dismissively dubbing the zone 'A Corridor for Camels'.[59] *The Times* alone did not cause the government to change its policy, drop the plan and persuade Hoare to resign his post, but considering its high reputation 'its biting criticism was undoubtedly a significant factor'.[60]

Critics further argue that Ebbutt's despatches from Berlin were cut or distorted to suit the newspaper's support for Chamberlain's policy. This argument, however, is valid only if the cutting of despatches can be shown to have started with the accession of Chamberlain, and if it was not already common editorial practice at the time. McDonough had to admit that even 'before the Nazis came to power, Ebbutt was already finding his task difficult'.[61] Moreover, while it cannot be denied that Ebbutt's despatches were often and substantially cut, the reason for such editorial cuts was not their content, but their length. As early as 1931 Deakin, the foreign news editor, wrote to Ebbutt: 'Your complaint about the lopping off of the last sentence in nearly every

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[58] See Hoare's speech on 11 September 1935 in Geneva, in *DBFP* 2, 14 no. 650.
[59] See *Times*, 16 December 1935, p. 15.
[60] Seymour-Ure, *Impact*, p. 76; see Thomas Jones, *A Diary with Letters* (Oxford, 1954), p.161, claiming that 'public opposition has been mounting throughout the Press of the country led by *The Times*'. For public opinion during the Abyssinian crisis see D. Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War 1935-36* (London, 1957), pp. 48-50.
[61] McDonough, '*The Times*', p. 408.

paragraph is all a matter of space'.[62] Or again a few years later: 'I sent you a request not to exceed a column on any story. You sent a column and a half of comment for which we could find no place.'[63] Ebbutt himself was well aware of the problem. In 1929 he had written that 'Every message one sends is cut and though there may be very good reasons of space, I find it depressing to see the results of what I do send'.[64] It seems that he could not restrain himself, even after warnings in 1933: 'I fear that, as usual, the articles will be found too long; and I realise that Barrington-Ward made this point clear enough in a recent letter. Yet I feel incapable of doing anything more about it than I have done, even if you give me up as a bad job.'[65] That the problem was a matter of Ebbutt's prolixity, rather than the substance of his reports, is confirmed by the fact that his main dealings on the issue were with a subordinate editor, Deakin, rather than with Dawson.[66] In November 1934, Ebbutt wrote that on twelve occasions his articles had been cut, and therefore, quite possibly, distorted.[67] When, at times, he thought he could not achieve anything by writing to his responsible sub-editor, he wrote directly to Dawson. Significantly, again, he often got a supportive answer: 'I will tell the sub-editors you are to be the best judge of what you can or cannot say and of how your messages can be framed most discreetly.'[68] In spite of this, the length of Ebbutt's articles continued to be cut, and he continued to complain. But Ebbutt never resigned; so one can assume that whatever happened to his work in London, he was still content with the outcome published in the paper – that he did not think that the substance and purpose of his articles was changed.

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[62] Deakin to Ebbutt, 7 June 1931, TTA, TT/FN/1/RD/1, and also Ebbutt to Deakin, 2 June 1931, TTA, TT/FN/1/RD/1. See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 123.
[63] Deakin to Ebbutt, 4 April 1935, TTA, TT/FN/1/RD/1.
[64] Ebbutt to Deakin, 29 March 1929, TTA, TT/FN/1/RD/1.
[65] Ebbutt to Deakin, 1 April 1933, TTA, TT/FN/1/RD/1.
[66] See McDonald, *History*, p. 466.
[67] Ebbutt to Deakin, 11 November 1934, TTA, TT/FN/1/RD/1.
[68] Dawson to Ebbutt, 20 December 1934, TTA, GGD/1.

In August 1937 Ebbutt was expelled from Germany. Gannon offered as the reason German government retaliation for the expulsion of three German journalists,[69] while the official *History of The Times* stressed that the Nazis feared his articles more than they valued Dawson's calming editorials.[70] McLachlan more or less agreed, that Ebbutt's printed articles caused his expulsion.[71] Woods, more specifically, stressed the importance of his articles on the Church struggle in Germany.[72] This explanation seemed to be confirmed by a *Times* leader commenting on German criticisms of Ebbutt, published three days before his expulsion:

> It is permissible, perhaps, to remind these well-drilled German newspapers that *The Times* has stood rather conspicuously for an attitude towards their country which is by no means universal in England. The distinction which it has always drawn between the internal affairs of Germany (which are her own concern) and those national activities - due to some extent, no doubt, to the character of their rulers - which may threaten the peace and security of other countries, or strike at the world-wide freedom of religious belief. There is too much reason to believe that Mr Ebbutt's main offence has been his repeated exposure of these persecutions of religion which are the worst feature of the Nazi regime and which are bound to be a permanent stumbling block in the path of international friendship.

So even when Dawson's staff 'edited' Ebbutt's articles, cutting out or altering sentences for reasons of length, these articles still remained so critical of the German government that in the end it expelled him.[73] In the face of German complaints, Dawson had been loyal to Ebbutt and refused to withdraw him. 'The case against Mr. Ebbutt was frankly based on dissatisfaction with his published record of affairs in Germany.'[74] As Woods

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[69] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 121.
[70] *History*, p. 908.
[71] McLachlan, *Chair*, pp. 131-8.
[72] Woods and Bishop, *Story,* p. 294.
[73] See Seymour-Ure, *Impact*, p. 93.
[74] *The Times*, 17 August 1937, p. 13; see also Dawson to Daniels, 9 August 1937, MS Dawson 79, where the editor believed that the reason for the expulsion was 'that he has not been sufficiently sympathetic to the Nazi regime.'

justly comments 'unlike the Government, who replaced an ambassador [Phipps in 1937]... *The Times* never attempted to shift its representative in Germany'.[75]

What none of Dawson's critics explain is the particular timing of Ebbutt's expulsion. McDonough explains it by a change in Nazi press policy, dating from January 1937.[76] He denied that the removal was 'the result of critical articles on Germany in 1937'.[77] Although this remains a possibility, it seems more likely that dislike of Ebbutt's articles was indeed the reason for the German action. Goebbels seems to have been the force behind it.[78] His gloating remark after he got news of Ebbutt's physical collapse months after the latter was back in England ('*The Times* is now bearable'[79]) indicates his level of personal satisfaction. Certainly it seems that after Ebbutt had left, the German news in *The Times* was less offensive in the Nazis' eyes. Even Hitler praised the paper: '*The Times* leader had not worried him so much, because *The Times* had given ... a fair deal on balance and had often been very kind.'[80] When during the summer of 1939 rumours about a change of the Berlin correspondent became public, Dirksen let it be known to the Foreign Office that the German government wanted Ebbutt's successor, Holburn, to stay in post because of his 'general objective correspondence'.[81]

However, Douglas Reed, the Central European correspondent since May 1935, had a different story. Reed quite quickly became a strong opponent of *The Times*' pro-

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[75] Woods and Bishop, *Story*, p. 294; see McDonald, *Man*, p. 53.
[76] See McDonough, '*The Times*', pp. 420-1.
[77] McDonough, '*The Times*', p. 421; cf. Huttner, *Britische Presse*, p. 223.
[78] For Ebbutt's expulsion see *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, ed. Elke Fröhlich vol. iii (Munich 1987). p. 229 (8 August 1937), p. 234 (12 August 1937), p. 236 (15 August 1937), p. 239 (18 August 1937), p. 241 (20 August 1937) and p. 262 (11 September 1937).
[79] Ibid., p. 334 (13 November 1937).
[80] Reed memo, 19 December 1937, Deakin papers, TTA, TT/FN/1/RD/1.
[81] Dirksen memo, 16 June 1939, Auswärtige Amt, R.121672.

appeasement stance.[82] He complained that as the international tension grew, his warnings were ignored, and he was purposely pushed off the 'news maps of Europe'. Instead of being sent to Prague to report on the Sudeten crisis, the paper sent him to Belgrade. As a consequence Reed left *The Times* in October 1938, moving to the *News Chronicle*.[83] He never alleged that the substance of his articles had been altered, but by this time he no longer felt he could identify with *The Times*. Reed was not the only journalist who was unhappy at *The Times* in the late 1930s.[84] Colin Coote, leader writer and convinced opponent of appeasement, was moved away from covering events in Europe, and asked to write on British rearmament instead.[85] He only remained at *The Times* because his friend Churchill asked him to do so.[86] There was also the case of Anthony Winn, who resigned as the paper's Lobby correspondent after his report on Duff Cooper's October 1938 resignation speech had been altered by Dawson.

Cooper's version of this episode quickly became part of the criticism of *The Times*. According to him, 'not only did the editor suppress it but he inserted a concoction of his own in which the speech was described as a "damp squib" and headed it "from our lobby correspondent"'.[87] This is completely misleading. In fact, Cooper's speech was not suppressed: it was fully reported in two columns on the Parliamentary pages. Nor was it attributed to the 'Lobby Correspondent' – and the phrase 'damp squib' does not appear in it.[88] Certainly there was an argument about the precise reporting of Cooper's words, which prompted Winn's resignation. But the underlying

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[82] See Dawson's judgement of his Vienna correspondent in a letter to Churchill, 23 March 1938, MS Dawson, 79/178: 'an extreme anti-Nazi'. See also Douglas Reed, *Insanity Fair* (London, 1938), his critical judgment of the European situation.
[83] Reed to Dawson, 10 October 1938, quoted in Huttner, *Britische Presse*, p. 199.
[84] See McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain*, p. 118.
[85] See Coote, *Editorial*, p. 169.
[86] See ibid. pp. 170-1. Churchill told him that he would like to have 'a friend in the "enemy's camp"': Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, vol. v (1922-39)* (London, 1976), p. 579.
[87] Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget* (London, 1954), p. 250; see also *A Durable Fire. The Letters of Duff and Diana Cooper 1913-1950*, ed. Artemis Cooper (London, 1985), p. 292.
[88] See *Times*, 3 October 1938, p. 15.

reason was Winn's growing disillusionment with the paper's editorial stance.[89] In his letter of resignation Winn wrote:

> The Duff Cooper episode apart, my distaste for what I frankly regard as a silly and dangerous policy has been hardening for many weeks. ...Since, rightly or wrongly, I hold these views it is impracticable for me to be the Parliamentary Correspondent of a paper which was the first responsible advocate of secession, and which still has hopes of a genuine friendship with the Nazi regime.[90]

Dawson took the criticism of his editorial policy very much to heart. His reply constitutes a reasoned and far from discreditable justification of the paper's policy:

> I do not myself believe that the [Nazi] system will last for ever. But in any case I am convinced that the best way to consolidate and perpetuate it would be by staging a worldwide war on an issue that would be profoundly misinterpreted, not only in this country and in Germany, but in the Dominions and in the United States. Similarly I am convinced that British rearmament and organisation must go forward with redoubled vigour if we are ever to make the German people cry halt to an insane competition.[91]

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The Times had long-established views on the German problem. These were not the product of government influence; rather, the paper's editorial policies tended to coincide with Chamberlain's policies. One of these views was that an *Anschluss* between Germany and Austria would be a means of remedying a German grievance. It therefore argued that the British government could have no interest in intervening in a purely German-Austrian affair. It believed that many Austrians themselves wanted to become part of the German Reich. For the newspaper the separation of the two countries had been artificial:

> Fundamentally a close understanding between the two German States is the most natural thing possible. One of the least rational, most brittle, and most provocative artificialities of the peace settlement was the ban on the

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[89] See Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 65-8, and McDonough, '*The Times*', p. 418.
[90] Winn to Dawson, 4 October 1938, MS Dawson 80.
[91] Dawson to Winn, 5 October 1938, MS Dawson 80.

> incorporation of Austria in the Reich. ... These crows are coming home to roost.[92]

Nevertheless, *The Times* reacted to news of the German invasion of Austria unusually sharply. Although for a long time it had considered the *Anschluss* inevitable, it expressed deep shock on 12 March 1938 over the brutal method used by the Germans.[93] *The Times* now worried over the *Anschluss*, because it was concerned that it had inflicted heavy damage to German-British relations, at a time when progress toward real 'friendship' had been made: 'What is so deeply resented here [was] by applying to it the physical strength of the bully, and in so doing to arrest other hopeful movements towards a stable peace.'[94] As a consequence, Dawson recommended unreserved support for the latest British arms programme.[95] This was now a permanent topic in *The Times*, which frankly stated that 'the British Government will see first and foremost to their own armaments – that is clearly what matters most'.[96]

Whilst the overriding aim was now to increase the rearmament effort, the basic principle of appeasement was not forgotten. The *Anschluss* would 'no doubt increase the resources and strength of Germany. Great Britain is also engaged in increasing her strength. But it is perfectly appropriate that negotiations should be conducted from strength by both parties'.[97] Yet this did not mean that *The Times* advocated a direct response to the *Anschluss*. Its view was that Austria had never been capable of surviving in any circumstances: 'she was destined sooner or later to find herself in close association with the German Reich.'[98] When the initial excitement had died away, it

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[92] *Times* 17 February 1938, p. 17.
[93] See *Times* 12 March 1938, p. 13.
[94] *Times* 14 March 1938, p. 15; on *The Times'* attitude towards the *Anschluss*, see *History of the Times*, pp. 915-7; Wrench, *Dawson*, pp. 368-70; Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 149-53; Woods and Bishop, *Story*, pp. 303-5.
[95] See *Times*, 14 March 1938, p. 15; see Huttner, *Britische Presse*, pp. 177-8.
[96] *Times*, 14 March 1938, p. 15, also 15 March 1938, p. 15.
[97] *Ibid.*, 11 April 1938, p. 13.
[98] *Ibid.*, 14 March 1938, p. 15, and see 16 March 1938, p. 15.

showed its readiness to go back to its earlier agenda: 'Why then should Europe ... be stirred to resentment over an act of union in line with the course of history, and ratified, as it seems, with a fever of popular gratitude?'[99]

A.L. Kennedy, now *The Times* chief leader writer, who was in Prague when the *Anschluss* took place, wrote an analysis of Nazi foreign policy at this time. His analysis, which he sent to Dawson, partly reflected *The Times*' policy over the coming months. He assumed that Britain was strong enough to fight her: 'The only question therefore for us, as I see it, is this – at what point are we going to cry 'halt'? Is Czecho-Slovakia good ground on which to make our stand? ... They [the Sudetendeutsche] are certainly one of the best treated minorities in Europe, now'. These doubts about the Sudetendeutsche prevailed through the summer until their fate was finally decided at Munich. But he also argued that Germany's ultimate aim was 'to challenge the British Empire'.[100] Dawson clearly agreed with Kennedy that the Sudeten Germans were a well-treated minority. But he certainly had doubts about British military strength, hence his frequent calls for increased armaments. It also seems very unlikely that Dawson accepted Kennedy's assumption that Germany ultimately wanted to fight the British Empire. If he had subscribed to this view, surely he would have advocated stronger action over Austria or Czechoslovakia, before Hitler drew strength and confidence from his invasion and became a more formidable threat to the Empire.

The Times now shifted between an understanding of the rightfulness of some German grievances, and the problem that would evolve for the Czechoslovakian government in dealing with their complaints. The longer it took, the more the newspaper grew anxious that the Czechoslovakian problem prevented the possibility of

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[99] *Ibid.*, 15 March 1938, p. 15; Kieser, *Englands Appeasementpolitik*, pp. 86-7.
[100] Kennedy to Dawson, 18 March 1938, TTA, GGD/1; also quoted in *Kennedy Journal*, p. 263.

an Anglo-German settlement.[101] The turning-point seemed to have been around the so-called 'May crisis'. Earlier, *The Times* supported the idea that Czechs and Sudeten Germans should solve their problems alone.[102] Then on 16 May, its opinion changed. *The Times* argued that the Czechs should concede most of the demands of the group around Henlein, in order to maintain the peace: 'The best chance of a friendly settlement is that the maximum of concessions – and concessions there must be – should be offered now and not in ineffective instalments.'[103] The newspaper now asked for a stronger role on the part of the British government in helping to settle the Czechoslovakian problem, even if this meant increased pressure on the Czechoslovakian government.[104] Already the paper's policy towards Czechoslovakia was beginning to take shape. On 30 May 1938 the paper argued that

> The Governments which refuse even to entertain proposals of peaceful change must therefore take their full share of the responsibility if, by popular vote or otherwise, some change is shown to be desired by a majority of the population.[105]

This indicated a clear step towards secession, although not expressed quite as strongly as it was to be in its notorious editorial of 7 September. In other words, *The Times* stance on the Sudeten problem was established well before the Czechoslovakian crisis really developed: it was not a policy adopted quickly in response to the events of September. Its editorials during the crisis expressed long-considered editorial views, and were not an effect of government 'guidance' or 'pressure'.

By June *The Times* had modified its opinion again. It now held that the Sudeten Germans should be permitted to chose their future freely, according to the principle of national self-determination. Although the Sudeten areas and their well-treated people

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[101] See Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 173-4.
[102] *Times* 20 April 1938, p. 17.
[103] *Ibid.*, 16 May 1938, p. 15.
[104] See *Ibid.*, 23 May 1938, p. 15.
[105] *Ibid.*, 30 May 1938, p. 15.

had for centuries been part of Bohemia and not of Germany, it would be better in the long term for Czechoslovakia to grant autonomy to the ethnic minority. From the Czechoslovakian point of view this was not the most favourable solution, but through the separation of Bohemia they could

> in the long run be the gainers in having a homogenous and contented people still more numerous than the population of Belgium or Holland, and twice as numerous as those of Denmark or Switzerland ... It would be a drastic remedy for the present unrest, but something drastic may be needed.[106]

To this suggestion of Sudeten autonomy the Foreign Office reacted with a prompt denial that it expressed government policy: the paper was plainly taking an independent line, in advance of ministerial views.[107] It is in fact probable that the article was inspired by a letter to *The Times* the day before from the Dean of St. Paul's, William Matthews. He wanted to see the Sudeten question solved in a radical way: 'I suppose that the British Empire has now adopted the view that it is both wrong and unwise to coerce a people into remaining within a State system against their will.'[108]

In official German circles this proposal in *The Times* was seen as corresponding to 'Chamberlain's trains of thought'. Hesse, the press attaché at the German Embassy, claimed that it was well-known that *The Times* was being used 'for such official *ballon d'essai*', and would not act against the opinions and intentions of Chamberlain on foreign policy questions.[109] Within *The Times*, John Walter IV, co-chief-proprietor felt the need to protest against the idea:

> I feel that our leader on Czechoslovakia yesterday must have come as a shock to many readers of *The Times*, advocating as it did the cause of the Wolf against the Lamb, on the ground of justice. ... In contemplating the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia as a measure of justice to the Sudeten Germans, our leader writer made no allusion to the flood of injustice and cruelty that would certainly

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[106] *Ibid.*, 3 June 1938, p. 15.
[107] See Huttner, *Britische Presse*, pp. 178-9; see *DBFP*, III, vol. 1, no.374.
[108] *Times*, 2 June 1938, p. 15.
[109] See Hesse memo, 'On probable genesis of the oft-quoted article in *The Times* of June 3rd', *DGFP*, vol. II, Series D, p. 399; see also Kieser, *Englands Appeasementpolitik*, p. 95.

> overwhelm the minorities thus handed over to the tender mercies of Messrs Hitler, Goering and Goebbels.[110]

Walter, however, could do little more than register his criticism, since the newspaper's policy was in the editor's hands, and the paper seemed to believe that the fate of minority populations should not be allowed to drag Europe into a new war. Within the pages of *The Times*, the handling of the Sudeten issue was no longer open to debate. The issue was whether the Sudeten Germans should be forced to remain part of a country within which they were being held by the unjust terms of the Versailles Treaty. *The Times* urged all governments involved to make the necessary sacrifice to preserve the peace in Europe:

> It would really be the bankruptcy of European statesmanship if this question of the future of something over 3,000,000 German Czech subjects were allowed to plunge a continent into devastating war. ... What remains to be done is to rectify the error of 1919, and to allow the Sudeten Germans peacefully to express their own views as to their future.[111]

Again Dawson had been in advance of government policy. In mid-June Kennedy reported that Halifax 'regards our advocacy of a plebiscite as being at least rather premature & embarrassing the negotiations between Benesh and the Sudetens'. Nevertheless, Halifax 'indicates that he may come to supporting the idea of a plebiscite himself; but asks us to go slow'. This in turn showed the Germans, who were beginning to think that the British government was on the Czech side through its preferred support for a 'solution maintaining the present boundaries' that their position was in fact more flexible than had hitherto been assumed.[112]

Although no definite solution had been proposed, the underlying idea was repeated in mid-July: 'The wishes of the nationalities themselves ought to be the

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[110] John Walter to Dawson, 4 June 1938, TTA, Dawson papers GGD/1.
[111] *Times,* 14 June 1938, p. 17.
[112] *Kennedy Journal*, p. 274 (17 June 1938).

determining factor, and no solution should be considered too drastic which is desired by an overwhelming majority.'[113] In August, with tension growing, the paper stated that Britain could not stay out of a possible conflict, but urged the essential wisdom of revision.[114] The leader now clearly prepared the ground for secession, but chose to call the process 'autonomy': 'to reject claims for autonomy merely as incompatible with the security of the State may itself be an impairment of that security.'[115]

The Times editorial of 7 September 1938 secured it a prominent place in the prehistory of the Munich conference. At the time of publication the Czechoslovakian president Benes, aware of the pressure of the British mediation efforts and faced with the threat of war, agreed to concessions which the Sudeten German minority had already demanded in their 'Karlsbad demands' on 24 April 1938.[116] In this context *The Times* introduced a suggestion which exceeded anything the leaders of the Sudeten German minority had dared to require officially from Czechoslovakia.[117] The paper expressed scepticism about the feasibility of the plan of a 'Kantonalisierung' of Czechoslovakia, which was about to be negotiated in Prague, and speculated:

> whether they should exclude altogether the project, which has found favour in some quarters, of making Czechoslovakia a more homogenous state or the secession of that fringe of alien populations who are contiguous to the nation with which they are united by race. In any case the wishes of the populations concerned would seem to be a decisively important element in any solution that can hope to be regarded as permanent, and the advantages to Czechoslovakia of becoming a homogenous state might conceivably outweigh the obvious disadvantage of losing the Sudeten German districts of the borderland.[118]

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[113] *Times*, 15 July 1938, p. 17.
[114] See *Ibid.*, 29 August 1938, p. 13.
[115] *Ibid.*, 31 August 1938, p. 11.
[116] See Helmuth Rönnefarth, *Die Sudetenkrise in der internationalen Politik. Enstehung, Verlauf, Auswirkung*, vol. I (Wiesbaden, 1961), pp. 478-90; Keith Robbins, *Munich 1938* (London, 1968), pp. 218-9.
[117] Huttner, *Britische Press*, pp. 179-80.
[118] *Times*, 7 September 1938, p. 13.

The dramatic proposal, which pressed forward the transfer of the Sudeten Germans of the border areas to Germany, had been completed during the evening of 6 September 1938.[119] Dawson's diary reads:

> an extremely arduous afternoon & evening – Leo Kennedy was there rather reluctantly prepared to write on the Czech crisis wh[ich] was obviously coming to a head & and produced an article wh[ich] I had to get him to re-write at the last minute. Even so it ventilated rather crudely the idea which we have often [made] before, of a secession of the Sudeten fringe in Germany & there was a lot of hurried revision to be done at midnight.[120]

But however well informed Kennedy and Dawson now were on Halifax's and Chamberlain's views, the article nevertheless expressed their own long developed line of argument. What caused most excitement was not the suggestion of a plebiscite to hand over the Sudetendeutsche areas to Germany: only a year previously the Saarland had been handed over to Germany after one such peaceful plebiscite.[121] The most striking part of the piece was the reference to anonymous political circles ('which has found favour in some quarters'), which led to speculation that the article had been inspired by the government.[122] The Foreign Office now had to deny for the second time that summer any connection with *The Times*' point of view. After the intervention of the Czechoslovak envoy, the British government stated by official communiqué that *The Times*' suggestion was not representative of their foreign policy.[123] Critics of the newspaper thus had good reasons for reproaching *The Times*, claiming it had sent a signal of Britain's readiness to make concessions to the German dictator.

Despite the Foreign Office denial, it is clear that Dawson and Kennedy were well aware that their proposal was acceptable to Halifax and Chamberlain. Halifax led

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[119] See *History*, pp. 929-934; McLachlan, *Chair*, pp. 146-150, and *Harold Nicolson. Diaries and Letters 1930-1939*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London, 1966), pp. 358-9 (9 September 1938).
[120] Dawson diary, 6 September 1938, MS Dawson 42; also Dawson to Barrington-Ward, 7 September 1938, MS Dawson 79.
[121] McLachlan, *Chair*, p. 150.
[122] See Woods and Bishop, *Story*, p. 311; also Kehoe, 'British Press', p. 212.
[123] *DBFP*, III, vol. 2, p. 271, fn 1.

Dawson to understand that, in his opinion, during the talks in Prague all possibilities had to be considered of a peaceful solution of the problem, even if they included the separation of the Sudeten areas of Czechoslovakia.[124] This points to the fact that *The Times* editorial was not far removed from the 'inner Cabinet' thinking,[125] something well understood in the German embassy, where Kordt wrote that whilst '*The Times* article was certainly not inspired by the Foreign Office. The possibility exists … that it derives from the Prime Minister's entourage'.[126]

Nevertheless, it is clear that *The Times* independently expressed a view which happened to coincide with the Cabinet line.[127] Halifax's statement to Dawson came after the publication of the editorial, and so is not evidence of government pressure or *Times* deference to the government. Indirectly, this is admitted by Cockett, who stated that 'whether Halifax actually invited Dawson to make the suggestion in his article can never be known, but it is evident that Dawson had correctly interpreted the minds of Halifax and Chamberlain'.[128]

Since so much historical attention has been paid to the issue it should be asked just how important was the leader of 7 September 1938. Undoubtedly, the article made progress on the part of the Runciman mission very unlikely, but had it any deeper political significance? Seymour-Ure saw its importance as lying 'in the widespread assumption that it foreshadowed the British view'.[129] This being so, the issue of whether the article was actually inspired by anyone in the government or not is ultimately of

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[124] Cf. Barrington-Ward's notes on 9 September 1938, printed in McLachlan, *Chair*, p. 148. Liddell Hart says Dawson felt sure that Halifax was 'privately in agreement, even though [he] was expressing the opposite view to the representatives of the other countries concerned': *Memoirs of Liddell Hart*, vol.II, p. 160, and see Huttner, *Britische Presse*, p. 181.

[125] See Seymour-Ure, *Impact*, p. 81.

[126] Kordt to German Foreign Ministry, telegram no. 406, 8 September 1938, *DGFP*, II/D, p. 723. Later he added that 'it was very probably the office of the Prime Minister at Number 10 Downing Street, which, if it did not actually approve that publication, nevertheless permitted it': Kordt to German Foreign Ministry, 3 October 1938, *DGFP*, II/D, p. 292.

[127] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 73.

[128] See Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 73; see Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 181-2, for denial of government influence.

[129] Seymour-Ure, *Impact*, p. 80.

little importance.[130] *The Times* at that time was already regarded as so closely involved in the inner circles of the British government that it did not really matter if it actually 'announced' the government's policy or only hinted at its future course. This was the result of being the British 'establishment' paper. In fact the article was not expressed as explicitly as Dawson had wished: 'It was not worded *quite* as I should have done if I had rather more time to revise it'.[131] Nevertheless, it was not a recommendation of secession, but a suggestion 'that it should not be excluded as a solution if all others failed'.[132]

It should also be reiterated that *The Times* had published versions of this idea earlier. Nor was the idea exclusive to itself. It had already been made by the left-wing journal, *The New Statesman*: 'the question of frontier revision, difficult though it is, should at once be tackled. The strategical value of the Bohemian frontier should not be made the occasion of a world war. We should not guarantee the status quo.'[133] The fact that similar editorial views existed on opposing sides of the political spectrum shows how widespread the desire was to solve the Sudeten crisis.[134]

Kennedy later found time to reconsider the genesis of the article. He gave the same explanation as Dawson: that the policy of secession had developed in the minds of the responsible people at *The Times* since at least May 1938. And he stressed that 'It was incidentally this suggestion of ours that evoked a private letter from Lord Halifax to GD … in which he begged us not to pursue the proposal of a plebiscite, as they (the Brit.

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[130] On the source of the article McDonald, *Man*, p. 33, remembered: 'For myself I was not at all comforted by knowing that the article was entirely home made in PHS. Given the standing and great influence of *The Times* in those years … I knew the damage would be at least as great as if the article had been inspired directly by the Government. In many ways it would be greater. The article was a signal that Chamberlain had allies. *The Times* was not simply tagging along behind the Government.'

[131] Dawson to Astor, quoted in *History of The Times*, p. 935.

[132] Seymour-Ure, *Impact*, p. 82.

[133] *New Statesman and Nation*, 28 August 1938, quoted in Rose, *Cliveden*, p. 189.

[134] See Kingsley Martin, *Editor* (London, 1968), pp. 255-7.

Government) were trying another solution'.[135] Halifax in that letter did not rule it out as an 'ultimate solution'. When it became obvious that the Runciman mission would fail, the newspaper put forward the proposal of secession at the beginning of September. *The Times* was further encouraged to press forward with this solution since it knew Chamberlain's position: 'We also knew in a roundabout way that Neville Chamberlain was ready to consider secession. He had attended a luncheon given by Lady Astor to some American journalists in the summer, at which one of them had asked him whether he would consider that solution - & he had answered in the same common sense way as Lord Halifax, that he would not refuse to consider it'.[136] Kennedy, with this background information, thought it completely acceptable to propose the solution. If he had grounds for complaint they lay in Chamberlain's handling of the situation. Because the prime minister never openly stated the possibility of secession 'until Hitler faced him with it at Berchtesgaden. Then he accepted it at once. It looked like capitulation to a dictator'.[137]

When Chamberlain decided to start his personal diplomacy by visiting Hitler in Berchtesgaden, *The Times* supported him in the strongest terms. Its editorial of 15 September praised Chamberlain's decision to travel to Germany as proof of 'courage and common sense'.[138] However, it is difficult to chart the paper's policy in September 1938, because it fluctuated considerably as events unfolded. Initially it argued that 'it would be absolute madness for general war to break out over the question of some three and one-half million folk in the pleasant land of Bohemia'.[139] But of course the desire to avoid war did not rule out the possibility of conflict. Later, *The Times* criticized Czechoslovakian obstinacy and reminded the Benes government that it could not draw any advantage by holding the German population of the area against their will. In

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[135] *Kennedy Journal*, p. 278 (17 October 1938).
[136] *Ibid*, p. 279; see McDonald, *Man*, p. 30, and McDonald, *History*, p. 18.
[137] *Kennedy Journal,* p. 279 (17 October 1938).
[138] *Times,* 15 September 1938, p. 11.
[139] Ibid..

stating this, the paper was doing nothing more than continuing its long-standing advocacy of self-determination. It argued that Czechoslovakia had nothing to fear from the transfer of territory, since it would receive larger security by an international warranty of its new boundaries.[140]

Meanwhile, events in international relations unfolded very quickly, and parts of the British press became more critical.[141] *The Times* defended Chamberlain against accusations that he had given in to Hitler, because Great Britain was not in a position to protect Czechoslovakia, even in the case of a war. 'Would war save or spare Czechoslovakia? Would victory restore it as now composed and under its present constitution?'[142] If the argument of considerable government influence, even control, over 'the press' were to have real validity, at this time of maximum government effort newspaper support – especially that of *The Times* – could have been taken for granted. Yet Chamberlain was relieved to find that *The Times* would support his mission.[143] This was not a prime minister confident even of the chief 'establishment' newspaper.

The Times argued that Chamberlain's readiness to negotiate Sudeten cession was 'certainly not betrayal. He has made a surrender, not to Herr Hitler but to justice – and that is not dishonourable... Justice does not become injustice because a dictator demands it.'[144] In the last week of September 1938, however, *The Times* began to pursue a harder line towards Germany, and in doing so contributed to a state of opinion which made it more difficult for Chamberlain to reach agreement in negotiations with Germany.[145] An editorial of 27 September condemned Hitler for aggravating the crisis. The article also

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[140] See *Times,* 20 September 1938, p. 13.
[141] See *Harvey diaries*, p. 191 (21 September 1938).
[142] *Times,* 21September 1938, p. 11.
[143] See Dawson diary, 22 September 1938, MS Dawson 42.
[144] *Times,* 22 September 1938, p. 11.
[145] See *Ibid.*, 26 September 1938, p. 13.

questioned whether his attitude did not point to a wider interest in Eastern Europe rather than a specific interest in the Sudeten Germans:

> What are the ultimate intentions of the Nazi regime …? Are they determined to get a stranglehold? Are they seeking to murder a nation because it is in the way? And then to stride on, reaching forward to the rich prizes of the Danubian and the Balkan granaries? That is the question mark which looms so large behind the immediate issue.[146]

The Times not only indicated its own reservations. An aspect ignored in most critical studies of the newspaper is that it was a forum for airing alternative views, including criticism of government policy and the paper's own editorial views. *The Times*' correspondence columns remained open even to leading anti-appeasers. This had been the case during the peak of the Austrian crisis,[147] and it remained so even to a point when the German government officially noted the 'malicious letters' that appeared in *The Times*.[148] During the Sudeten crisis, even after Hoare had in late September started to speak with newspaper editors in order to try to moderate published criticisms, a stream of critical letters continued to be published. For example, letters from Eden and Amery – leading Conservative anti-appeaser – were printed.[149] Moreover, speeches and other public statements from opposition politicians like Attlee and Sinclair continued to appear in the newspaper throughout the crisis, as did reports of the Labour Party Conference. As a newspaper 'of record', *The Times* was expected to do nothing less: it was not at all suppressing views hostile to the government.

In the days following the Munich agreement *The Times* defended Chamberlain unreservedly. It stressed that there was so little real difference of opinion between the Germans and the British and French governments that a war over Czechoslovakia

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[146] *Ibid.*, 27 September 1938, p. 13; see Kehoe, 'British Press', pp. 217-8.
[147] See *History of The Times*, p. 916.
[148] See Dirksen memo, 10 June 1938, Auswärtige Amt, Political Archive, R.1022778.Pol.II 1875.
[149] *Times*, 12 September and 26 September 1938, p. 13; and see Anthony Eden, *The Reckoning* (London, 1965), p. 23 and *The Empire at Bay. The Leo Amery Diaries, 1929-1945*, ed. John Barnes and David Nicolson (London, 1988), pp. 485, 516: hereafter *Amery Diaries*.

would be considered as 'criminal'.[150] The Munich agreement was regarded by the paper as a 'hopeful' agreement, and Chamberlain was credited with proposing all of the peace-keeping measures.[151] *The Times* emphasized that 'justice has been the victor at Munich', and attacked critics of the agreement for advocating a policy which would have driven Great Britain into a war, without themselves offering alternatives to Chamberlain's actions.[152] 'The lessons of the crisis are plain and urgent. The policy of international appeasement must of course be pressed forward, working through the peoples, who have shown that they desire it'.[153] Privately, writing to his friend Brand, Dawson agreed about the barbarity of the Nazis – but added that it was 'very largely the creation of ourselves and the French in the past'.[154] Here, once again, the Versailles 'guilt complex' was the guiding principle of the editor.

Nevertheless, there was a discernible toughening of the paper's stance – one more in line with Halifax's doubts about German intentions than Chamberlain's confidence in 'peace in our time'. In the midst of the parliamentary debates on Munich, it emphasised that the agreement had bought the necessary time that Britain needed to close the armament gap that existed between itself and Germany. 'On the most pessimistic estimates on the future, we have gained a respite in which to make up a backwardness in armament that is now recognized even by those who most bitterly opposed all attempts to put it right.'[155] When it argued in mid-October for the need to combine 'the strengthening of our defences with an active cultivation of the tender shoots of the policy of appeasement', the order of priorities was telling.[156] It needed an intense situation to 'awaken the people of England to the dangers of their vulnerable

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[150] See *Times,* 30 September 1938, p. 13.
[151] See *Ibid.,* 1 October 1938, p. 13.
[152] See *Ibid.,* 4 October.1938, p. 15.
[153] *Ibid.,* 3 October 1938, p. 11.
[154] Dawson to Brand, 2 October 1938, TTA, GGD/1.
[155] *Times,* 5 October 1938, p. 15.
[156] *Ibid.*, 18 October 1938, p. 15.

state', [157] but they had now accepted that 'British rearmament is the key to disarmament'.[158] Over the coming months suspicion over German intentions began to grow in the *Times* office as Hitler's behaviour made it clear that his strategy was to follow 'agreements' with new demands. These doubts were also increased by the pogrom of 9 November 1938, the so-called 'Kristallnacht'. This more sceptical point of view became public on 30 January 1939, the anniversary of Hitler's accession to power. Barrington-Ward wrote that by continuing to emphasise and demand redress for German grievances, Hitler was going too far. The paper now believed that further claims were not justified: they were not 'inexhaustible assets and they have been swallowed up in the incorporation of Austria and the Sudetenland in the territory of the Reich'.[159]

After Munich, *The Times* soon abandoned any idea that Czechoslovakia could remain truly independent. It is therefore surprising that *The Times* reacted with such alarm when German forces invaded Prague on 15 March and proclaimed the 'protectorate of Bohemia and Maehren'. As the paper now saw, by this step the worst British fears had been realised: with the forceful incorporation of non-German citizens into the German Reich Hitler revealed his true goal to be the conquest of Eastern Europe, not the establishment of a homogeneous state. *The Times* turned from its tolerant view of German requests with the statement: 'Germany has failed to honour the agreement'.[160]

The Times now accepted that German supremacy over Eastern Europe was probably unavoidable. But it concluded that Western Europe should now concentrate on its own defence: 'They on their own part can only continue with increased energy to

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[157] *Ibid.*, 21 October 1938, p. 15.
[158] *Ibid.*, 17 October 1938, p. 15.
[159] *Ibid.*, 31 January 1939, p. 13; see Gannon, *British Press*, p. 229.
[160] *Ibid.*, 15 March 1939, p. 15.

look to their own security'.[161] For *The Times* appeasement was now a dead policy, but it nevertheless argued that it had been the right policy to follow until Germany's true intentions had become clear.[162] 'The invasion, occupation, and annexation of Bohemia-Moravia are notice to the world that German policy no longer seeks the protection of a moral case.'[163] The most recent Nazi act of aggression was now clearly regarded as not being in line with the principle of self-determination. The purpose was only too clear, and was 'more and more revealed as sheer aggrandisement – the brutal domination of other countries for the sole purpose of increasing the power of the Reich'.[164]

The newspaper now urged close cooperation among the Western powers, because there was an obvious fear: 'Is the recent invasion the last of a series we know or the first of a new series?'[165] In the eyes of *The Times* the need for friendship with France had never been greater since 1919. As a consequence of the stiff British response to the Prague occupation, rumours began to spread in Berlin about the old claim of 'encirclement'. This time, however, *The Times* remained strong in its argument and presented any 'encirclement' as a consequence of German foreign policy, which had made it 'a natural and even an inevitable process'.[166] *The Times* was no longer prepared to justify German acts by reference to its old grievances, as it had done earlier.[167]

The occupation of Prague changed the paper's policy completely: its support for the policy of appeasement stopped. The change in the *Times*'s stance did not occur because Chamberlain ceased to seek its support. The means of government influence, such as they were, remained in place. What had changed was the paper's assessment of German intentions and the appropriate British response. Where before it had supported

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[161] *Ibid.*
[162] *Ibid.*, 18 March 1939, p. 13.
[163] *Ibid.*, 16 March 1939, p. 17.
[164] *Ibid.*, 17 March 1939, p. 17.
[165] *Ibid.*, 18 March 1939, p. 13.
[166] *Ibid.*, 20 March 1939, p. 15.
[167] See *Ibid.*; see Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 237-8.

appeasement, now it turned instead to advocating an alliance of the democracies against German aggression. In neither case were its views 'controlled' by the government.

Nevertheless, on 31 March 1939, when Chamberlain surprisingly told the House of Commons that the British government had decided to guarantee the independence of Poland, *The Times* published an editorial which was generally felt to qualify the guarantee.[168] It introduced a distinction between Polish 'independence' and its territorial 'integrity', in a way which seemed to weaken the guarantee pledge to defend the Polish frontier automatically; instead, the decision to go to war would remain with the British government. Foster argues that this limitation of Chamberlain's speech in parts of the press (*Evening Standard* and Reuters also qualified the guarantee) 'suggested a guiding hand at work'.[169] The leader received strong criticism in the House of Commons debate,[170] and Simon had to give an assurance that

> no one, either at the Foreign Office or on behalf of the government authorised Reuters or The Times to minimise the effect of the Prime Minister's statement on Friday. I am given this specific sentence which I repeat, as I have it before me: 'These comments were made on the responsibility of the agency and the newspaper concerned.'[171]

Dawson noted 'a good deal of to-do about Saturday's leader which was suspected (quite wrongly) of watering down the British declaration … it also ran the gauntlet in the House of Commons where there was a big debate in the afternoon and an admirable speech from the Prime Minister'.[172] This was also Kennedy's impression: 'Possibly GD and I between us put a shade too much stress on the limitations of the guarantee, and too

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[168] *Ibid.*, 1 April 1939, p. 15. See Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 263-5; Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 108-10.
[169] Foster, 'Unequivocal', p. 36.
[170] See *HcDeb* 345, cols. 2501, 2513 (3 April 1939). For the debate see Foster, 'Unequivocal', pp. 39-41.
[171] *HcDeb* 345, col. 2583.
[172] Dawson diary, 3 April 1939, Mss Dawson 43.

little on its implications.'[173] The reception of the article, therefore, did not reflect the intention of the authors, who were both unhappy with the general interpretation. Even so, Dawson's logic is hard to believe, because he knew that the newspaper's interpretation conformed to the government's ideas.[174] Dawson knew that the leader originated from a meeting between Kennedy and Cadogan, permanent secretary at the Foreign Office, where the latter 'gave him the low-down'.[175] Dawson himself had been seen in the House of Commons on the evening of 31 March.[176] Chamberlain was content with the *Times* interpretation, noting in his diary that he 'stressed the important point perceived alone by *The Times* ... it is we who will judge whether their independence is threatened or not'.[177]

It seems very likely, then, that there was some degree of government influence on the article.[178] Yet the circumstances raise the question: why was the exercise of influence so selective? Why was it confined to so few media outlets? Chamberlain could only approach those newspapers which he thought likely to support his own views. Now, however, it seemed that only *The Times* and the *Evening Standard* could be depended upon. Other newspapers, even the former 'loyal' *Daily Telegraph*, were no longer reliable, so limited had government influence become.

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Dawson's actions as editor – his argument with Northcliffe, his fight for editorial independence and his long-standing conviction of the just German grievances – make

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[173] *Kennedy Journal*, p. 286 (4 April 1939). Dawson noted in his diary on 31 March: 'Leo K writing the leader after a great deal of discussion and diplomatic, parliamentary notes etc. all requiring a lot of revision (and excision)': MS Dawson 43.
[174] See McDonald, *History*, p. 22.
[175] *Cadogan diary*, p. 165 (30 March 1939).
[176] See Hugh Dalton, *The Fateful Years* (London, 1957), p. 244.
[177] Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 2 April 1939, NC18/1/1092; see also *Cadogan diary*, p. 167.
[178] See Foster, 'Unequivocal', p. 43.

the charges against him, that he subordinated *The Times* to government wishes, most unlikely. Dawson undoubtedly talked with and listened to leading ministers, but, as McDonald wrote: 'he went to them disposed to agree.'[179] Such a stance was one of the features of being an establishment paper, whose editor was himself a part of the establishment. This, however, was crucially distinct from government 'inspiration' or 'manipulation' in the way the newspaper reported events.

Dawson came to support appeasement through his own conviction about what constituted a desirable British foreign policy, and he needed no 'pressure' or 'control' from the government to pursue his thinking in the paper. Margach, though very critical about what Dawson had done, admitted that he was 'a man who needed no persuasion for he was the patron saint of appeasement'.[180] It is difficult to find a stronger and more committed supporter of Chamberlain's policy than *The Times*. 'I shall always be an impenitent supporter of what is called the "Munich policy"', wrote Dawson in his last letter to Chamberlain before the latter died.[181] Dawson never changed his conviction that war with Germany at the time of the Munich crisis would have been a mistake.

> No one who sat in this place [The Times] as I did during the autumn of '38, with almost daily visitations from eminent Canadians and Australians, could fail to recognise that war with Germany at that time would have been misunderstood and resented from end to end of the Empire.[182]

As such, he supported Chamberlain's actions because they accorded with his own vision of how the country should respond to the European situation. The policy of *The Times* was not, then, shaped by the government, but moulded by an independent editor whose outlook, at a crucial time, was close to that of the prime minister. Rather than proving Cockett's argument of government control, the case of *The Times* shows that agreement

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[179] McDonald, *History*, p. 14.
[180] Margach, *Abuse*, p. 54.
[181] Dawson to Chamberlain, November 8, 1940, NC 13/18/830; see Wrench, *Dawson*, pp. 432-3.
[182] Ibid.; see McDonald, *Man*, p. 52.

could be reached between independent parties without the need for bringing direct influence to bear.

CHAPTER III

THE *DAILY TELEGRAPH*

By the late 1930s, the *Daily Telegraph* had long been regarded as loyal to the Conservative party, and therefore to the National Government. Cockett has claimed that by 1937, the paper had been 'used' by Chamberlain to support his policy of reconciliation with Germany;[1] yet in 1939 it became a champion of Churchill. What had changed, and what can we learn from the newspaper's case about government-press relations?

The *Daily Telegraph* was a significant Conservative newspaper, because its readership was predominantly from the upper and middle classes.[2] Throughout the 1930s it could claim to have the highest 'quality' circulation in the world,[3] reaching about 750,000 in 1939,[4] compared with less than a quarter of a million for *The Times*. Its importance among right-wing Conservatives increased in 1937 when it took over and amalgamated with the *Morning Post*, because in international relations the latter had the 'preservation and protection of Britain and the British Empire at heart'.[5]

The *Daily Telegraph* had a distinctive way of setting its political direction, different to that of other newspapers. *The Times* and *The Observer* had owners who allowed real control to lie with the editors. The *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* had weak editors, but strong, interventionist owners, who adopted their own political policies and were prepared to run the newspapers as personal propaganda instruments. The *Daily*

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[1] See Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 38.
[2] See Gannon, *British Press,* p. 44, and R.A.C. Parker, *Churchill and Appeasement* (London, 2000), p. 233.
[3] See Hartwell, *Camrose*, p. 171.
[4] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 44.
[5] Ibid., p. 49.

Telegraph stood somewhere between these two methods of control. When Camrose[6] took control of the *Daily Telegraph* in 1928, he became not just the principal owner but also the paper's final arbiter in editorial matters.[7] The editor, Arthur Watson, is described by Koss as being in accordance with 'the tradition of faceless editors', acting mainly as head of staff.[8] Camrose wanted to ensure that he was the only power behind editorial policy,[9] and that this policy was broadly in line with a Conservative outlook.[10] He made this clear to his staff when he set out his objectives for the newspaper's future. It should be Conservative yet detached, in contrast to Beaverbrook's and Rothermere's newspapers:

> Politically, The *Daily Telegraph* is in close sympathy with the policy of the Conservative Party … it has no official or financial connection with any Party… it does not hesitate to express an independent view when circumstances warrant it. Above all The *Daily Telegraph* will be a National Newspaper, serving its reader with candour and enterprise and approaching all political and social problems without personal bias.[11]

Yet – again in contrast to Beaverbrook and Rotheremere – Camrose had no ambition to be directly involved in politics. Rather, he exercised 'influence through friendship with leading politicians'.[12]

During the 1920s Camrose and his brother Gomer (later Lord Kemsley) were regarded as press allies by Conservative Central Office, which encouraged them to act as rivals to Rothermere and Beaverbrook, and assisted them to build up their national

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[6] William Berry, first Viscount Camrose (1879-1954); author of *British Newspapers and Their Controllers* (London, 1947), a useful survey of British national newspapers.
[7] See Royal Commission on the Press, *Minutes of Evidence*, qq. 7667, 7669, 7708 and Royal Commission on the Press, *Report*, p.45; Hart-Davis, *House,* p. 61.
[8] Koss, *Rise and Fall*, vol.ii, p. 464; Lord Burnham, *Peterborough Court. The Story of the Daily Telegraph* (London, 1955), p. 178, called this a 'model of relations between a working proprietor and his editor'.
[9] See Harold Hobson, Phillip Knightley, and Leonard Russel, *The Pearl of Days. An Intimate Memoir of the Sunday Times, 1822-1972* (London 1972), p. 78; Burnham, *Peterborough Court*, p. 161.
[10] See Hart-Davis, *House*, p. 26.
[11] Quoted in Hartwell, *Camrose*, p. 166, and Burnham, *Peterborough Court*, p. 201.
[12] Hart-Davis, *House*, p. 26.

and regional press chains.[13] During the 'press lords' onslaught against Baldwin in early 1931, they had been prepared to help him by starting a new London evening newspaper.[14] Camrose had also been close to Chamberlain since the early 1930s, indeed he urged Chamberlain to make himself Conservative party leader if Baldwin were forced to resign.[15] All this indicates the extent to which the Berry brothers had a history of close contact with party leaders and organisers.[16] In return for their steady support, the brothers had received baronetcies and later the peerages of Camrose (1929) and Kemsley (1936). During the Abdication crisis Baldwin made full use of this political intimacy by giving Davidson the job of ensuring that 'the *Daily Telegraph* was completely informed of all developments'.[17]

Nevertheless, despite his connections with Chamberlain, according to Margach, during the late 1930s Camrose 'successfully resisted all blandishments' from the government.[18] Despite his general support for the Conservative party and the National government, he thought it important not to be too closely associated with its leaders. In Lord Hartwell's biography of his father, written with the advantage of access to his private papers, there are such comments as Camrose's advice to his staff to be 'particularly careful that we do not overdo the Conservative Association Meeting so as to be described as a Conservative party organ'.[19] Presumably this stance of semi-detachment was preserved largely for commercial reasons: to become too identified with the party, and with particular leaders, risked compromising the aims of reaching a broad readership and maximising sales. Arguably, a further reason was Camrose's

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[13] See Cockett, 'The party, publicity, and the media', pp. 554-5.
[14] *Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters. The Heir Apparent, 1928 – 33*, vol. iii, ed. Robert Self (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 223, 238; and see Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin. Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 80.
[15] See *Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters*, p. 238.
[16] Hart-Davis, *House*, p. 97; cf. Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 13, who claimed that Camrose 'seemed to have the least personal contact with members of Baldwin's or Chamberlain's governments'.
[17] Quoted in Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 567.
[18] Margach, *Abuse,* p. 53; see Gannon, *British Press*, p. 44.
[19] Hartwell, *Camrose*, pp. 167-8.

friendship with Churchill and sympathy with some of his concerns.[20] Most notably, they had long been agreed in wanting more vigorous rearmament: for example, Camrose assured Churchill in May 1935 that 'you can rely on us to do all we can in respect of air parity. You will doubtless have noticed we have kept up well with this subject in the *Daily Telegraph*'.[21] The effect was that the newspaper tended to oscillate between support for, and criticism of, Chamberlain's policies. Cockett admits that 'the *Daily Telegraph* was the only national paper with Conservative loyalties to treat Chamberlain and appeasement with a modicum of caution'.[22] It would be more accurate to say that although the newspaper gave Chamberlain support in general terms, it became increasingly critical of his policy towards Nazi Germany.[23]

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The closeness between the *Daily Telegraph* and Chamberlain was demonstrated by the episode of Halifax's visit to Germany in late 1937. As already noted, after the *Evening Standard* had revealed that the visit was being arranged, Chamberlain was able to turn the leak to the government's advantage by making the *Daily Telegraph* as well as *The Times* aware of the visit's true purpose.[24] According to Hartwell, this closeness meant that the paper continued 'to support Chamberlain's foreign policy' until the *Anschluss*.[25] Nevertheless, even in this period it should not be assumed that the *Telegraph* toed a Chamberlainite line in all matters. In December 1937, for example,

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[20] See Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 13.
[21] Hartwell, *Camrose*, p. 208, and Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, p. 649.
[22] Cockett, *Twilight,* p. 13. It may be noted that his statement contains a significant qualification, which tends to subvert his general argument. Its implication is that newspapers *without* 'Conservative loyalties' showed more than a 'modicum of caution', indeed were critical of appeasement – that is to say, any Chamberlain influence over the press did not reach very far.
[23] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 47; see also Kehoe, 'British Press', p. 21.
[24] See, p. 23, above.
[25] Hartwell, *Camrose*, p. 228.

Henderson complained strongly about the 'immense harm'[26] caused by its diplomatic correspondent, Victor Gordon-Lennox,[27] in an article which gave a disturbing outline of the German government's colonial demands.[28] Halifax urged Eden to use his influence with Gordon-Lennox to ensure that there would not be similar disturbing reports – but Eden refused to intervene.[29]

The *Telegraph* was surprised and shocked by Hitler's invasion of Austria. 'Never, indeed, has the mailed fist been wielded with such dramatic effect as by Germany between dawn and dusk yesterday.'[30] Unlike many other newspapers, it stressed that the invasion constituted 'ruthless aggression' against an independent state, and was not a 'family affair' among German peoples.[31] It is also significant that the paper proposed, at an early stage, that the British government should act with other powers to stop further German aggression. This was certainly not what the government wished; rather it was close to Churchill's vision of gathering like-minded nations in a 'Grand Alliance'.

What is particularly interesting is that in its leader of 14 March the *Telegraph* drew attention to a special attempt that 'has lately been directed to securing the docility of the British Press'. This, it understood, was a German government initiative: 'pressure has been brought upon the British Government to institute some form of press censorship – open or veiled – as an indispensable preliminary to successful Anglo-German conversations'.[32] The article suggested, however, that it was most unlikely that these proposals would be accepted by the British government, and reported that Chamberlain had denied any personal interest in them. The *Telegraph* was not alone in

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[26] Henderson to Halifax, 7 December 1937, Halifax Papers, A4.410.3.2.
[27] According to Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 18, one of Leeper's 'most privileged diplomatic correspondents'.
[28] See ibid., pp. 46-7.
[29] See Halifax to Henderson, 9 December 1937, Halifax Papers, A4.410.3.2, and Eden to Halifax, 10 December 1937, Halifax Papers, A4.410.3.2.; cf. *Harvey diary*, p. 102 (23 February 1938).
[30] *Daily Telegraph*, 12 March 1938, p. 14.
[31] See *ibid.*, 12 March 1938, p. 14.
[32] *Ibid.*, 14 March 1938, p. 12.

commenting on alleged attempts to apply pressure on newspapers. Other papers, from the opposition to the Conservative (*Observer*) side, picked up the rumours as well. Camrose, through his contacts with ministers, and more so through his experience over the Halifax visit of the previous November, was certainly aware of British and of increased German sensitivity towards press criticism, and government attempts to exercise influence: he had, after all, allowed Chamberlain to plant material in his paper to assist improved relations with Germany. Yet he and his editor were now clearly alert to – and prepared to publicise – what they considered to be improper forms of 'influence'. Camrose and the *Telegraph* remained inclined to support political moves towards Anglo-German reconciliation, but they were privately and publicly resistant to attempts to secure the 'docility' of the British press.

As the debate over a British guarantee for Czechoslovakia heated up, the *Daily Telegraph* expressed a position independent of that of the government. It demanded 'that Great Britain shall range herself forthwith alongside France and Soviet Russia and pledge her armed support to Czechoslovakia, should her independence be attacked by Germany'.[33] It suggested that there was now a parallel with the situation before 1914, and argued that a firm stand would prevent the outbreak of war. The *Telegraph*'s stance clearly reflected the growing trust that Camrose placed in Churchill, who was now writing signed articles for the paper every fortnight. This was not an obvious alliance, even aside from Churchill's record of being a Conservative maverick. When the two men had first met Camrose had been suspicious of Churchill's powerful character. However, after Churchill's contract with the *Evening Standard* was ended after the *Anschluss*, because of his outright hostility towards Nazi policy and implied criticism of the government attitude, he turned to the *Telegraph*.[34]

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[33] *Ibid.*, 18 March 1938, p. 16.
[34] See Chisholm and Davie, *Beaverbrook*, p. 349.

This in itself was significant: the most prominent anti-appeaser plainly did not consider the paper to be constricted by Chamberlainite influence. Camrose, although attracted by the prospect of such a newsworthy contributor, nevertheless had some doubts about the compatibility of Churchill's and his paper's stances: 'It is a little difficult for us to enter into a definite agreement for ... a series of articles on political subjects, having regard to the fact that our policies might well be at serious variance.'[35] Churchill started on a trial contract, but over the following months Camrose's reservations about him vanished in the light of the development of the international situation.

The employment of Churchill indicated the *Daily Telegraph*'s readiness to adopt an independent position. Churchill probably started his new writing duties at the most opportune time for voicing his criticisms, since the situation in Central Europe seemed to be deteriorating. A *Daily Telegraph* article argued that the 'very existence of the British people as a free community' was at risk. It added that 'there can be no more toleration for miscalculations or for half-measures. Whatever is not enough is as bad as nothing at all',[36] and urged the public to back the government if it was bold enough to introduce the necessary steps to check German aggression. In the same issue, Churchill pleaded for cooperation between as many powers as possible as the best means to stabilise Europe.[37]

Over subsequent months the *Daily Telegraph*'s outlook came increasingly in line with that of Churchill, and therefore more critical of the government's policy. Although after the May crisis it initially welcomed Chamberlain's attempts to avoid an outbreak of hostilities, it regretted that the government was not creating a Ministry of

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[35] Camrose to Churchill, 6 April 1938, in Martin Gilbert, *Winston Churchill, Companion*, Vol.V, Part 2 (London, 1979), p. 982.
[36] *Daily Telegraph*, 12 May 1938, p. 16.
[37] For a sample of Churchill's newspaper contributions in the 1930s, see Winston S. Churchill, *Step By Step 1936-1939* (London, 1939).

Supply to help accelerate rearmament and prepare for possible war mobilisation, as was demanded by an increasing number of politicians, including Churchill.[38] 'No step could be better calculated to appease the public mind and convince opinion, both at home and abroad, that the Government are in dead earnest'.[39] Another indication of the growing tone of criticism in the paper's pages was that it now also published signed articles by Robert Boothby, a firm Churchill supporter. In one piece he wrote that 'under the prevailing conditions of power politics, resolute and quick action is essential to success. Hesitancy and delay – conveying the impression of indecision and fear – are fatal', and concluded that an 'armed defensive alliance against aggression' was the most effective answer.[40] Churchill, in an article almost a week later, wrote in the same vein and now also argued for the introduction of national service, in other words, the beginning of military conscription.[41]

Nevertheless, the following two months saw the *Telegraph* itself undecided in its attitude. On the one hand it argued that the international situation looked bright, due to Chamberlain's appeasement policy.[42] On the other hand, it stated that such success as had been gained was due to British military power.[43] Its policy towards Hitler was wavering too, in so far as it had doubts about Hitler's non-involvement in the Sudeten German agitation.[44] In doing so it was not alone; the British government and even Churchill never suspected that Henlein, the Sudeten leader was really Hitler's puppet. Later, however, notwithstanding that it became evident that the whole tensions were in

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[38] *Daily Telegraph*, 24 May 1938, p. 16; see Gilbert, *Churchill*, v, p. 942.
[39] *Daily Telegraph*, 24 May 1938, p. 16; see also *ibid.*, 26 May 1938, p. 16.
[40] *Ibid.*, 31 May 1938, p. 16.
[41] *Ibid.*, 9 June 1938, p. 14.
[42] *Ibid.*, 27 July 1938, p. 14.
[43] *Ibid.*, 4 July 1938, p. 14.
[44] *Ibid.*, 2 August 1938, p. 8.

fact directed from Berlin, the paper, could still not hold Hitler directly responsible, though it was clear that he had 'the final and decisive word'.[45]

The next month was a difficult period for the editorial policies of the *Daily Telegraph*. It was torn between its resolution to support a harder line over German policy, while at the same time continuing to support the government on other policies and wanting to avoid a decisive break with Chamberlain, because it could not offer a suitable alternative as prime minister. The *Daily Telegraph* rejected *The Times*'s proposal of 7 September of secession of the Sudeten areas, because this would weaken Britain's position in the negotiations: '[n]o more sinister blow could have been struck at the chances of settlement'.[46] It printed in full the Foreign Office's repudiation of the proposal and declared that the Czechoslovakian government had offered all that the Sudeten could possibly want.[47] It also advised the British government not to be indifferent towards this part of the world, which meant pursuing instead a line close to that advocated by Churchill: to cooperate with other powers in applying diplomatic pressure. The *Daily Telegraph*'s weakness was that although it demanded government firmness towards Germany, it never argued outright that ministers should commit themselves to fight for Czechoslovakia.[48] The division or indecisiveness of editorial policy, either to support Chamberlain, or to break with him and follow Churchill, was exemplified in mid-September. Now the arguments of Churchill – for a firm stand from Great Britain and a joint British, French and Russian note of warning to Hitler personally – and the policies of Chamberlain, who gave a positive outlook of his meeting with Hitler, virtually confronted each other.[49] At this crucial point it seems that

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[45] *Ibid.*, 30 August 1938, p. 12; see *ibid.*, 29 August 1938, p. 8. See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 191.
[46] *Daily Telegraph*, 8 September 1938, p. 12.
[47] *Ibid.*, 9 September 1938, p. 12.
[48] See *Ibid.*, 10 September 1938, p. 12.
[49] *Ibid.*, 15 September 1938, pp. 12 (Churchill), 13 (Chamberlain); see Parker, *Churchill*, p. 175.

the *Telegraph* itself could not advocate a clearly defined point of view, and so left it for the readers to make up their own minds.

Nevertheless, Chamberlain's decision to meet Hitler personally was considered by the *Telegraph* to be a courageous departure from diplomatic precedents. But it did so because it considered this to be the ultimate means for conveying to Hitler the firm resolution of the British government.[50] The question of plebiscites was not discussed. However, when it became obvious first that the Chamberlain–Hitler meeting had not replaced provocative utterances with more sober judgement, and that Nazi propaganda against Czechoslovakia had increased, the paper became critical of the Berchtesgaden meeting.[51] As Cockett states, 'owing to Camrose's doubts and Gordon-Lennox's convictions, [the *Daily Telegraph*] now became openly critical of the government's stance'.[52] By the time Chamberlain met Hitler for the second time at Godesberg, the *Telegraph's* position was hardening against Hitler's new demands. It questioned Hitler's sincerity, and asked whether he was really interested in a constructive solution,[53] and was shocked when the Godesberg demands became public. 'What would be left', it stated, 'would be militarily undefendable, economically broken and politically subjugated completely to German domination in all aspects of policy'.[54] If the *Daily Telegraph* had found the original Anglo-French proposals offered at Berchtesgaden difficult to accept, the Godesberg proposals proved impossible.[55] They were 'not the basis of negotiation for a peaceful settlement, but a dictation to an enemy beaten in the field'.[56] On the day the new terms were discussed in Cabinet, the *Telegraph* printed a list of Hitler's broken promises to date. In the next two days the

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[50] *Daily Telegraph*, 16 September 1938, p. 14.
[51] *Ibid.*, 19 September 1938, p. 10; see Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 77-8.
[52] Ibid., p. 77.
[53] *Daily Telegraph*, 23 September 1938, p. 14.
[54] *Ibid.*, 26 September 1938, p. 11.
[55] On this episode see Gannon, *British Press*, p. 195 and Kehoe, 'British Press', p. 223.
[56] *Daily Telegraph*, 26 September 1938, p. 10.

newspaper cautioned its readers that Hitler could not be believed when he claimed that the Sudetenland was his last territorial demand, because his behaviour demonstrated that he really wanted to eliminate Czechoslovakia as the last block to his expansion into Eastern Europe.[57] Clearly, Camrose was now potentially in an awkward position, since the *Daily Telegraph* had so far praised Chamberlain's handling of the crisis and supported his efforts to keep the peace.[58]

It was not until late September that any overt government attempt was made to influence the paper's direction. At a time when the British press attitude towards Germany was becoming increasingly hostile, leading ministers stepped up their efforts to tone down the criticism. Hoare tried hard to get the *Telegraph* back on a pro-appeasement course – itself proof of the *Telegraph*'s independence. Critically, at this point, Camrose was absent and had left his son Seymour Berry in charge of the paper.[59] Hoare asked Berry not to criticise Chamberlain's attempts to reach an Anglo-German settlement.[60] The outcome of this talk leaves much room for speculation. There is evidence that the *Telegraph* did momentarily soften its tone. Did it do so because of Hoare's intervention?

According to Gannon, Seymour Berry and J.C. Johnstone, the leader writer, who had written a critical draft on the Munich talks, were determined to ignore Hoare and go ahead with the paper's critical stance. At this point Gordon-Lennox intervened. He had hitherto the strongest reservations about Chamberlain's policy; but he was also the paper's most experienced commentator on international affairs. He urged Berry not to jeopardise the outcome of the Munich meeting by premature condemnation, which might contribute to an excessive public reaction. His view prevailed and the leader

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[57] *Ibid.*, 27 September 1938, p.14; see also 28 September 1938, p.12: 'Menace of World Domination'.
[58] *Ibid.*, 28 September 1938, p. 12.
[59] For the events see, Hartwell, *Camrose*, pp. 248-60. Although Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 78-81, places much emphasis on Hoare's success with press controllers, he does not examine the position of the *Telegraph*.
[60] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 45; see McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain*, pp. 120-1.

was softened.[61] In other words, the crucial element was not government pressure itself, but a sense within the *Telegraph* of national interest. Faced with the imminent prospect of war, even journalists critical of appeasement chose to moderate the public expression of their views.

In contrast to *The Times*, there was never any suggestion that the despatches of the *Daily Telegraph*'s foreign correspondents were toned down. McDonough stressed that the paper's Berlin correspondent, Arthur Mann,[62] never encountered any problems over publication of his critical articles about Nazi policies.[63] The only divergence of opinion on the *Telegraph* seemed to have been with its Vienna correspondent, Eric Gedye, who was expelled by the Nazis because of his critical coverage of the *Anschluss*.[64] Gedye's subsequent expulsion from the staff of the *Telegraph* was due not to his articles but to his book *Fallen Bastions* (1939).[65] Gedye promised to give his readers 'the uncensored truth' about Nazi policy and Chamberlain, and Watson at the *Telegraph* explained that he could not continue to work for the newspaper as a reporter and 'simultaneously give vent to extreme views on countries on which he was supposed to be writing factually'.[66] Yet it must have been the *degree* of Gedye's criticism, not his criticism of government attitudes as such, that the *Daily Telegraph* found intolerable, because its editors were well aware that another of its journalists was also publishing alternative views elsewhere.

While continuing to write for the *Telegraph*, Gordon-Lennox edited his own journal, the *Whitehall News Letter*. This had begun as a means of publishing observations on government policies which he knew the *Telegraph* would not print; the

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[61] See Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 44-5.
[62] This is not the editor of the *Yorkshire Post*.
[63] See McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain,* p. 120.
[64] See *Daily Telegraph*, 25 March 1938, p. 14; for the coverage see Hartwell, *Camrose*, p. 223.
[65] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 47.
[66] Hartwell, *Camrose*, p. 223.

newsletter was broadly 'Edenite'.[67] This was not because of any government pressure on the newspaper – we have seen that Camrose was resistant to such attempts to interfere with editorial policy – but because the paper itself had then been committed to support Chamberlain's line. Contrary to Cockett's assertion, the existence of the newsletter was not a consequence of the *Daily Telegraph*`s subordination to government pressure, but rather a response to its own preference for Chamberlain – and it remained sufficiently tolerant of other views to allow Gordon-Lennox to produce alternative commentaries in his own time.[68]

Even after Hoare's attempt during the Czechoslovakian crisis to influence its editorial policy, the *Daily Telegraph* continued to express reservations and doubts, though not yet to the point of turning against Chamberlain. It could not bring itself to advocate a war in defence of Czechoslovakia, but it was disappointed with the 'sacrifice' of the nation. The tone of criticism was plain:

> The danger against which Mr. Chamberlain must be vigilant is that of loosening what ought to be held fast. Already so much has been given away that there is little left to surrender if Czechoslovakia is to be left as a viable entity. All the hope and promise which the Munich conference holds out will be frustrated if such a 'settlement' is reached as results, a few months hence, in a revival of all the present trouble.[69]

After the Munich settlement had been signed, however, the *Telegraph* shared in the general relief at the avoidance of war. As it commented, '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 one of profound thankfulness'.[70] Nevertheless, the *Telegraph* continued to argue that a firm line towards Hitler, backed by the threat of force, could have – and would – halt Hitler's aggression. 'Great as is the debt we owe to

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[67] See Ronald Tree, *When the Moon was High. Memoirs of Peace and War, 1897-1942* (London, 1975), p. 75.
[68] See Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 101-3, 125.
[69] *Daily Telegraph*, 29 September 1938, p. 12.
[70] *Ibid.*, 1 October 1938, p.12; see Gannon, *British Press*, p. 197.

Mr Chamberlain', it stated on 3 October, 'it would be greater if he had stood out more forcefully' in aid of Czechoslovakia.[71]

In mid-October the *Telegraph* largely pushed all its concerns away, believing that it was now a dead issue and urged instead to strengthen British defences.[72] Now that the damage to the integrity of Czechoslovakia and to Britain's reputation had been done, Britain should step up rearmament to make the country safe in readiness for a possible attack. Articles critical of the slow Air Raid Precautions (ARP) pointed in the same direction.[73] It was now an open secret that the *Telegraph* was becoming a critic of the whole tendency of British foreign policy. Dawson of *The Times*, the *Telegraph*'s main Conservative rival, was told that it was 'so obvious ... that the *Daily Telegraph* is working to bring down Chamberlain and to put in Eden, Duff Cooper & Churchill' that one self-styled 'old reader ... dropped [it?] in favour of *The Times*'.[74] The government was also worried that a newspaper on whose support it could once rely was now becoming openly critical. As Koss stated: 'In terms of practical politics, the equivocations of the *Telegraph* were more damaging than abuse from predictable sources.'[75]

The newspaper's criticism after Hitler's invasion of Prague in March 1939 was, therefore, the logical consequence of what had now become the paper's established view. The *Telegraph* concluded that appeasement, finally, was no issue any longer: 'The "spirit of Munich" is dead and buried, for who can hope to "appease" a boa-

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[71] *Daily Telegraph*, 3 October 1938, p. 10; see Churchill in *Daily Telegraph*, 4 October 1938, p. 16. See Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 583.
[72] *Ibid.*, 15 October 1938, p. 14; see Kehoe, 'British Press', p. 239-40.
[73] *Daily Telegraph*, 10 and 11 October 1938, p. 12.
[74] Donald Macleod to Dawson, 17 October 1938, quoted in Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 583. The reader was an exception, because as Hartwell, *Camrose*, p. 262, states, the *Telegraph* received about 3000 letters of support against the normal 300, and most had been anti-government. But 'as far as humanly possible we have kept the scales even'.
[75] Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 583.

constrictor?'[76] According to the *Telegraph* the invasion of Prague had made 'a complete and utter mockery' of Munich.[77] Though the paper stated that the policy of appeasement had not been wrong, since it demonstrated Britain's belief in peace, the *Telegraph* called for the policy to be abandoned on the grounds that it was evident that Hitler would not honour any agreements and was out to conquer Eastern Europe.[78] The paper's stance reflected how far the situation had changed since Munich. In 1938 Hitler, using the slogan of 'self-determination', was able to proceed with his ambition, which the paper, to a certain degree, found it hard to resist. Now, however, under the slogan of 'self-preservation', it seemed that Hitler was free to advance in any direction without being likely to face strong opposition.[79] As a consequence, the *Telegraph* called for immediate action by the government, and even came close to suggesting a military alliance:

> Clearly what the situation demands is a policy which is at once closely concerted between the Powers, which formulates exactly the course to be followed in given circumstances, and which is capable of instant application. In default of such a policy Europe will just crumble piecemeal before the spreading Nazi attack.[80]

It is noteworthy how close this conception was to opinions that Churchill had held since the beginning of 1938. The *Telegraph* included Russia in its list of states which should be involved in the 'united resistance of Europe'.[81] Here again, the newspaper asked for a firm lead and no further delay. In March 1939 it became obvious to the paper that Hitler could not be stopped unless he was faced with a united front of all the major powers.[82] However, it did not single out Chamberlain specifically for criticism,

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[76] *Daily Telegraph*, 16 March 1939, p. 16.
[77] *Ibid.*, 16 March 1939, p. 16.
[78] *Ibid.*, 18 March 1939, p. 14; and see 15 March 1939, p. 16.
[79] *Ibid.*, 17 March 1939, p. 16.
[80] *Ibid.*, 20 March 1939, p. 12; see Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 240-1.
[81] *Daily Telegraph,* 20 March 1939, p. 12.
[82] *Ibid.*, 23 March 1939, p. 14.

but its editorial did 'regret the delay in signing a treaty with Russia'.[83] Russia was certainly an issue on which the policies of the *Telegraph* and the government differed widely. No doubt, the *Telegraph* had to overcome a 'natural' Conservative scepticism towards Communist Russia, but it now saw an urgent need for an alliance. For the *Daily Telegraph* a moral question had been raised: 'In a word, we find ourselves in a situation which demands a realistic not a legalistic view of our undertakings. The firmer and more decisive the policy of the Government the more certainly will they be assured of the unstinted support of the country.'[84] The leader directly attacked the government: 'At a moment when the whole country is waiting unanimously for an instantaneous and vigorous lead it would be lamentable indeed if unanimity on this issue were lacking within the Government itself.'[85] When the British government finally announced the Polish guarantee, the *Daily Telegraph* supported the initiative as a sign that something would be done to show Germany its limits. The paper called it 'the nucleus of a powerful defensive alliance', and thereby put more faith in the value of Poland than any other Conservative paper.[86]

Gannon is wrong to assume that at this point an outcry following allegations of government efforts to limit press freedom 'was enough to cause the government to issue inspired denials through the *Daily Telegraph*'.[87] The *Daily Telegraph* was certainly not included in the government's efforts to minimise the implications of the Polish guarantee. Instead the paper believed the assurances made by the government in Parliament: 'So thought the world until a qualifying and limiting interpretation of the pledge was put forward by *The Times*'.[88] In any sense, the episode shows the distance

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[83] *Ibid.*, 7 July 1939, p. 16.
[84] *Ibid.*, 25 March 1939, p. 14.
[85] *Ibid.*.
[86] *Ibid.*, 1 April 1939; see Kehoe, 'British Press', p. 281
[87] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 21.
[88] *Daily Telegraph*, 4 April 1939; see Foster, 'Unequivocal', p. 41

that the *Telegraph* had travelled from being a trusted government supporter in late 1937 to a newspaper that had fallen out of favour with Chamberlain and was consequently left in the dark about the government's real intentions.

The *Telegraph*'s independent political role was finally established by its role in the efforts to change the composition of the government – to have Churchill and Eden included in the Cabinet. The *Telegraph* was considered to be crucial for the success of the campaign because it was a highly respected Conservative newspaper and because Camrose had once been close to Chamberlain, yet it was now plainly sympathetic to the Eden group of 'anti-appeasers'.[89]

In late June two members of this group, Macmillan and Nicolson, wrote to Camrose to put the case for Churchill's inclusion in the Cabinet, and together with Astor they spoke with him on 30 June 1939. As a result, Camrose was now 'known to be sympathetic to the idea of an all-party coalition',[90] and to be convinced that 'Winston is the vital figure'.[91] Although Astor's *Observer* prepared the ground for the campaign on 2 July – without mentioning Churchill – the campaign was really begun on the following day with a forceful *Telegraph* article in praise of Churchill. The government, it claimed, did not include all

> those counsellors who are best qualified to decide upon fateful issues and to plan strategic strokes. One name will leap at once to everyone's cognisance. It is that of Mr. Churchill… True, Mr Churchill has a strong and masterful personality which estranges and even antagonises some persons; but strong and masterful personalities are just what the present situation demands. …The act of inviting Mr. Churchill to join the Cabinet would be the most popular step which Mr. Chamberlain could make.[92]

Other papers followed the *Telegraph*'s lead. As Hoare commented in July, 'the papers of the Left and the important papers of the Right' were 'shouting with one voice for his

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[89] See *Amery Diaries,* p. 554 (29 June 1939).
[90] Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 387.
[91] See Parker, *Churchill*, pp. 232-3.
[92] *Daily Telegraph*, 3 July 1939, p.14; see Parker, *Churchill*, p. 233-4.

inclusion'.[93] Chamberlain himself was 'vexed that Camrose who used to be such a firm supporter should now have committed himself to Churchill'.[94] He now sent for Camrose, and tried to convince him that it would be inappropriate to include Churchill in the Cabinet, because of his occasional 'lack of judgement', and because the German government would regard this appointment as evidence of British preparedness to fight, making war more – not less – likely.[95] As he had written privately about Churchill in April, 'the nearer we get to war the more his chances improve and vice versa'.[96]

As Dawson well understood, Chamberlain had no 'intention of being bounced into taking back Winston'.[97] Chamberlain's stubbornness, and then a further deterioration in the international situation meant that Camrose and the *Telegraph* did not press their campaign. As war became unavoidable, Camrose reverted to support for Chamberlain because 'patriotic duty demanded that the paper support the Prime Minister' – though in the event the outbreak of war did also force Chamberlain to appoint Churchill (and Eden) to his Cabinet.[98]

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The *Telegraph*'s policy was always to report the news straight, and this was usually what gave offence to the German government and came to irritate British ministers. The paper also considered it a duty to report on the range of public debate. Not only did it gave space to Churchill's articles from April 1938, and later to

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[93] Quoted in Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, p. 263.
[94] Neville Chamberlain to I. Chamberlain, 8 July 1939, NC18/1/1106. For Chamberlain's reaction, see also *Channon diary*, p. 204 (9 July 1939).
[95] Lord Camrose, notes of a conversation with Neville Chamberlain, 3 July 1939, in Gilbert, *Winston Churchill, Companion*, pp. 1544-6. On the attempt to get Churchill back into the government, see Parker, *Churchill*, pp. 233-7.
[96] Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, April 1939, NC18/1/1095; also quoted in Parker, *Churchill*, p. 235.
[97] Dawson diary, 16 July 1939, MS Dawson 43.
[98] See Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 164.

Boothby's views; it also reported the speeches of other 'anti-appeasers'.[99] In terms of editorial comment, as Camrose had written when he first took control of the paper, his aim was to support the Conservative party in general terms, while retaining the right to differ on specifics. The distinction became more delicate when there were divisions between Conservative politicians. In the late 1930s foreign policy was an issue on which it shifted from the perspectives of Chamberlain towards those of another Conservative, Churchill. Even so, it never quite pressed outright for an overthrow of Chamberlain and his policy, because it remained committed to general support of the Conservative leadership.

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[99] E.g. E.L. Spears, connected with the *Focus*, on 19 March 1938, p. 12, or Duncan Sandys, 8 April 1938, p. 16.

CHAPTER IV

THE BEAVERBROOK NEWSPAPERS

Lord Beaverbrook, in the view of many historians second only to Dawson of *The Times* in his support for Chamberlain's policy, was one of the notorious 'press lords'. Like other leading newspaper proprietors, he owned a chain of newspapers, chiefly the *Daily Express*, *Sunday Express* and *Evening Standard.* This alone did not make him a 'press lord': what made him distinctive was the way he used his papers to promote his own political interests. Given his past history of vigorous political independence, he provides a particularly good case study of government-newspaper relations during the period of appeasement. Was his support for the policy the result of active government persuasion? Or was it the product of his own deeply-held opinions? There is a further issue. If government pressure had been effective with him, one might expect that his various newspapers would all adopt similar attitudes on British foreign policy. If they did not, this surely raises doubts about the ability of the government to control or manipulate the press. This chapter therefore examines – and compares and contrasts – two of Beaverbrook's papers, the *Daily Express* and the *Evening Standard.*

I. The *Daily Express*

Beaverbrook had taken control of the *Express* in 1916 with the support and encouragement of his friend, the Unionist party leader Bonar Law, and with financial assistance from the Unionist party's Central Office. Both had expected him to maintain its existing position as an official Unionist paper, but Beaverbrook quickly loosened its ties with the party. As he told Law, 'in politics I am bound – for no man can really be a politician without submitting to the necessary trammels of Party. In the press, on the

contrary, I am free and can work from the outside'.[1] As Koss claimed, his departure from the traditional party attachment of the paper 'struck at the very heart of the old political press'.[2]

Beaverbrook considered himself to be Conservative, but he was not a party-Conservative. Apart from support at election times, he gave little active support for the Conservative party. Instead he claimed that 'I have tried to persuade the party to walk in my direction instead of walking with the party'.[3] This independence from the Conservative party he tried to defend, claiming that 'inside the Conservative party, whether as politician or journalist, I should be prohibited from appealing to popular opinion against the decision of my leaders'.[4] He was throughout, as Benson claimed, 'an outsider and an individualist', running his newspapers according to his own wishes.[5]

Beaverbrook would therefore not allow party loyalties to get in the way of the running of his newspapers, and they were expected to advocate views that were independent of party affiliation. He held that 'the normal attitude of the Press towards the politicians must be one of complete independence. This will take the form of criticism when it appears that the political leaders are going wrong and adopting policies of which the nation does not approve'.[6] Several times he denounced all parties, rather than support a particular one.

Moreover, Beaverbrook was a businessman, who expected his particular newspapers, and certainly his whole newspaper empire, to yield a profit. This meant

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[1] Quoted in Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 156, and see also Peter Howard, *Beaverbrook. A Study of Max the Unknown* (London, 1964), p. 104; Dennis Griffiths, *Plant Here the Standard* (London, 1996), p. 218; Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, pp. 355-6.
[2] Ibid., p. 357; see Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 136.
[3] Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook* (London, 1965), p. 196.
[4] Edgar Middleton, *Beaverbrook: The Statesman and the Man* (London, 1934), p. 196; also Piers Brendon, *The Life and Death of the Press Barons* (London, 1982), p. 160.
[5] Timothy S. Benson, 'Low and Beaverbrook: The Case of a Cartoonist's Autonomy' (PhD thesis, University of Kent, 1998), p. 23.
[6] *Daily News*, 24 November 1925, quoted in Benson, 'Low', p. 24; see also David Low, *Low's Autobiography* (London, 1956), p. 175.

that he was sensitive to the different readerships of the individual newspapers he owned. He understood that each had a body of loyal readers, and that there were commercial advantages in having his newspapers express different shades of opinion. To seek to impose identical attitudes on them all could well be damaging; far better, within limits, to leave each paper to develop its own distinctive style. He himself strongly denied that he controlled the general policies of his various newspapers: as he put it, when on certain issues a paper like the *Daily Express* accepted his point of view, it was still possible that his two other papers would take an opposing stance.[7] He saw no point in 'instructing' his editors to write something they did not agree with, arguing that 'you must not coerce them, you must carry them along with you'.[8] This comment needs to be treated with some care, as Beaverbrook did admit that he urged his editors to support his campaigns for Empire Free Trade. Even so, he said that he did not intervene 'on other issues'.[9]

Nevertheless, it is very likely that Beaverbrook exercised a vigorous control over his newspapers. Former journalists have claimed that 'he played a ceaseless part in their control'.[10] Beaverbrook's statements about political independence of his editors were, as Benson states, a 'smoke-screen' for his constant intervention in editorial matters: 'complete freedom of expression was in fact only tolerated when the article or cartoon was either in sympathy with, or indifferent to Beaverbrook's own political views and allegiances'.[11]

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[7] See Royal Commission on the Press, *Minutes of Evidence*, 18 March 1948, q. 8642, 8644, 8754.
[8] Ibid., q. 8752, 8757.
[9] Ibid., q. 8751; see Royal Commission on the Press, *Report*, p. 43.
[10] Howard, *Beaverbrook*, p. 61.
[11] Benson, 'Low', pp. 34-5.

In Cockett's study, the *Daily Express* is raised to the same level as *The Times* in its support for appeasement – 'a mere cipher for Chamberlain's policies'.[12] Yet such assertions say nothing about the degree of government influence. Indeed, as Cockett expresses the point, it was Beaverbrook who 'put his papers totally at the service of the government' – which is crucially distinct from the government successfully imposing control. [13] Besides being independently-minded, Beaverbrook had a tough and unpredictable character, and it is probable that ministers did not dare to attempt asserting 'control' as such. Indeed, during Chamberlain's premiership, they only once tried to influence the *Express*'s political stance.

Beaverbrook later told the Royal Commission on the Press that 'yes, we would always support any political party that took a favourable attitude to our views, and we attacked parties one after the other because they would not take favourably to our views'.[14] What, then, were Beaverbrook's political views, and to what extent did the *Daily Express* mirror them? Its readership represented a cross-section taken from every social group; indeed, it has been argued that 'Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* was the only classless and ageless newspaper in the world',[15] with a circulation of about 2.2 million in the mid-1930s. The paper was very much Beaverbrook's own. Arthur Christiansen, the editor 1933-57, accepted that the *Express*'s 'policies were Lord Beaverbrook's job', not that of himself and his staff.[16] It is in connection with the *Daily Express* that one has to regard Beaverbrook's famous remarks when giving evidence at the Royal Commission on the Press: 'I ran the paper purely for the purpose of making propaganda

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[12] Richard Cockett (ed.), *My Dear Max. The Letters of Brendan Bracken to Lord Beaverbrook, 1925-1958* (London, 1990), pp. 20-1, and Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 65.
[13] Ibid., p. 80
[14] Royal Commission on the Press, *Minutes of Evidence*, q. 8659.
[15] Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, pp. xi, 175; see also Taylor, *English History*, p. 310.
[16] Arthur Christiansen, *Headlines All My Life* (London, 1961), p. 144.

and with no other object', in relation to Empire Free Trade – 'my own issue, the issue I have advocated all these years'.[17]

His priority in foreign policy was clearly expressed as support for 'splendid isolation' from continental entanglements, and it was principally as a consequence of this that he supported Chamberlain's appeasement policy.[18] Beaverbrook was an imperialist, and since the 1920s he had committed himself and the *Daily Express* to the cause of imperial unity. This stance also entailed non-involvement in Europe. 'Interference in Europe means war for certain. ... It is a policy which means the break up of the British Empire.'[19] Any entanglements in Europe, even under the 'the League of Nations is now a greater danger to peace than the armament makers. ... Turn away from Europe. Stand by the Empire and Splendid Isolation'.[20] Because his newspapers were 'popular' papers, whose circulation might have been affected by grim news, European coverage was kept at a minimum; instead overseas reporting concentrated on the British Empire and the United States.[21]

According to Taylor, 'Beaverbrook had one steadfast conviction which he put far above party loyalty. This was a desire to promote the economic unity of the British Empire'.[22] In launching his Crusade in 1929, he directly challenged the Conservative party hierarchy. According to Koss, from the very start 'the venture had all the qualities of a breakaway political movement'.[23] In the *Daily Express*, space was strictly occupied just by 'our supporters'.[24] As for editorial control, Beaverbrook wrote that 'the truth is that an Editor ... is only useful as long as he works honestly and earnestly in furtherance of the political programme. The moment he shows the slightest tendency to

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[17] Royal Commission on the Press, *Minutes of Evidence*, 18 March 1948, qq. 8656, 8657.
[18] See Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, pp. 163-4, and Benson, 'Low', p. 140.
[19] Beaverbrook in the *Sunday Express*, 15 July 1934, quoted in Benson, 'Low', p. 140.
[20] *Daily Express*, 17 November 1934, p. 8.
[21] See Kehoe, 'British Press', p. 25; Gannon, *British Press*, p. 36.
[22] Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 163.
[23] Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 498.
[24] Beaverbrook, quoted in Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 273.

"stall" he can do incredible injury'.[25] Journalists were free to write what they wanted, as long as they were in accordance with Beaverbrook's Empire policy.

Another example of Beaverbrook's independent-mindedness occurred over government foreign policy. Here, he followed his own conception about the appropriate policy attitude towards the problem of Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia. He did not go as far as to challenge the government itself over the issue, but he was one of the few who stood by the Foreign Secretary Hoare, when the Cabinet dropped the Hoare-Laval plan in the face of a widespread public outcry in favour of the League of Nations and collective security.[26] Beaverbrook welcomed Hoare's proposal because he resented involvement in Europe, which was what membership of the League involved. 'The peace plan was sound and should have been pressed as a basis for negotiation', insisted the *Daily Express*. Hoare resigned and left the Cabinet in December 1935, but he returned to office in summer 1936. Beaverbrook had long been friendly with him; and he now cultivated him to the extent of secretly giving him substantial sums of money. The advantage of the connection was that it gave Beaverbrook access to the inner thinking of the government. Later, during the Sudeten crisis, this special relationship between Beaverbrook and Hoare became very important for the Chamberlainite ministers.

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When the tension over German claims on Austria rose with Hitler's ultimatum, the *Daily Express* strongly advocated a policy of isolation, claiming that Britain had no

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[25] Ibid., p. 274.
[26] Beaverbrook to Hoare, 14 December 1935, Beaverbrook papers C/307b; see also Chisholm and Davie, *Beaverbrook*, p. 329. For Beaverbook's support for Vansittart, see Norman Rose, *Vansittart. Study of a Diplomat* (London, 1978), pp. 181-2.

right to interfere: 'our business is to unite our own peoples in our own commonwealth by a policy of Empire Free Trade and Splendid Isolation'.[27] From this position it sought to defend the government against the criticism of Churchill, whom it dubbed 'the most powerful enemy of the Government'. Churchill was especially suspect because he had become a leading critic of isolationism, and a keen supporter of alliances. The *Daily Express* implied that Britain could have stayed out of the First World War and saw Churchill's criticism of government foreign policy as a 'dangerous campaign to drive this country into war since he drove us into it himself against Russia in 1919'.[28]

In a noteworthy article on 10 March 1938 the paper claimed that in his policy towards Germany 'the Prime Minister recognises the same principle in foreign affairs as the Isolationists do'. The crux was that the government had largely adopted the policy set out by Beaverbrook, allowing the *Daily Express* to state that 'the programme of the Government in relation to foreign affairs brings us much nearer to the policy of Isolation for which we have laboured and striven over the years'.[29] Beaverbrook's support for Chamberlain's foreign policy was not really due to a belief that appeasement represented the right way to address German claims. Rather it was an expression of a larger commitment to British non-interventionism. Given that personally he disliked the nature of the fascist dictatorship,[30] it seems likely that he was less interested in the specific policy decisions relating to Germany than in the long-term implications of appeasement. As long as isolation was the ultimate goal, he supported Chamberlain. Once Chamberlain stepped away from the path, Beaverbrook would become critical.

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[27] *Daily Express*, 16 February 1938, p. 10.
[28] *Ibid.*, 25 February 1938, p. 10.
[29] *Ibid.*, 10 March 1938, p.8.
[30] Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 378. He wrote to Lloyd George after a visit to Germany that 'I hated so much the regimentation of opinion that I could not bear it': Beaverbrook to Lloyd George, 6 October 1936, Beaverbrook papers C/218a.

At the same time as supporting appeasement, he was prepared to go further than Chamberlain in demanding through his newspapers a stronger rearmament programme. 'With the policy of isolation there comes the need for adequate defences. ... The price for our safety will be high. We should prepare to pay it'.[31] In this respect, Beaverbrook's newspapers were closer to Churchill than to Chamberlain.[32]

The *Daily Express*'s attitude towards the *Anschluss* was that it was inevitable, and a purely German affair.[33] Even so, it was worried about the ruthless manner in which it was executed, and forecast that more of the same was likely to come from Germany.[34] Nevertheless it continued to advocate its own policy of isolation towards Europe, and stronger links with the Empire and the United States. While it showed some sympathy towards France in its anxiety towards its powerful neighbour, it asked the French to understand Britain's position – that Britain was not prepared to go to war for 'the ramshackle State of Czechoslovakia'.[35]

Throughout the Czechoslovakian crisis the *Daily Express* maintained its position of avoiding commitments at almost any cost, stressing that Britain had no obligation to defend Eastern Europe. It argued that Hitler's demands from mid-September cleared the air and considerably lessened tension by showing where Germany stood. It also argued that 'war is not inevitable'.[36] On 14 September it placed much emphasis on German government statements that no war was necessary between Germany and Britain. 'Britain has a great responsibility, for if she wants to she can prevent such military action being taken. She should use influence in Prague.'[37] This suggestion that pressure should be placed on the Czechoslovakian government in order to prevent a European

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[31] *Sunday Express*, 13 March 1938, quoted in Benson, 'Low', p. 257.
[32] See Howard, *Beaverbrook*, p. 105.
[33] See *Daily Express*, 16 and 17 February 1938, p. 12.
[34] *Ibid.*, 12 March 1938, p. 12.
[35] *Ibid.*, 29 April 1938, p. 12, and *Ibid.*, 21 May 1938, p. 12
[36] *Ibid.*, 13 September 1938, p. 1.
[37] *Ibid.*, 14 September 1938, p. 1.

war came very close to Chamberlain's appeasement policy. The effect of this attitude was that Beaverbrook became eager to assist the Cabinet in its dealings with the media. This was certainly not a case of a newspaper proprietor yielding to government influence.

When Chamberlain started his 'shuttle-diplomacy' in September, Beaverbrook offered Halifax advice on how to improve and co-ordinate press support. His assumptions about government-newspaper relations at this point are significant. He claimed that the newspapers were 'all anxious to help the Prime Minister and to help you. But they are greatly in need of guidance'. His concern was evidently that in the past British newspapers had not always published responsible commentaries, and that these might jeopardise sensitive negotiations with the German government, and public support for compromise. He suggested that a leading minister be 'authorised to have direct contact with the newspaper proprietors individually and personally', and suggested Hoare for the task. He argued that 'great benefits would flow from the decision', because the government would be able to prevent misrepresentation which might upset Hitler. The aim would be 'to guide the newspapers in their policy, to strike out errors and to crush rumours'.[38] Beaverbrook promised that through this step 'the newspapers of the right and left will go with you in your decisions'.[39]

Beaverbrook's initiative was welcomed by Chamberlain, who thought it an excellent suggestion – a reaction which does not indicate ministerial confidence in their existing influence with the press.[40] Indeed, if the newspapers had been under significant government influence, Beaverbrook would not have needed to make the offer. Nor was his suggestion that the newspapers needed 'guidance' tantamount to proposals for

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[38] Beaverbrook to Halifax, 16 September 1938, Beaverbrook papers C/152.
[39] Beaverbrook to Chamberlain, 16 September 1938, Beaverbrook papers C/80; also quoted in Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 384, and Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 75.
[40] Chamberlain to Beaverbrook, 17 September 1938, Beaverbrook papers C/80.

controlling the press – something to which Beaverbrook was most certainly opposed. Earlier in 1938, when the German government had complained about British newspaper criticism of Hitler and implied that greater government control of the press was needed, Beaverbrook had quickly rebutted the notion in a *Daily Express* article. 'This, I can say emphatically, will be declared by Mr. Chamberlain to be impossible. The view in Whitehall is that the British press is not unfairly critical of Germany and her rulers. In any case, no attempt will be made to "muzzle" the press.'[41] The paper vigorously defended freedom of speech; after all independence had been at the heart of Beaverbrook's conduct of his own papers. The *Daily Express*'s own independence, commitment to free debate, and eye for the commercial necessity to maintain 'newsworthiness' was manifested in the prominence it continued to give to speeches by anti-appeasers, from Churchill to Attlee, even when its editorial line was firmly Chamberlainite.[42]

In late September, when there were rumours that a deal with Germany might include a British guarantee towards Czechoslovakia, the *Daily Express* voiced alarm at this prospective departure from isolationism. In such circumstances it was even prepared to admire the opinions of Attlee, the Labour party leader: 'Mr. Attlee accepts the view of the *Daily Express*. For he wants to call Parliament to discuss thoroughly what he designates the grave departure from traditional British policy in giving frontier guarantees.'[43] The paper demanded that government policy should be 'founded upon reality', in other words isolation. The paper could not understand why Chamberlain, 'claimed by the Isolationists as a wise statesman', was willing to support such a guarantee.[44]

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[41] *Daily Express*, 7 March 1938, p. 2.
[42] See *Ibid.*, 8 March 1938, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 15 March 1938, p. 8.
[43] *Ibid.*, 21 September 1938, p. 10; see also *Ibid.*, 22 September 1938, p. 7.
[44] *Ibid.*, 22 September 1938, p. 10.

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[44] *Ibid.*, 22 September 1938, p. 10.

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[41] *Daily Express*, 7 March 1938, p. 2.
[42] See *Ibid.*, 8 March 1938, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 15 March 1938, p. 8.
[43] *Ibid.*, 21 September 1938, p. 10; see also *Ibid.*, 22 September 1938, p. 7.
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[42] See *Ibid.*, 8 March 1938, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 15 March 1938, p. 8.
[43] *Ibid.*, 21 September 1938, p. 10; see also *Ibid.*, 22 September 1938, p. 7.
[44] *Ibid.*, 22 September 1938, p. 10.

Certainly the *Daily Express* was one of the more optimistic papers about the prospect of peace, but its criticism of the proposed guarantees casts doubts on the claim that Beaverbrook 'put his papers totally at the service of the government'.[45] The freedom of comment enjoyed by the *Daily Express* was such that, after a Cabinet meeting on 25 September 1938 during which growing criticism of government's policy was noted, Hoare asked Beaverbrook to 'stick at present to supporting the P.M. as about the only hope of peace'.[46] This has been presented as a prime example of government exerting influence over the newspapers. But it can more convincingly be regarded as evidence to the contrary: the appeal indicated a lack of government control and a fear of the implications of newspaper independence.

When Chamberlain flew to Munich on 29 September he had the full support of the *Daily Express*. Its headline read: 'It's all Right'. Next day, reporting the Munich agreement, the front page printed the now notorious headline: 'The *Daily Express* declares that Britain will not be involved in a European war this year, or next year either.' Given its deep commitment to isolationism, this is hardly surprising: but the paper also struck a critical note. It took issue with the guarantee given for the remaining state of Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain had committed Britain to stand by a nation on the continent, something that Beaverbrook had always tried to avoid. The newspaper thought that the country should concentrate solely on national rearmament, and keep clear of any European commitments.[47] Privately, Beaverbrook had to defend the *Daily Express*'s isolationist position. A prominent reader recalled that in 1914 England and its allies had only narrowly escaped defeat by German forces, and asked whether isolation

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[45] Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 80.
[46] Hoare to Beaverbrook, September (undated) 1938, Beaverbrook Papers C/299; see also Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 81.
[47] *Daily Express*, 3 October 1938, p. 10.

was 'feasible'?[48] Beaverbrook, the arch-isolationist, answered the letter personally and pointed out that the policy of the paper was precisely to back up isolation with 'preparations for defence'.[49] Shortly afterwards the *Daily Express* found the appropriate headline, combining both principles: 'Armed Isolation'.[50] Rearmament now became the paper's most urgent rallying-cry.

There is no doubt that Chamberlain valued Beaverbrook's support and tried hard to obtain it. This provided Beaverbrook with the chance of being more closely involved in government business than at any time since 1918. Beaverbrook was keen to maintain his newly-regained influence and reminded Halifax in November 1938 that 'my newspapers will do anything to help you in your difficult negotiations with the central European countries, or indeed in any direction. Besides, I am in agreement with your policy and I can give you the strongest support'. [51] The similarity between Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* and the Cabinet's position was still such that Robertson, the *Express*'s general manager, declared that 'Chamberlain's speeches read like *Daily Express* leaders'.[52] In private, however, Beaverbrook's support for Chamberlain was certainly not unqualified: 'we set out on the road with him, on his policy of appeasement in Europe, and we cannot turn our back until he ceases to lead us in that highway'.[53]

After the New Year Beaverbrook became more optimistic, because he felt that Chamberlain was now 'running an isolationist policy all the time', and would ultimately 'isolate the Empire from the quarrels of Europe'.[54] He saw the prospects of peace growing, but was realist enough to put this down to 'the growing strength of our armed

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[48] See Agate to Christiansen, October 1938, Beaverbrook papers B/292.
[49] See Beaverbrook to Agate, 5 October 1938, Beaverbrook papers B/292.
[50] *Daily Express*, 8 October 1938, p. 2; see Kehoe, 'British Press', p. 240.
[51] Beaverbrook to Halifax, 14 November 1938, Beaverbrook papers C/152; see Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 56.
[52] Lockhart diaries, 7 November 1938, p.408, quoted in Chisholm, *Beaverbrook*, p.353.
[53] Beaverbrook to Blumenfeld, 8 December 1938, Beaverbrook papers C/45c.
[54] Quoted in Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 388.

forces',[55] rather than the policy of appeasement. When tension grew over Prague in March 1939, Beaverbrook was content that the pledges given at Munich were not applied: 'our Government could never have defended Czechoslovakia, and that combination of races could never have worked together … The structure was bound to fall as soon as the weight of reality was imposed upon it'.[56] Nevertheless, after the German armies had occupied Prague, in one respect the paper argued for a resolute response: 'while everything will be done by Mr. Chamberlain and his colleagues to promote peace, the policy of making Britain strong, militarily and diplomatically, will be pressed forward and speeded up'.[57]

When on 31 March 1939 the British government announced its guarantee to Poland, the *Daily Express*, naturally opposed the pledge. It was thereby nearly alone in doing so. Like *The Times*, the *Daily Express* gave a narrow definition of its scope and criticised the step:

> There is no discordant voice anywhere save only from this newspaper. *The Daily Express* regrets 1, that a guarantee should have been given that involved Britain in the concerns of Eastern Europe, 2, that it was given without seeking and obtaining the approval of the Dominions and their concurrence in the obligations. The *Daily Express* opposes the commitment to Poland.[58]

Not only did the *Daily Express* criticise the Polish guarantee, it now accused Chamberlain of being weak, 'since his decision in fact adopted the policies of his Socialist opponents, of his Liberal opponents, and of his critics in his own party like Mr. Eden and Mr. Churchill'.[59] What annoyed the newspaper in particular was that the prime minister followed the prevailing 'public opinion': Chamberlain was going with the tide, not with the *Daily Express* and Beaverbrook. However, the paper hesitated to

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[55] Beaverbrook to Swope, 21 February 1939, Beaverbrook papers B/297.
[56] Beaverbrook to Macdonnell, 15 March 1939, quoted in Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 390.
[57] *Daily Express*, 16 March 1939, p. 1.
[58] *Ibid.*, 1 April 1939, p. 10; Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 391.
[59] *Ibid.*, 4 April 1939, p. 7.

break completely with the government, because it anticipated that in a case of war 'the *Daily Express* should be in a position to encourage and fortify the resistance and endurance of the British Nation'.[60]

It was now plain that the *Daily Express* had not supported Chamberlain as such – still less subordinated itself to Chamberlainite blandishments or pressure – so much as welcomed Chamberlain's support for Beaverbrook's isolationism. As Beaverbrook stated in 1947:

> Up to March, 1939, Chamberlain had a policy that we accepted and supported very strongly, and then he changed his policy and decided to give a guarantee to Poland. The *Daily Express* made a most furious attack upon that guarantee. Chamberlain was angry about the attack, and so I had no further conversation with him after that date, until after the outbreak of war.[61]

Beaverbrook privately wrote that 'this was a pledge that should not have been made, that could not be honoured, and which defied the bounds of practical reality when it was entered into'.[62] He continued to oppose entanglement on the continent right up to the outbreak of war – and beyond. Contrary to Taylor's assumption that his newspapers now preached an alliance with Russia,[63] as the only means of sustaining the Polish guarantee, in July the *Daily Express* criticised negotiations with the Soviet government. A treaty would allow Stalin to lure Britain into a war it did not want, and from which only Russia could benefit.[64] Even after the outbreak of war, Beaverbrook still wanted to reach a negotiated settlement with Hitler, and to avoid an expansion of the conflict. Only with Churchill's accession as prime minister in May 1940 and Beaverbrook's appointment to the War Cabinet did he change his position.[65]

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[60] Beaverbrook to Dunnico, 10 April 1939, Beaverbrook papers B/296.
[61] Royal Commission on the Press, *Minutes of* Evidence, q.8756.
[62] Quoted in Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 391.
[63] See Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 391.
[64] *Daily Express*, 31 July 1939, p. 10.
[65] See Benson, 'Low', p. 31.

II. **The *Evening Standard* and Low**

The *Evening Standard* was considered to be 'independent conservative'.[66] In 1939 it had a circulation of 382,000.[67] According to Seymour-Ure and Schoff, it was Beaverbrook's 'plaything', to which he allowed a greater degree of political freedom.[68] This was partly because as an evening newspaper for a well-informed readership (in London and South-East England) it offered sophisticated entertainment as well as serious discussion. It was also because it served as an outlet for Beaverbrook's more mischievous, or maverick, instincts. He even employed radical journalists like Frank Owen, editor 1938-1941, and Michael Foot, the future editor, as well as the left-wing cartoonist, David Low.[69]

The *Evening Standard* had even the freedom to disagree with views and opinion published in the *Daily* and *Sunday Express*.[70] For example, Percy Cudlipp, editor 1933-1938, was among the first to call for a popular front against Hitler. When he left (significantly to join the *Daily Herald*) Owen continued to pursue a more critical approach towards Germany than that of the *Daily Express*.[71] Beaverbrook occasionally tried to restrain him, but Owen took little or no notice.[72] Later, Beaverbrook did not deny that he tried to convince his various editors to adopt a more optimistic line on international affairs; but he also stated that he only succeeded up to a point. He did not convince all his editors: 'My own view was accepted by the *Daily Express*. John Gordon of the *Sunday Express*, for instance, and Frank Owen of the *Evening Standard* did not accept my view'.[73] In consequence, the political stances of his various

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[66] See David Butler and Gareth Butler, *British Political Facts 1900-1985*, sixth ed. (London, 1986), p. 489; Benson, 'Low ', p. 90, and Colin Seymour-Ure and Jim Schoff, *David Low* (London, 1985), p. 44.
[67] Ibid., p. 167.
[68] See Ibid., p. 44, and Benson, 'Low', p. 20.
[69] See *My Dear Max*, p. 21 and p. 18: 'an impish sense of mischief were the guiding lights of his life'.
[70] See Benson, 'Low', p. 260.
[71] Curran and Seaton, *Power Without*, p. 49.
[72] Ibid.; cf. Benson, 'Low', p. 260.
[73] Royal Commission on the Press, *Minutes of Evidence*, 18 March 1948, q. 8754.

newspapers were sometimes contradictory. Even while personally supporting Chamberlain during 1938, he did not insist that all his newspapers were favourable towards appeasement.

Probably the most remarkable feature of the *Evening Standard* was its employment of Low. In the early 1930s, as a committed supporter of the League of Nations he had drawn attention to the importance of disarmament and collective security. When these failed, faced with Italy's annexation of Abyssinia, Low modified his view to advocate backing up the League with military force. After the reoccupation of the Rhineland, he supported an increase in rearmament, and in the summer of 1938 he 'rampaged' against Germany.[74] After the occupation of Prague he looked for an agreement with Russia. On all these points, Low was in direct opposition to the thinking of Beaverbrook as well as the government.[75] Where Low was a supporter of the League, Beaverbrook was a fervent supporter of isolation.[76] During the late 1930s there was probably just one point of agreement: as Benson argues, 'they both saw an increasing need for rearmament'.[77]

Given their differences, would Beaverbrook really allow Low to express his markedly independent views during the delicate conditions of 1938? When Low had joined the *Evening Standard* in 1927, he was free to define his conditions: 'Policy: It is agreed that you are to have complete freedom in the selection and treatment of subject matter for your cartoons and in the expression therein of the policies in which you believe'.[78] Beaverbrook confirmed this right to independence in terms that also cast doubt on his own susceptibility to outside influences:

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[74] Low, *Autobiography*, p. 306.
[75] See Seymour-Ure and Schoff, *Low*, p. 166.
[76] See Seymour-Ure and Schoff, *Low*, pp. 42, 45, and Benson, 'Low', p. 124.
[77] Benson, 'Low', p. 141.
[78] Low, *Autobiography*, p. 182.

> My views as shareholder in any newspaper are that its columns ought to be free and open to the expression of opinion by men and women of distinction. I should no more be in favour of excluding such work because I disagreed with the opinions contained in it than I would countenance the colouring of news to suit preconceived ideas.[79]

Low always maintained that he had independence from Beaverbrook's interventions, and that there was only one case where a cartoon was left out for political reasons.[80] Of course, there were certain topics which Low felt he should leave untouched, as a matter of tact, particularly the monarchy and Rothermere, Beaverbrook's fellow press lord and ally, who objected to being in cartoons. Some other cartoons had to be omitted because of fear of libel action.[81]

Low's independence is affirmed in some of the earliest studies of his relationship with Beaverbrook. Streicher, in 1965, argued that 'crucial for Low's status as a commentator was unique freedom. He was privileged and sheltered to speak the truth as he personally saw it, regardless of Lord Beaverbrook's politics and editorial policies'.[82] This claim was also made by Taylor in his biography of Beaverbrook. 'Low had a free run for the best part of twenty years in the *Evening Standard*'.[83] It was not until 1985 when Seymour-Ure and Schoff published their biography of Low that some doubts about his independence arose. They argued that 'The contract clause "worked" in as much as both parties publicly maintained that it worked. Like many contracts, however, it symbolised a working relationship more than actively sustaining it'.[84] Benson's thesis goes in the same direction: 'Low's independence in reality depended on how far Beaverbrook felt that freedom should go. Low on his part, it is argued, was not

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[79] Ibid., pp. 196-7.
[80] See Benson, 'Low', pp. i, 12. The subject matter was Greece in 1945: see Low, *Autobiography*, p. 197.
[81] See Seymour-Ure and Schoff, *Low*, pp. 49-50.
[82] Lawrence H. Streicher, 'The Political Imagery in the Caricatures of David Low' (Phd. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1965), p. 220.
[83] Taylor, *Beaverbrook* p. 216.
[84] C. Seymour-Ure and Schoff, *Low*, p .47.

only prepared to ignore such blatant infringements to the terms of his contract, but also toed the line to suit his proprietor's political whims.'[85] If the *Evening Standard*, like other newspapers was in 'Chamberlain's pocket', as Chisholm and Davie claim, this issue needs to be addressed.[86]

* * *

Low was certainly aware of the dangers posed by the dictators, and tried to alert the public with his striking caricatures of them.[87] As Seymour-Ure and Schoff state, he helped to fix 'the lasting image of Hitler and Mussolini'.[88] He foresaw that if a firm policy was not adopted towards the dictators they would be still more aggressive, and eventually cause the outbreak of war. During the late 1930s Low was an outright opponent of appeasement.[89]

Even before the *Evening Standard* received official complaints about Low's cartoons, the newspaper knew that they could have a bearing on Anglo-German relations. The editor hinted to Low as early as September 1937 that 'a newspaper must be very keenly alive to its responsibilities'. The dictators were 'people whose tempers are inflamed more by a cartoon than by any letterpress'.[90] Matters came to a head with Halifax's visit to Germany. During the visit, Goebbels specifically complained about cartoons in British newspapers, and Halifax resolved to try and soften matters. As he wrote to Henderson: 'I haven't as yet devised any approach that is satisfactory to Low,

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[85] Benson, 'Low', p. i.
[86] Chisholm and Davie, *Beaverbrook*, p. 354.
[87] See e.g. Low cartoon, 'Cause preceeds effect', *Evening Standard*, 20 March 1935, and 'Stepping Stones to glory', 8 July 1936.
[88] See Seymour-Ure and Schoff, *Low*, p. xi.
[89] Benson, 'Low', p. 2.
[90] Cudlipp to Low, 9 September 1937, quoted in Peter Mellini, 'Why Didn't They Listen? Political Cartooning and British Foreign Policy 1933-1940', *Journal of Newspaper and Periodical History* 6 (1990), p. 33.

who draws the picture in the *Evening Standard*, and these I expect are the most troublesome of any.'[91]

Any government action was made more difficult because Halifax and Beaverbrook were not on good terms. Also Beaverbrook was known to maintain that Low had artistic independence to draw as he wished. So Halifax instead tried to circumvent Beaverbrook by approaching the *Standard*'s manager, Michael Wardell, asking him to put some pressure on Low.[92] But he was firmly told that such a request could not be met:

> Low has a contract which gives him complete immunity. Of course, I could refuse to publish a cartoon, if it were blasphemous or obscene or libellous, or in such bad taste as to bring discredit on the newspaper. But Low's cartoons don't fall into any of those categories. They just make you mad, if you don't agree with them.[93]

Nevertheless, Wardell arranged a luncheon in order to give Halifax the chance to talk to Low personally, and try to persuade him to tone down his attacks. Low was not convinced that a softer tone would result in a more moderate policy in Germany, and on a more personal level, that Halifax or Chamberlain were equipped to understand the dictators. He rather thought that the British government was being 'taken for a ride'.[94] Low finally stated that 'I understand you to say that you would find it easier to promote peace if my cartoons did not irritate the Nazi leaders personally?' 'Yes', Halifax replied.[95] This, as Shepherd splendidly stated, was 'a very English attempt at censorship'.[96] As Low added, 'We left it at that, and sitting on Wardell's roof-garden we looked at Hyde Park below and talked about the weather'. Even so, Low did agree to

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[91] Halifax to Henderson, 25 November 1937, Halifax papers A4.410.3.2 (ii), quoted in Benson, 'Low', p. 266.
[92] See Timothy Benson, 'Low and the Dictators – Editorial cartoonist David Low, and his ridiculing of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini', *History Today* 51 (2001), p. 38; cf. Chisholm and Davie, *Beaverbrook*, p. 350, who argue that the contact was 'at Beaverbrook's behest'.
[93] Quoted in Benson, 'Low and the Dictators', pp. 38-9.
[94] Low, *Autobiography*, pp. 278-9; see also Mellini, 'Why', p. 33.
[95] Quoted in Low, *Autobiography*, p. 278.
[96] Shepherd, *Class Divided*, p. 119.

modify his criticism of the dictators, and established the composite figure of 'Muzzler', in order to continue his criticism in a 'less personal key'. It seems that he chose the name as an allusion to the ministerial attempt to 'muzzle' his work. But his self-restraint lasted only for a short period.[97]

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A further indication of the *Evening Standard*'s independence from Beaverbrook's views is that Churchill was a frequent contributor. For a period he wrote a fortnightly article, including all his favourite themes such as collective security and rearmament. For example, his article 'Britain Rearms' in early January 1938 advocated still more rearmament than that proposed by the government, and caused no problems with either the editor or proprietor.[98] A week later, Low drew a critical cartoon about the state of air-armament, showing Swinton sleeping on an unfinished plane and dreaming of lots of planes in the air.[99] It is an indication of the paper's 'inconsistent' policies at the time that on the next day its 'Londoner's Diary' praised Swinton for performing his task with great competence.[100]

How can this be explained? Even Low remarked on this strange contrast: 'Things got a bit mixed up at times between me and the *Evening Standard*. Cartoons and leading articles often flatly contradicted one another.'[101] This strange feature also appeared between articles; a leader at the end of January 1938 claimed that the League was 'in effect, a meeting of undertakers. Its business is to dispose of the body. For the

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[97] Low, *Autobiography*, p. 279; see Chisholm and Davie, *Beaverbrook*, p. 350, and Shepherd, *Class*, p. 119.
[98] *Evening Standard*, 7 January 1938, p. 7: 'Britain Rearms', by Churchill.
[99] *Ibid.*, 12 January 1938, p. 10.
[100] *Ibid.*, 13 January 1938; *Ibid.*, 1 February 1938, p. 6.
[101] Low, *Autobiography*, p. 280.

League has expired. This is a fact which everybody knows, but which everybody does not admit.'[102] Yet this was followed by Churchill's contribution 'The League is not dead yet'.[103] It seems that there were no editorial conferences and little attempt to co-ordinate a common attitude.

With the tension rising over Austria in mid-February, the *Evening Standard* did argue for a policy of isolationism, in line with Beaverbrook's preference.[104] The events were seen as 'a reminder to us that to pursue fanciful "objects of British policy" in Europe is a course which can never lead to satisfactory results'. It 'illustrates once more the truth that Europe is a tract of shifting sands. And on those sands we can found no sure and lasting policy'.[105] The following day the paper declared that 'politically, events on the Continent …have reinforced the conclusion that the course of wisdom for us is to keep ourselves free from European commitments. … Our real interests lie within the British Commonwealth of Nations and primarily within our own island shores.'[106] In any case, the *Standard* asked, 'Did anyone ever think that the post-war settlement in Europe was destined to last forever?'[107]

The build up to the *Anschluss* was interrupted by Eden's resignation as Foreign Secretary. Although the newspaper's leaders played down the importance of the event,[108] Churchill's column paid more attention to it. He pointed out that the National government had lost their only popular figure, at a time when British policy seemed to be uncertain. Churchill also doubted if Mussolini was willing to distance himself from Hitler, join Britain, and help sustain the independence of Austria.[109] Here, as on other occasions, the paper appeared to speak with different voices. The Eden resignation and

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[102] *Evening Standard*, 25 January 1938, p. 6.
[103] *Ibid.*, 4 February 1938, p. 7: The League is not dead yet, by Churchill.
[104] *Ibid.*, 7 February 1938, p. 6.
[105] *Ibid.*, 16 February 1938, p. 6.
[106] *Ibid.*, 17 February 1938, p. 6.
[107] *Ibid.*, 18 February 1938, p. 6.
[108] *Ibid.*, 21 February 1938, p. 6; *Ibid.*, 26 February 1938, p. 6.
[109] *Ibid.*, 4 March 1938, p. 7: 'Carry On!', by Churchill.

the *Anschluss* prompted Low to return to his unreserved critical position towards the dictators and the British government, just at the time when there were rumours of increased government attempts to influence press opinion. His cartoon 'Press control? Why certainly, Rib old boy!' criticised any attempt to 'muzzle', and his own actions showed how impossible it was for the government to achieve restraint.[110] So too did Chamberlain's reference to Low's cartoons in a May 1938 speech to the Newspaper Society:

> Such criticism might do a great deal to embitter relations when we on our side are trying to improve them. German Nazis have been particularly annoyed by criticisms in the British press, and especially by cartoons. The bitter cartoons of Low of the Evening Standard have been a frequent source of complaint.[111]

When Hitler finally sent his armies into Austria, the *Standard* was quick to assure its readers that there would be no war in Europe at present, but was critical of France's position. More specifically, it reflected Beaverbrook's characteristic view of calling both for faster rearmament ('We must build up our fighting forces'), and for isolationism: 'No more pledges. No more European responsibilities. No more declarations that Britain's frontier lies on the Rhine. No more promises to go to the aid of Czechoslovakia.'[112] Last but not least, the paper was content with the outcome: one major German grievance had been settled, and without bloodshed.[113]

Yet again, the next day, Churchill drew a different lesson, arguing that time and advantage had been lost by the government's misreading of the German mind. While Churchill also emphasised the need to increase British defences, in a crucial distinction from Beaverbrook's stance he stressed the need for Britain to bear its part with the

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[110] *Ibid.*, 11 March 1938, p. 10.
[111] Quoted in Benson, 'Low', p. 274.
[112] *Evening Standard*, 12 March 1938, p. 6.
[113] *Ibid.*, 14 March 1938, p. 6; *Ibid.*, 17 March 1938, p. 6.

French Republic in a joint effort to avert a European war, urging his readers that action should be taken according to the Covenant of the League of Nations.[114]

So far, his articles had not crossed Beaverbrook's views: this changed after Churchill realised after the *Anschluss* that Hitler was a bigger threat than ever, and proposed a Grand Alliance to counter German aims. This was the opposite of Beaverbrook's stance of 'splendid isolation'. When Beaverbrook was asked in mid-March 1938 to talk to Chamberlain about the possibility of including Churchill in the government, Beaverbrook rejected the proposal.[115] Indeed he considered him to be probably 'the worst' possible alternative,[116] whilst Chamberlain, in Beaverbrook's eyes, was 'the undisputed leader of the Isolationists'.[117] This is a remarkable comment since its syntax indicates that Beaverbrook believed that Chamberlain was finally following his policy, not vice versa.

Churchill's intensified criticism of appeasement and arguments for intervention now became too much for Beaverbrook, who now really did exert his influence over the *Evening Standard*. Churchill's contract was terminated. As R.J. Thompson, Wardell's successor as manager, wrote: 'your views on foreign affairs and the part which this country should play are extremely opposed to those held by us.'[118] While Churchill had been sacked, Low was still working for the *Standard*. Churchill grasped this contradiction and wrote crossly back:

> With regard to the divergence from Lord Beaverbrook's policy, that of course has been obvious from the beginning, but it clearly appears to me to be less marked than in the case of the Low cartoons. I rather thought that Lord Beaverbrook prided himself upon forming a platform in the *Evening Standard* for various opinions including, of course, his own.[119]

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[114] *Ibid.*, 18 March 1938, p. 7: 'The Austrian Eye-Opener', by Churchill.
[115] See Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 571.
[116] Beaverbrook to Grigg, 20 June 1938, quoted in Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 383.
[117] Beaverbrook to Cummings, 4 March 1938, Beaverbrook papers C/104.
[118] R.J.Thompson to Churchill, 24 March 1938, quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Winston Churchill*, Companion, vol. V, part 3 (London, 1979), pp. 957-8.
[119] Churchill to Thompson, 11 April 1938, quoted in Gilbert, *Churchill,* Companion, vol. V, p. 987, and Benson, 'Low', p. 36.

From the explanation given to Churchill it is evident that he had lost his job because the policies he advocated directly contradicted Beaverbrook's views.[120] Churchill was certainly right about the continued licence given to Low. The difference, perhaps, was that Low offered humorous images rather than reasoned policy alternatives. Low was also careful not to offend his employer directly. For instance, in late March, his cartoon 'The Shiver Sisters Celebrate',[121] implied that politicians and journalists who favoured appeasement – like Garvin, Dawson, Grigg, Lothian, Lady Astor and Halifax, members of the so-called 'Cliveden set' – were under the influence of German propaganda. As Mellini states, 'Low's cartoons turned the Cliveden Set into a household phrase for an elite right-wing pro-Nazi conspiracy'.[122] Beaverbrook was not a member of the 'set'; even so Low knew Beaverbrook's opinions perfectly well – yet he did not target him in his cartoons.

During summer 1938, Low's cartoons warned the *Evening Standard*'s readers of the dangers of isolationism, most notably in the famous cartoon 'What is Czechoslovakia to me, anyway?'[123] In contrast the paper published optimistic articles about the conditions of Europe, and its editorials still expressed confidence in the government.[124] In early September it declared that 'opinion in this country is unanimous in having confidence in one thing – that Mr. Chamberlain and his ministers can be trusted to follow unswervingly two aims: peace, and the defence of Britain's interests and security.'[125] And again 'our luck at the moment is that we have in Neville

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[120] See Benson, 'Low', p. 48 , and Parker, *Churchill*, pp. 8-9.
[121] *Evening Standard*, 23 March 1938, p. 10.
[122] Mellini, 'Why', p. 33; see also Low, *Autobiography*, p. 311.
[123] *Evening Standard*, 18 July 1938, p. 10.
[124] See *Evening Standard*, 25 July 1938, p. 6; *ibid.*, 3 August 1938, p. 7; *ibid.*, 18 August 1938, p. 6; *ibid.*, 19 August 1938, p. 7.
[125] *Evening Standard*, 14 September 1938, p. 6.

Chamberlain a man who knows how to talk to men'.[126] Even so, it again forecast that rearmament might need to be intensified beyond the levels so far contemplated by the government. Rearmament 'has not been allowed to interfere to any considerable extent with the ordinary industrial activities of Britain. But if now the mobilisation of our might overlaps in some ways with the day-to-day tasks of the nation we shall not complain'.[127]

As early as 20 September the paper warned against any commitment towards Czechoslovakia, in line with Beaverbrook's support for isolationism, rather than in support of appeasement as such. The possibility of guaranteeing any revised Czechoslovakian frontiers was described as a 'sinister departure from recent British policy' and was vigorously opposed.[128] In consequence, it became critical of the prime minister: 'Mr. Baldwin gave us the Rhine as frontier; Mr. Chamberlain extends it to the Danube'.[129] Yet the newspaper's line was unsteady. On 27 September, it declared that if Hitler 'rejects peace and the full satisfaction offered of every legitimate claim, he will be challenging the united strength of Britain, France and Russia and defying the condemnation of almost the whole world.'[130] Two days later, it reverted to warning of the dangers of intervention: 'if British policy abroad was to persist in building up commitments to other States, then we should one day be presented with the bill to be paid in full and on the instant.'[131]

After the publication of the Munich settlement, the paper regretted that there was an implied guarantee to the rump Czechoslovakian state.[132] Low now published two further famous cartoons, criticising the Russian government's exclusion from the

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[126] *Ibid.*, 19 September 1938, p. 7.
[127] *Ibid.*, 15 September 1938, p. 6.
[128] *Ibid.*, 20 September 1938, p. 6.
[129] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[130] *Ibid.*, 27 September 1938, p. 6.
[131] *Ibid.*, 29 September 1938, p. 6.
[132] *Evening Standard*, 30 September 1939, p. 6; see also *ibid.*, 1 October 1938, p. 6, and *ibid.*, 3 October 1938, p. 6.

Munich talks – 'Why, no chair for me?'[133] – and the condition of British rearmament in 'Our New Defence', showing a piece of paper covering a breached wall.[134]

In an article entitled 'A Fourth Arm' the paper called for the establishment of a Ministry of Supply, in particular to make aircraft production more effective.[135] Beaverbrook's tendency for mischief-making (but also his sense of commercial opportunities) again became apparent, when Duff Cooper – the only Minister to resign in protest against the Munich settlement – was immediately given a column in the *Evening Standard*. In his first article he demanded a firm stand against the dictator states,[136] followed a week later with a call for conscription.[137] These views hardly fitted with the general Beaverbrook line, especially proclaimed in the *Daily Express*, that there would be no European war – any more than giving a platform to Cooper was compatible with suggestions that Beaverbrook's newspapers were under Chamberlain's influence. To those who complained about Cooper's articles Beaverbrook, notwithstanding the earlier termination of Churchill's contract, restated his long-standing claim that his papers provided an area for free debate. 'If I were to depart from that practice, it would be a complete reversal of policy, and I am not prepared to go so far at the present time.'[138]

Early in 1939 the dissonance between the *Evening Standard*'s editorial line and some of its contributors (as well as its cartoonist) continued.[139] The paper remained generally supportive of Chamberlain's foreign policy and optimistic about the European

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[133] Low, 'Why, no chair for me?', *Evening Standard*, 30 September 1938.
[134] Low, 'Our New Defence', *Evening Standard*, 5 October 1938.
[135] *Evening Standard*, 20 October 1938, p. 6; cf. also *ibid.*, 22 October 1938, p. 6.
[136] *Ibid.*, 11 October 1938, p. 7: 'Who Wants War?', by Duff Cooper.
[137] *Ibid.*, 19 October 1938, p. 7: 'The Will To Serve', by Duff Cooper.
[138] Beaverbrook to Chaplin, 2 February 1939, Beaverbrook papers B/295; for a confirmation of the independence see, Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, p. 252; see also Benson, 'Low', p. 285.
[139] See Low's 'Si vis pacem pare umbrellum', in 'Low's Topical Budget', *Evening Standard*, 12 November 1938, in which he turned Chamberlain's umbrella into a symbol of appeasement, trying to stress the point of Britain's inadequate armament program.

situation.[140] Yet Cooper warned the public that it would be mistaken if it thought 'that there has recently been a great improvement in the international situation', and urged the people to show their determination to resist Nazi aggression by enlisting for national service.[141]

On the brink of the German invasion of Prague the *Evening Standard* reminded its readers that the fate of the Czech state 'does not concern the people of Britain'. It also recalled that it had declared the Munich commitment to be an impossible undertaking. Britain should not intervene again in Eastern Europe diplomacy, but instead follow the path of detachment.[142] After the invasion, the paper reiterated that the Munich terms did not apply because they had not defined the Czechoslovakian frontiers,[143] and they were bound to crumble anyway.[144] Nevertheless, again in contrast to the 'no war' declarations in the *Daily Express* and Chamberlain's continued determination to avoid war, the newspaper urged a firm stand against further German aggression and the introduction of conscription.[145] This did not, however, stretch to support for the Polish guarantee, as Beaverbrook again asserted his authority. According to a Polish observer, he himself wrote the *Standard*'s article which interpreted the guarantee in a narrow sense, limiting British responsibility to supporting Polish 'independence', not 'territorial integrity'.[146]

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[140] E.g. *Evening Standard*, 4 January 1939, p. 6; *ibid.*, 10 March 1939, p. 6.
[141] *Ibid.*, 28 February 1939, p. 7: Is The Storm Over? By Duff Cooper.
[142] *Ibid.*, 13 March 1939, p. 6.
[143] *Ibid.*, 14 March 1939, p. 6.
[144] *Ibid.*, 15 March 1939, p. 6.
[145] *Ibid.*, 16 March 1939, p. 6; *Ibid.*, 17 March 1939, p. 6; *Ibid.*, 21 March 1939, p. 6; *Ibid.*, 23 March 1939, p. 7.
[146] See D.C. Watt, *How War Came. The immediate Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1989), pp. 186-7.

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It seems most unlikely that either Chamberlain or the Foreign Office had any meaningful influence over Beaverbrook, to the point where they could shape the opinions expressed in his newspapers. Beaverbrook, as his long experience as a 'political maverick' demonstrated, was fiercely independent. As comments from the Chamberlainite loyalist, Ball, in the mid 1930s indicated, the government could never rely upon Beaverbrook's support. When he supported Chamberlain's foreign policy, he did so for his own reasons, and on his own terms; indeed his commitment to British isolation from Europe meant that he could never go as far as Chamberlain towards appeasement, with its readiness to become involved in central European diplomacy. When there was special contact between Beaverbrook and ministers, as in September 1938, the initiative came from Beaverbrook.

Beaverbrook exercised different degrees of control over his various newspapers. With his main title, the *Daily Express*, it was tight, whereas he allowed the editor, journalists, columnists – and cartoonist – on the *Evening Standard* a greater degree of expression.[147] The *Evening Standard* sometimes stated contrary views to those of the *Express*; and at times Low's cartoons or Churchill's and Cooper's articles flatly contradicted the *Standard*'s editorial position. The one issue on which Beaverbrook required a common commitment by all his newspapers was imperial unity. Otherwise, he allowed a degree of independence to some of his editors, even on foreign policy.

The case of Low is significant and indicative. Beaverbrook himself did not seek to censor his cartoons, least of all under government pressure. As Seymour-Ure stated, the actual number of cartoons omitted was very small.[148] Halifax's appeal to Low on the grounds of national interest did persuade him to tone down his caricatures of Hitler, but

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[147] See Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 377, and Chisholm and Davie, *Beaverbrook*, p. 348.
[148] Seymour Ure and Schoff, *Low*, p. 50; also Mellini, 'Why', p. 31.

only for a brief period, ended by the *Anschluss*. Yet at the same time his critical commentary on British politics continued unabated. Low only acknowledged one limitation – that he should not ridicule Beaverbrook's commitment to the Empire. The difficulty with Churchill arose because his articles directly contradicted Beaverbrook's isolationist attitudes. For all Beaverbrook's affirmations about the editorial independence of his newspapers, there were some limits.

In his two newspapers, allowing expression of different perspectives, Beaverbrook 'could burn both ends of the candle at once'. He could promote his own views on foreign and defence policy, while retaining the appeal of his newspapers to readers of different opinion – and he could keep open his contacts with different political elements, including the developing body of anti-appeasers. Consequently it was difficult to identify his newspapers with any single attitude, which indeed, saved his reputation after May 1940. Beaverbrook was certainly among the strongest supporters of Chamberlain's appeasement during 1938. Yet the *Evening Standard*'s employment of Liberal and Labour radicals – crucially including few of the co-authors of *Guilty Men*, Owen and Foot – and its openness to alternative opinions, meant that from 1940 Beaverbrook was able to escape the now almost universal condemnation of the appeasers.[149]

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[149] See Benson, 'Low', p. 30, and Gron Williams, *Firebrand. The Frank Owen Story* (Worcester, 1993), p. 46.

CHAPTER V

J.L. GARVIN AND *THE OBSERVER*

Founded in 1791, *The Observer* was Britain's oldest Sunday newspaper. As one of just two quality Sunday newspapers, alongside the *Sunday Times*, its influence was considerable. This was especially so because J.L. Garvin, its long-serving editor (1908-42), commanded attention as a brilliant and trenchant political commentator – arguably the 'leading political journalist of the day'.[1] An independent Conservative, on international issues he was an 'intellectual Chamberlainite', in the sense of Joseph Chamberlain: an imperialist arguing for Anglo-Saxon understanding but not, like Beaverbrook, for British isolation from continental European affairs.[2] What Garvin wanted was a stable, satisfied, peaceful Europe which posed no serious challenges to British power. Before 1914 this had made him 'anti-German'.[3] But from 1919 he had been a consistent critic of the Treaty of Versailles, because in his view it created more problems than it solved: as late as 1938 he was still complaining of 'the purblind and botching statecraft of Versailles'.[4] From this perspective he was, in Gannon's words, 'the British Press's most outspoken Czechophobe'.[5] For him, Czechoslovakia was an artificial and dangerously unstable state, which 'never ought to have been created'[6] and

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[1] Philip Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government. British Politics, the Economy and Empire, 1926-1932* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 141; Rose, *Cliveden*, p. 19. See also Cockett, *David Astor*, p. 76; see also John Stubbs, 'Appearance and Reality: A Case Study of *The Observer* and J. L. Garvin, 1914-1942', in Boyce, Curran and Wingate (eds.), *Newspaper History*, p. 325; Alfred M. Gollin, *The Observer and Garvin 1908-14: a Study in a Great Editorship* (Oxford, 1966), passim.

[2] Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler. British Politics and British Policy 1933-1940* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 122; cf. Kehoe, 'British Press', p. 190, who saw in him 'the most influential spokesman for the isolationist section of the Conservative press'.

[3] Cowling, *Impact*, p. 123.

[4] *Observer*, 6 March 1938, p. 16. See also *Observer*, 20 March 1938, p. 14 and 27 March 1938, p. 21. For criticism, see Benny Morris, *The Roots of Appeasement. The British Weekly Press and Nazi Germany during the 1930s* (London, 1991), pp. 31-2; Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 10-1; Kehoe, 'British Press', p. 21.

[5] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 51.

[6] *Observer*, 6 March 1938, p. 16.

which should not be supported or defended. More generally, for the purposes of preserving European peace he was from early 1937 prepared to envisage German hegemony in Eastern Europe,[7] and even the return to Germany of its former overseas colonies.[8]

Although Garvin campaigned in the 1930s for Anglo–German reconciliation, this certainly did not mean that he was naïve about the nature of the Nazi regime. He disliked its racial policies, and was fully aware of the German military threat to European security.[9] Consequently he also campaigned for greater British rearmament, to ensure that Britain could act as a counter-weight to 'the new barbarism in the centre of Europe'.[10] It is therefore difficult to accept Gannon's claim that until the Munich crisis, Garvin was convinced of Hitler's desire for peace, and can – without qualification – be described as an appeaser.[11] It should also be emphasised that Garvin had thought about and commented on European politics for some forty years; that his attitudes towards Nazi Germany had become firmly established well before Chamberlain became prime minister, and that his influence rested upon his reputation for independent commentary.[12]

Although Garvin had partly learned his trade from close association with party leaders and ministers,[13] by the 1930s he had – for a political journalist – become unusually detached.[14] He edited the newspaper from his home near Beaconsfield, rarely visited London for any extended period, and had no sustained contact with or influence on the Conservative prime ministers of the 1930s, Baldwin and Chamberlain. This did

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[7] *Observer*, 21 March 1937, quoted in Stewart, *Burying*, p. 271; see also Neville Thompson, *The Anti-Appeasers. Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1971), p. 34.
[8] See Kehoe, 'British Press', p. 162.
[9] See Morris, *Roots*, p. 34.
[10] Garvin to Astor, 31 August 1933, quoted in Cowling, *Impact*, p. 123; see Morris, *Roots*, p. 33; Gannon, *British Press*, p. 51.
[11] See Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 51-2; see also Morris, *Roots*, p. 34.
[12] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 51.
[13] Williamson, *National Crisis*, p. 141.
[14] See Stubbs, 'Appearance and Reality', p. 329.

not mean, however, that he was out of touch with ministers and leading Conservatives. As well as conducting a vast correspondence with politicians and other newspaper controllers, he had further access to political opinions through *The Observer*'s proprietor, Waldorf, 2nd Viscount Astor, and his wife Nancy, the Conservative MP.

The Astors were famous political hosts, bringing together ministers and other public figures at Cliveden, their Berkshire country house. In the late 1930s a so-called 'Cliveden Set' was made notorious by the radical newsletter *The Week*, edited by the Communist Claud Cockburn. He claimed that the politicians and 'opinion formers' who visited Cliveden – including Lothian, Brand, Dawson, Londonderry, Halifax, Hoare and Simon – joined with the Astors in forming a group which manipulated foreign policy in pro-German directions. In a recent examination of these charges, Rose has described it as 'a classic conspiracy theory'.[15] In reality the 'Cliveden set' was not a coherent group which acted together in shaping policy. Rather, most of those invited to Cliveden by the Astors were like-minded individuals, who happened to be in favour of coming to terms with Nazi Germany. Nor should it be supposed that *The Observer* was an organ for this supposed 'Cliveden set'. Garvin was fiercely independently-minded and quite capable of disagreeing with his proprietor. Also, despite being linked with the 'set' in Low cartoons, he was not a frequent visitor to Cliveden.[16]

The newspaper's circulation was about 214,000.[17] Garvin and Astor were not overly concerned with increasing that figure, because their primary concerns were not profit-making. Astor had originally bought the paper in order to 'get certain things done' – to promote the courses of a broadly progressive Conservatism, imperial integration, and Anglo-American friendship. As he stated to Garvin 'you and I agree in fundamentals. To bring about what we want or believe in, some independent thought

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[15] Rose, *Cliveden*, p. 5; also Cockett, *Astor*, p. 59.
[16] Stubbs, 'Appearance and Reality', p. 330.
[17] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 51.

and the formation of sound opinion is essential'.[18] This combination of solid sales yet refusal to engage in circulation wars gave the newspaper the advantage of a financial independence which underpinned its editorial independence.[19]

Garvin and Astor agreed that Chamberlain's succession as prime minister represented the best possibility of achieving an Anglo-German settlement. In July 1937 Garvin wrote that because Chamberlain had been 'staunch on social reform', so he seemed to have the 'right instinct for the main things in foreign affairs'. He hoped that Chamberlain would come to an agreement with Germany, at the expense of Austria and Czechoslovakia, and thus exclude them from what he termed Britain's 'contingent obligation' to Central Europe, under the Versailles Treaty.[20] Astor, too, saw the possibility of a fresh start in Anglo-German relations and suggested that Garvin should write articles 'reminding the reader of some of the grosser mistakes of the Versailles and other treaties'.[21]

Garvin's criticism of Versailles was one reason why he had gained a reputation as a leading pro-German commentator, even to the point of appearing in the famous 'Shiver Sisters' cartoon by David Low, next to Dawson, Lothian, and Nancy Astor, dancing to the propaganda of Goebbels. But did he deserve his place in the cartoon? And was he susceptible to influence of any kind? *The Observer* had a well-established perspective on Germany, supported nearly all the time by Astor. While this attitude undoubtedly generated independent support for Chamberlain, it was not at all a response to government pressure. Far from supporting the government unequivocally, after Munich *The Observer* became fiercely critical.

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[18] Astor to Garvin, 27 December 1912, quoted in Stubbs, 'Appearance and Reality', p. 330; see also Cockett, *Astor*, p. 77.
[19] See Stubbs, 'Appearance and Reality', p. 320.
[20] Garvin to Astor, 19 July 1937, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 26.
[21] Astor to Garvin, 16 May 1937, quoted in *ibid.*.

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The Abyssinian crisis was vital in determining Garvin's policy towards Europe in the late 1930s. Initially he believed that Italian Fascism, though hideous to the British mind, was a lesser evil than German National Socialism, and that Italy was essential to the stability of Europe in the face of Hitler.[22] Garvin, like members of the National government, had hoped and believed in 1934 that Mussolini shared French and British anxieties over Hitler's designs against Austria, and could be included in a co-ordinated attempt to check German ambitions, the 'Stresa Front'.[23] However, the Abyssinian crisis separated Britain and France from Mussolini, and their antagonism not only ended the prospect of an anti-Nazi bloc but drove Mussolini towards association with Hitler. Faced with this setback, and acutely aware of Britain's military weakness, Garvin decided to support Chamberlain's policy of appeasing Hitler.

More particularly, the failure of League policy over Abyssinia forced Garvin to reconsider his stance over Austria. In summer of 1935, he had described Austria as 'the keystone' of a lasting peace in Europe, and argued that the defence of its independence was 'the acid test of British Policy'.[24] A year later his position had completely reversed: he now argued that a possible unification of Austria and Germany was 'about the last question on earth in which British policy should dream of interfering'.[25] As the Austrian crisis developed in February 1938, Garvin therefore urged some kind of cooperation between Austria and Germany, claiming that this was what the public wanted.[26] Such a stance was also the logical consequence of his political views on the injustice of the Versailles Treaty, which had separated the two countries: '[Austria] is riven with

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[22] See Stubbs, 'Appearance and Reality', p. 333.
[23] See Cowling, *Impact*, p. 125.
[24] *Observer*, 14 July 1935, p. 16, quoted in Morris, *Roots*, pp. 121-2.
[25] *Observer*, 22 November 1936, p. 16, quoted in Morris, *Roots*, pp. 123.
[26] *Observer*, 20 February 1938, p. 14.

discord. A powerful section passionately demands closer union with the Reich. Conflict would mean civil war. It is a family issue within the German race. We have nothing to do with it.'[27]

Clearly Austria was no longer important to Garvin. Indeed, he thought that a solution to the Austrian problem 'may even help the all-important cause of a Anglo-German settlement'.[28] Nevertheless, the precipitate and forceful manner in which Hitler conducted the *Anschluss* was a matter of concern, to which Garvin responded by urging that the British government 'should extend [its] rearmament without delay'.[29] Still, for Garvin the *Anschluss* removed 'an obstacle to European settlement',[30] and could be justified on the purpose of German 'self-determination'.[31]

Garvin was unconcerned that Czech security was now fatally weakened; rather he represented Czechoslovakia as another 'obstacle to European peace'.[32] Long before other newspapers – and indeed the government – began to think hard about the Sudeten issue, *The Observer* proposed a solution. 'The Bohemian Germans in 1919 were promised equality "on Swiss principles". The promise has not been kept. It has got to be fulfilled.'[33] According to Garvin, reorganisation on the Swiss model – with local autonomy for each of its various nationalities – would result in the creation of a neutral state.[34] But the paper did not argue for secession or dismemberment of the area, because the strategic consequences were of such magnitude. This seemed of great importance to Garvin, because he was concerned about the way in which the European alliance systems might operate in the existing circumstances. Russia and France were bound by treaties to defend the integrity of Czechoslovakia. Although Britain had no such

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[27] *Ibid.*, 6 March 1938, p. 16.
[28] *Ibid.*, 20 February 1938, p. 14.
[29] *Ibid.*, 13 March 1938, p. 16.
[30] *Ibid.*, 20 March 1938, p. 14.
[31] *Ibid.*, 20 March 1938, p. 14.
[32] *Ibid.*, 30 March 1938, p. 14l; see Morris, *Roots*, p. 124.
[33] *Observer*, 6 March 1938, p. 16; see also *ibid.*, 20 March 1938, p. 14, and 27 March 1938, p. 21.
[34] *Ibid.*, 1 May 1938, p. 16; see Morris, *Roots*, p. 145.

commitment, if a German intervention resulted in a French military response, the British government would probably feel bound to support the French and be drawn into war.[35] The Russian treaty was no less dangerous: it gave the Soviet government an opportunity to intervene in Central Europe, which might in turn encourage Soviet ambitions to invade Western Europe. The importance of rearmament and security for Garvin became increasingly clear over the month. He constantly attacked the government on the rearmament issue, in particular the air threat. 'Though we are the most vulnerable people on earth to the new arm, instead of parity we have disparity. Instead of the parity promised more than three years ago we have disparity, humiliating, dangerous, and increasing.'[36]

Through July and August 1938, Garvin's line was to welcome moves towards settlement of Sudeten demands. The Czechoslovakian government, he argued, would never make 'sufficient concessions' to the Sudetens so long as it thought it could count on British support.[37] On the other hand, he rejected Hitler's proposals as a 'reasoned amendment' to the Czechoslovakian government's suggestions.[38] Such attitudes were welcomed by Chamberlain, though at first he was less hopeful than Garvin about the prospects of a peaceful solution. 'I wish I could have that conviction; I doubt if Garvin would be so confident if he had all my information.'[39] In other words, Garvin was not being influenced by ministerial briefings. As well as continuing to recommend his own proposal of cantonal autonomy,[40] he was at this point actually in advance of Chamberlain's own expectations. Garvin also differed in his awareness of how far German actions were affecting British public opinion. 'There is not one particle of

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[35] *Observer*, 29 May 1938, p. 16; see Morris, *Roots*, p. 129.
[36] *Observer*, 8 May 1938, p. 18; see *ibid.*, 15 May 1938, p. 16, where the state of British rearmament is described as: 'We are sorry to have to call it an anti-climax. It is another chapter in the interminable story entitled "Too small and too slow".'
[37] *Observer*, 29 May 1938, p. 16.
[38] *Ibid.*, 24 July 1938, p. 14.
[39] Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 21 August 1938, NC 18/1/1064.
[40] *Observer*, 28 August 1938, p. 12.

sympathy any more with Germany. Not an atom. That's dead. …the Germans could not possibly have been clumsier … [or] more egoistical.' Indeed, he went so far as to state that the British daily press 'no longer gives any true idea of the feeling of this country'.[41]

As the crisis deepened during September, Garvin feared that 'a German onslaught on Czecho-Slovakia would be a deliberate and unparalleled destruction of the world's peace, and that it would be impossible for Britain to remain neutral'.[42] Yet at first he disliked *The Times*'s suggestion that the Sudetenland should be ceded to Germany. This, he argued, would weaken Czechoslovakia, which in turn would weaken French security – again with potentially terrible consequences. Instead, as late as 11 September he continued to propose that Czechoslovakia should transform itself into a second Switzerland, 'decentralised but federalised, neutralised and guaranteed'.[43] Yet just one week later Garvin reversed his position, and now advocated secession: 'Britain and the Empire will not go to war against the doctrine of self-determination.' Even so, he hoped the government would engineer a 'peace with honour', not 'a peace of surrender'.[44]

In order to understand the shift in *The Observer*'s position, Garvin's private thinking has to be examined. Although publicly supporting secession and Chamberlain's appeasement, the new crisis had much increased his suspicion of German ambitions and his private doubts about the prospect of Anglo-German reconciliation. But given his fears about the condition of British rearmament, he did not feel that he should press the case for resistance to German demands. At this point, the situation was so serious that Garvin was conscious of an editorial responsibility to

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[41] Garvin to Lord Astor, 30 August 1938, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 64.
[42] *Observer*, 11 September 1938, p. 14.
[43] *Ibid.*.
[44] *Ibid.*, 18 September 1938, p. 14.

exercise great restraint, in order to avoid complicating the negotiations and alarming (or inflaming) public opinion. There was, he told Astor, much that could not be said or 'hinted at in print'.[45] Garvin was therefore among those newspaper controllers whom Cockett describes as 'freely engaging in a conspiracy of silence based on a policy of self-censorship'.[46] Yet it should not be concluded, as Cockett does, that this was the effect of intervention by Hoare, or indeed by any other minister. Rather, from an acute sense of what he considered to be the pressing national interest of avoiding a European war, Garvin himself chose not to publish his worst fears but instead accepted what seemed to be the only possible means of preserving peace. The crucial words in Cockett's statement are 'freely' and 'self-censorship'. None of this meant that *The Observer* endorsed the whole of Chamberlain's analysis. During the crisis Astor was already looking to a reconstruction of the government on new principles:

> Britain was bound to lose face whatever happened now – that the best chance of restoring some kind of world position for ourselves and of regaining our self-respect was to set up a new and national Government for defence with a striking programme of increased output of aero engines … to negotiate from strength.[47]

As he revealed a year later, the Czechoslovakian crisis had made him realise that Britain was dealing with 'a more heavily armed gangster'.[48] Garvin agreed, and even in *The Observer* hinted at the need for a new start and a firm stand: 'The Nazi power last week threw off the mask before the British Prime Minister. … They counted that their armed advantage had made them already the masters of the earth. Not yet.'[49] Wickham Steed, former editor of *The Times*, grasped the change of opinion in Garvin's editorial: 'You

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[45] Garvin to Astor, 21 September 1938, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 77.
[46] See *ibid.*.
[47] Astor to Garvin, 21 September 1938, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 146.
[48] Astor to John Stewart Bryan, 1 November 1939, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 146.
[49] See *Observer*, 25 September 1938, p. 14.

have lifted a load from my heart this morning. It has lain there many long days. … Now, thank goodness, you have recaptured your old self.'[50]

Nevertheless, *The Observer* welcomed the Munich pact, and even described it as a sign for 'healing statesmanship'.[51] Was this because of government influence? There is nothing in Chamberlain's diaries and letters to indicate any attempt to influence the Astors and Garvin at this time. Indeed, as Garvin confirmed to Amery's wife: 'I *never* ask to see Neville'.[52] In the same way as Chamberlain made his own decisions about British foreign policy, so Garvin independently came to his own conclusions on how to lead the paper.[53] Here, the relief of having avoided war was universal and was not only expressed in *The Observer*. It argued that the result was the 'very best that could be achieved in the stern and stark circumstances'.[54]

There is simply no need to point to 'government influence' as an explanation. The reason for *The Observer*'s acceptance of the Munich pact is plain in its simultaneous calls for full-scale rearmament and immediate conscription – or as it stated a week later, if British and French armaments had 'been as strong as their words, the world's recent ordeal would not have arisen at all'.[55] Instead, the power of the German air force had been 'a dominant factor behind the ultimatums'.[56] Over the following months, Garvin appealed for unity between the political parties in support of stronger defence and demanded the creation of a Ministry of Supply and a National Register, in anticipation of conscription. 'The crucial need is unity for defence.'[57]

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[50] Steed to Garvin, 25 September 1938, quoted in Ayerst, *Garvin*, p. 269.
[51] *Observer*, 2 October 1938, p. 11; see Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 583.
[52] Garvin to Mrs Amery, 4 October 1938, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 26.
[53] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 51.
[54] *Observer*, 2 October 1938, p. 14
[55] *Ibid.*, and *Observer*, 9 October 1938, p. 18.
[56] *Ibid.*, 9 October 1938, p. 18.
[57] *Ibid.*. *The Observer* continued its criticism over the autumn, and the demand for a Ministry of Supply and National Register; see *Observer*, 16 October 1938, p. 18, *Observer*, 6 November1938, p. 16, and *Observer*, 13 November 1938, p. 16.

Moreover, Garvin and Astor disliked the reception of the Munich settlement in other newspapers. Garvin privately criticised the 'hysterical raptures for Chamberlain': in contrast, he noted, 'we have written under the strictest reserve', demanding that 'comment on many aspects must be rigorously postponed'.[58] Astor too was sensitive to the contrast, comparing his own newspaper's independence to what he assumed to be the ministerial 'inspired dope in the *Sunday Times*'.[59]

The Observer's public acceptance of the Munich settlement, which might be seen to represent a high point of Chamberlainite influence over newspapers, was in reality anything but that. Munich was the moment that pushed Garvin into 'the anti-appeasement camp'.[60] Privately, he was now critical of Chamberlain and his Cabinet, and of the conditions which he believed they had created: 'this peace with humiliating weakness … is something worse than I ever saw in my time'.[61] Even so, Garvin and Astor felt they had to continue general public support for the government, because as yet they could see no viable alternative, and because preserving as much political stability as possible seemed vital if rearmament was to be pressed forward in any form.[62]

Garvin linked the occupation of Prague in March 1939 with Chamberlain's shortcomings at Munich: by failing to stand up to Hitler, Czechoslovakia's fate had been decided.[63] His own disillusionment with Germany was now complete: 'Most odious and intolerable is the systematic deception they [the Germans] employ in order to make dupes of those of us who have honestly wished to be friends.'[64] It was now clear to him that Hitler was following the plan set out in *Mein Kampf*, which Garvin

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[58] Garvin notes on 'Correspondence and Documents Relating to Czechoslovakia', September 1938, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 82-3.
[59] Astor to Garvin, October (undated) 1938, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 83.
[60] Morris, *Roots*, p. 160.
[61] Garvin to Astor, 3 November 1938, quoted in Morris, *Roots*, p. 147; also Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 148.
[62] See Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 583. ok
[63] *Observer*, 19 March 1939, p. 16.
[64] Garvin to Astor, 16 March 1939, quoted in Morris, *Roots*, p. 160.

read in the full German version.[65] Consequently, *The Observer* abandoned any remaining hope of agreement with Germany.[66]

Instead, Garvin proposed a 'commitment for military action' with Russia and France: 'the apostle of force' had to be 'stopped and beaten by counterforce in the shape of a world's coalition'.[67] The shift in priorities was stark: for *The Observer*, Germany had replaced Russia as the greatest threat. For Garvin, to reach this conclusion, he had to overcome great doubts. As Ayerst wrote, Garvin 'loved Russia' and valued the country as a power, but had strong reservations about its political system.[68] The divergence from Chamberlain's government became still more manifest with Garvin's scepticism towards the Polish guarantee: this, he implied, was inadequate – what was really needed was a Russian alliance.[69]

But this was as close as Garvin came to an open break with the British government, which still rejected the idea of an alliance with Russia. In private, however, he had no illusions about the government, and its attitude towards Germany. The events of the past have not changed its approach towards Germany, he told Astor: 'I doubt whether the Cabinet yet comprehends the breadth and urgency of the business … or the size of the game that Hitler is attempting'. At the same time he hoped for 'the dramatic stroke' to complete an alliance with Russia.[70]

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[65] *Observer*, 26 March 1939, p. 16; see Gannon, *British Press*, p. 261. For Garvin reading *Mein Kampf*, see Morris, *Roots*, p. 5.

[66] A German Foreign Office official saw Garvin at Cliveden and recorded: 'that it was better to end an honourable history of 800 years with a desperate struggle, rather than "allow oneself to be kicked around like a fool and a coward" (Garvin evidently believes war with Germany to be inevitable)', *DGFP*, Ser. D, vi, doc.497, p. 684; also quoted in Gannon, *British Press*, p. 52.

[67] *Observer*, 26 March 1939, p. 16; see also *ibid.*, 19 March 1939, p. 16.

[68] See Ayerst, *Garvin*, p. 177.

[69] See *Observer*, 9 April 1939, p. 10, and *ibid.*, 2 April 1939, p. 14; see *ibid.*, 14 May 1939, p. 12; see *ibid.*, 4 June 1939, also 9 April 1939, p. 10. Privately he wrote: 'These people here ought to have secured Russia first. Without that the Polish engagement would be the worst blunder in the history of our foreign policy except the sanctions against Italy in 1935', Garvin to Grigg, 20 June 1939, quoted in Ayerst, *Garvin*, p. 269.

[70] Garvin to Astor, 20 March 1939, quoted in Morris, *Roots*, p. 160.

Although Garvin and Astor were agreed in wanting changes in British foreign policy and greater drive in rearmament, at this point they began to diverge. Astor now sought wide-ranging reconstruction of the government, to include Liberal and Labour leaders.[71] Above all, he wanted Churchill included: this demand, he believed, was the most effective means of applying pressure on Chamberlain to revise his policies. In contrast Garvin continued to believe even now that – amidst a severely deteriorating international situation – as a responsible editor he should support the prime minister. Again, his appeal was to the national interest. It was 'not possible for us to enable the Germans to say or think that the P.M. has lost the confidence of the country and that the nation is already split or splitting'.[72] Not just independently, but against the wishes of his proprietor, Garvin decided to omit comment and opinions which would weaken Chamberlain's position. His refusal to attack Chamberlain directly continued after the outbreak of war and right up to the end of Chamberlain's government in May 1940, to Astor's growing exasperation.

Garvin's stand against Astor has wider significance. It demonstrates the force among editors of quality newspapers of the principles of press freedom and editorial responsibility – a freedom and a responsibility which might be exercised as much by restraint as by criticism, and which was associated with the conception of the national interest which outweighed other influences and pressures. Garvin had publicly reaffirmed these principles in March 1938, when explaining press restraint in conditions of possible war:

> no muzzling-order and no censorship can be imposed upon the freedom of the Press by any British Government. Upon the newspapers and the propagandist speakers themselves lies the duty of responsible restraint. Unless they exercise it with a sense of all that is at stake they may have blood on their hands.[73]

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[71] See Cowling, *Impact*, p. 252.
[72] Garvin to Astor, 10 July 1939, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 148; see Cockett, *Astor*, p. 79
[73] *Observer*, 6 March 1938, p. 16.

Not even the outbreak of war changed Garvin's attitude. When Astor called for a reconstruction of the government in May 1940, Garvin rejected this, stressing the need for 'unity' in front of Germany.[74] All Astor could do was to watch how Garvin supported Chamberlain to the end, while Britain went into the catastrophe 'united in silence'.[75] After Churchill had taken over the government, Garvin now 'pledged the paper to unquestioning loyalty to the new Prime Minister'.[76] He did so for the same reason that he had supported Chamberlain, that it was the duty of a responsible editor to support the government in times of crisis. When in August 1941 the paper's political correspondent praised Churchill in a report, Astor, who was a critic of Churchill, despite his support in the summer 1939, 'instructed' Garvin to correct the correspondent. This attempt to interfere in the paper's policy was too much for Garvin. He replied:

> Your letter is an insult, almost unique, to the tradition of honest journalism in this country. ... I refuse to rebuke or suggestionise our parliamentary correspondent in that sense ... I am sick of these personal feuds that you are extending right and left from the Prime Minister down. I will have nothing to do with it. But the implication of your letter touch as well the standards of British journalism as they have been and shall be maintained by me. Shall be, so long as Responsible Editorship belongs to Your affectionate, Garve.[77]

In the light of this rebuttal, it is no wonder that Garvin's contract on *The Observer* was not renewed.

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Earlier in this chapter, reference was made to Low's 'Shiver Sisters' cartoon, showing Garvin among those who danced to Goebbels's tune. This was certainly an

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[74] See Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 149.
[75] Astor to Garvin, 3 May 1940, quoted in Cockett, *Astor*, p. 80.
[76] Cockett, *Astor*, p. 80.
[77] Garvin to Astor, 14 August 1941, quoted in Ayerst, *Garvin*, p. 271.

injustice to the man.[78] Garvin was never part of the 'Cliveden set', and was resistant to influence which worked against his own judgment.[79] His problems with editorial freedom came from his proprietor, not from the government. He was a fiercely independent editor who flatly rejected the notion that an editor simply received instructions from his proprietor. This was evident each time a new contract was negotiated between them. In 1936, for instance, he wrote that 'if there comes to be any question of muzzle, gag or opinion in it, I must be free to leave and tell the country why'.[80] What Garvin insisted upon in his relations with his employer were no less evident in his relations towards the government. Given his criticism of the Versailles Treaty and desire for an understanding with Nazi Germany before Munich, he could certainly be labelled an appeaser. But while his views for long coincided with or were similar to those of Chamberlain's government, they were long-established and held independently of government influence.[81]

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[78] Cockett, *Astor*, p. 79.
[79] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 52.
[80] Garvin to Astor, 12 June 1936, quoted in Ayerst, *Garvin*, p. 266.
[81] See Cockett, *Astor*, p. 79.

CHAPTER VI

'SERVING THE NATIONAL INTEREST':

ARTHUR MANN AND THE *YORKSHIRE POST*

The *Yorkshire Post* is significant because it provides a sensitive test for Cockett's claim about Chamberlainite 'control' over British newspapers. The problems are evident even from Cockett's own text. The *Post*'s editor, Arthur Mann (1919-39), can certainly be shown to have experienced political pressure. According to Cockett, 'it was Mann's misfortune that he was the editor of the one paper that was still financially run by and for the Conservative Party in Yorkshire. The paper did not have the capitalist independence that allowed other editors to pursue a less party-political line'.[1] Aside from the implicit concession that other newspapers had greater editorial independence, the statement is interesting because elsewhere Cockett accepts that the paper was sceptical about the 'party-political line':

> there was only one paper that attempted to give a true indication of the feeling of the country, and that was the *Yorkshire Post* ... Mann, did not suffer from any false sense of loyalty to Chamberlain, nor did he acquiesce in the latter's high-minded identification of himself with the cause of national unity.[2]

The interest of the *Yorkshire Post* was also emphasised by Margach, which in his otherwise fierce criticism of the British press at this time described the *Yorkshire Post* as having 'a robust independence', and by Koss, who claimed that 'of all the routinely Tory papers ... the *Yorkshire Post* went furthest towards disowning Chamberlain'.[3]

These interpretative difficulties arose partly from the use of different sources. As Margach and Koss indicate – and as Cockett has to concede – the *Post*'s independence

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[1] Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 100.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[3] Margach, *Abuse*, p. 53; Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 583.

was manifest in its published editorial views. But Cockett was the first historian to have access to Mann's private papers, which reveal disagreement with the chairman of the newspaper's proprietors, Rupert Beckett – a dispute which he identified with pressure from Conservative Central Office. However, careful re-examination of the sources reveals a more complex position; nor is there clear evidence of the assumed line of attempted influence from the Chamberlainites to Mann himself.

The *Yorkshire Post* shared with the Liberal *Manchester Guardian* – considered in the next chapter – the distinction of being among the leading English regional newspapers. Although they had relatively low circulation figures compared with the national newspapers, they exercised a national influence which calls into question Koss's decision largely to omit the provincial press from his study, 'because it received short shrift in reality'.[4] In fact, political leaders aware of the local bases of electoral politics knew very well that the best provincial newspapers mattered, a significance which meant that their views were quoted in foreign newspapers.[5] Baldwin, for instance, considered the provincial press to be valuable and effective as a counterweight to the national newspapers of the 'press barons'.[6] The *Yorkshire Post* had long had good contacts with national Conservative leaders, who regarded it as generally reliable. It was in effect Halifax's local newspaper, and Mann had been consulted at critical periods by Baldwin and successive party chairmen.[7]

The paper's Conservative political credentials were evident in the name of its publishers – The Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Association. It was based in Leeds. The high quality of its reportage and comment, combined with its Conservative

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[4] *Ibid.*, ii, p. 3.
[5] See Mildred A. Gibb and Frank Beckwith, *The Yorkshire Post. Two Centuries* (Bradford London, 1954), p. 70.
[6] See Williamson, *Baldwin*, p. 80.
[7] See *ibid.*

perspective, had led to it being described as '*The Times* of the North of England'.[8] Nevertheless, Mann was very much in the tradition of editors who regarded the national interest – not party loyalty alone – as the most important concern in a newspaper's editorial policy. In the context of the late 1930s, this meant 'the safety of the realm is still the first principle of true Conservatism'. For Mann, the purpose of editorial responsibility and independence meant refraining from close personal contacts with politicians. Mann tried to emphasise his own independence by limiting his social contacts with both pro-appeasement politicians and critical voices. Accused of being too close to critics of the government, such as Eden,[9] he categorically denied any influence on the part of the former foreign secretary many times in public and in private. 'I should like to take this opportunity of letting you know, and through you, any others who share this illusion, that Mr. Eden exerts no more influences on the policy of "The Yorkshire Post" than you do yourself', he replied on one occasion.[10] This detachment included the rejection of political honours. In the 1920s he declined two such offers. His first letter of refusal, to Baldwin, indicates his attitude: 'I feel that a journalist who receives a title, particularly if that title be suggested as a recognition of political services, may … lessen his power to aid the cause he has at heart.'[11]

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In the mid 1930s the *Yorkshire Post* shared an understanding of some of the achievements of Hitler's Germany, and sympathy with some of its grievances.

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[8] See Mann report, no date, Mann papers, Ms. Eng c.3274, fol. 227; also quoted in Gibb and Beckwith, *Yorkshire Post*, p. 44.
[9] See Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 387, arguing a close alliance between Mann and Eden; cf. Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 99, who denied closer political contact between both.
[10] Mann to Radcliffe, 16 June 1938, Mann papers Ms. Eng c.3274. For further denials of Eden's influence see Mann to Major Pearson, 2 March 1938, Mann papers Ms. Eng c.3274, fol. 8, Mann to A.G. Hebblethwaite, 7 October 1938, Mann papers Ms. Eng c.3274, fol. 40.
[11] Mann to Baldwin, 27 December 1923, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 62.

Nevertheless, it supported a firm stand against German aggression. This should, it argued, be based upon collective security through the League of Nations. 'We cannot swerve from that policy without damaging our prestige and without plainly betraying those countries which so far have gone with us in pursuit of League policy.'[12] Germany, it argued, could not complain about 'encirclement' when it had withdrawn from the collective system by its own decision. The newspaper also strongly supported British rearmament, because it believed that the British government could only hope to play an effective role in European and League of Nations affairs from a position of strength. If Britain's position was clear and strong, it would be up to Germany to decide how to react.

While the *Yorkshire Post* initially considered some German grievances to be justified, it objected strongly to the occupation of the Rhineland's demilitarised zone by Hitler's army in March 1936. In the paper's view, this event revealed much about the aggressive nature of Hitler's regime and should be regarded as a clear breach of the Locarno Treaty, which the Germans had signed voluntarily – not to mention a repudiation of the Treaty of Versailles. In its assessment of Hitler's move, the *Post* declared that 'we cannot insulate ourselves against the effects on the Continent, because the peace of Europe may be endangered by this action, and the peace of Europe is Britain's most immediate personal concern'.[13] Such words represented a firm stand against the 'isolationism' so vehemently supported by Beaverbrook and his newspapers. The paper argued that there was a direct correlation between Germany's strength and Britain's weakness, a result of its attachment to 'pacifism': 'we believe Herr Hitler has depended to a very large extent upon the known desire of the Government and the people of this country to seek peace and ensure it, and in all circumstances to prefer

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[12] See Gibb and Beckwith, *Yorkshire Post*, pp. 81-2.
[13] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 83.

conciliation and negotiation to the pre-war methods of provocation'.[14] But, the paper continued, 'to avoid the catastrophe which German action has brought dangerously near', Britain had to rearm. In doing so the newspaper joined the articulate advocates of rearmament in Parliament. 'We pay a price for democracy. If it is not to be too high, then the people themselves must rally without reserve to the support of the Government' in taking necessary defensive measures.[15]

From these perspectives, after the *Anschluss* Mann made the *Post* a critic of the British government. It had failed to appreciate that Hitler's action followed the plan outlined in *Mein Kampf*. The Cabinet was 'unfitted to grasp' the realities of foreign policy, basing its policy on 'illusion'.[16] The *Yorkshire Post* urged the government to issue a firm public declaration of its determination to keep the peace, backed by a sharp increase in rearmament.[17] It even went so far as to express sympathy with Churchill's attacks on the Cabinet and defence policies.[18]

These statements worried the *Post*'s proprietors, who, after all, assumed that the newspaper's political *raison d'etre* was to support the Conservative party and its leader. Beckett told Mann that he had read 'with growing concern day-by-day the Y.P. leaders devoted to foreign policy'. He also detected a desire to have Chamberlain 'replaced', an objective with which he did not think the paper should be associated. He asked Mann not to persist with his criticism, especially because these would increase Chamberlain's difficulties in responding to difficult international conditions.[19] Mann's reaction was best stated in a reply to similar observations by another member of the board of directors. 'I have always enunciated "Yorkshire Post" policy as Editor without receiving

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[14] *Ibid.* [same article]. See Mann to E.J.Radcliffe, 16 and 22 June 1938, Mann papers, Ms. Eng c.3274.
[15] Quoted in Gibb and Beckwith, *Yorkshire Post*, p. 83.
[16] *Yorkshire Post*, 16 March 1938, p. 8; *Yorkshire Post*, 17 March 1938, p. 8. See also Mann to Radcliffe, 22 June 1938, Mann papers, Ms. Eng c.3274.
[17] See *Yorkshire Post*, 15 March 1938, p. 10; 16 March 1938, p. 8; 21 March 1938, p. 8.
[18] See *Ibid.*, 16 March, p. 8.
[19] Beckett to Mann, 23 March 1938, Mann papers, Ms. Eng c.3274; see Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 63.

any instructions from the Directors. … I have offered my personal judgement after most careful study, on important national issues – not always on strict party lines'. In the present case, his conclusion was that 'Mr. Chamberlain's policy … is dangerous to the national interest'.[20]

A few days later Mann had an interview with Chamberlain himself. Unfortunately the sources do not reveal who took the initiative in arranging the meeting, and therefore who was trying to influence whom. Was this a prime example of Chamberlain personally trying to influence a newspaper? Or was it a case of a newspaper editor trying to influence the prime minister? The tone of Chamberlain's comments suggest that the initiative came from Mann; and if Chamberlain did regard the meeting as a opportunity to put pressure on an editor, it is striking how unsuccessful he was. Mann pressed Chamberlain to take a firm stand against the dictators, and to make a bold declaration which would rally the democratic nations in an effort to avert war.[21] Attempting to reinforce his appeal, he also reminded Chamberlain of earlier occasions – notably the abdication crisis – when, in contrast to other newspapers, the *Yorkshire Post* had judged the 'public opinion' correctly.

Chamberlain was normally sensitive and careful with editors, including those from the provinces – and not just those of the Conservative newspaper in his own region, the *Birmingham Post*, which he had long cultivated. Yet he was unusually dismissive with Mann. Chamberlain not only refused to respond to Mann's criticism. According to Mann's later recollection he said he was 'much to busy to read the provincial newspapers', and cut Mann short by saying 'I'm afraid I have an appointment at 11.15,

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[20] Mann to Pearson, 23 March 1938, Mann papers, Ms. Eng. c.3274 fol. 8.
[21] See Mann memo 'Interview with Neville Chamberlain', 21 March 1938, Mann papers, Ms. Eng. c.3274; see Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 63-4, who dates the interview on 27 March 1938.

and it is now 11.14'.[22] All this may have been another instance of Chamberlain's impatience with and rejection of criticism. But it may also have indicated that he understood that there was no point in trying to alter Mann's views – that he was immune to such influence.

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During the Czechoslovakian crisis, the *Yorkshire Post* continued to offer constructive criticism not just on foreign policy, but also on the character of the Cabinet – calling for inclusion of the opposition party leaders in a broader, reconstructed government.[23] Nevertheless, like other editors – and indeed politicians – he felt the European situation had become so serious that it was desirable to exercise temporary restraint. As he commented to his diplomatic correspondent at a particularly sensitive moment, 'we can only deal, I think, tonight with the Godesberg meeting in our restrained style on the general lines that the omens are not propitious'.[24] Similarly, he commented privately to Churchill about a point of criticism on government policy that for 'patriotic reasons we may not say so' publicly.[25] Of wider significance was an earlier withdrawal, by mutual agreement, of an article analysing the mentality of the dictators by the former under-secretary at the Foreign Office, Cranborne.[26] As Cranborne explained:

> The situation has become so delicate that I doubt whether an article on these lines is just now justifiable – we don't want to say anything to exacerbate the

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[22] *Fleet Street, Press Barons and Politics. The Journals of Collin Brooks, 1931-1940*, ed. by Nick Crowson (London, 1998), pp. 263-4 (11 February 1940).
[23] See *Yorkshire Post*, 9 September 1938, p. 8.
[24] Mann to Tower, 22 September 1938, Mann papers Ms. Eng. c.3274 fols. 36-7.
[25] Mann to Churchill, quoted in Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. v, p. 969; see also Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. v *Companion* part 3 Documents. *The Coming of War, 1936-1939* (London, 1982), pp. 1132-3.
[26] See Cranborne to Mann, 6 August 1938, Mann papers Ms. Eng. c.5236.

> Germans at a moment when they are hovering between peace and war. Nor would it be helpful to say anything of a critical nature about the Government, who seem now, when we have reached the crisis, to be doing extraordinary well.[27]

This comment is of particular interest because Cranborne had resigned from the government with Eden in February 1938, and was increasingly regarded as a leading anti-appeaser. When even such a figure as this temporarily withheld public comment, it becomes especially hard to consider similar restraint by newspapers as necessarily an effect of government pressure.

Mann found it difficult to write positively about the Munich settlement, but was encouraged by Beckett to do so. Beckett urged him to consider it as representing 'success so far' for Chamberlain's policy, and that this attitude should now guide the *Yorkshire Post*'s editorial comment. 'It is our duty loyally to support this policy and to cease personal criticisms which alienate Conservative opinion and with which I do not agree.'[28] Yet however uneasy Beckett was about Mann's attitudes, he continued to support him when faced with complaints from readers. He justified Mann's earlier criticism by stating that the government had 'been somewhat tardy in realising the very serious trend of events', argued that no personal attack on Chamberlain was intended, and declared that if his policy proved successful, 'we shall be second to none in recognising Mr. Chamberlain's achievement'.[29]

On this occasion, in recognition again of the delicacy of the international position, but also of the general public relief that war had been avoided, Mann heeded Beckett's suggestion. He welcomed the Munich agreement as a 'well-deserved acknowledgment of the personal courage' of Chamberlain, confining himself to the

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[27] Cranborne to Mann, 31 August 1938, Mann papers, Ms. Eng. c.5236.
[28] Beckett to Mann, 30 September 1938, Mann papers Ms. Eng. c.3274 fol. 39.
[29] Beckett to J.W. Clifford Walton, 29 September 1938, Mann papers Ms. Eng. c.3274, fol. 38.

qualification that 'we have yet to fathom all the consequences'.[30] Nevertheless, within a few days the *Post* was commenting on 'The Price of Peace' – the problems left unresolved by the Munich agreement – and calling again for a reconstruction of the government on a new all-party, national, basis.[31] Such a call was an implicit criticism of Chamberlain, an assertion that his government was not representative, and that it should be made so by inclusion of critics of the Munich agreement; and it came at a time when Chamberlain had been happy to regard the widespread support expressed for Munich as proof of national unity, and evidence that any such reconstruction was unnecessary.

By early November, the *Post* argued that Hitler had displayed no real desire for peace and was still attached to 'the doctrine of force', and that British policy amounted to little more than 'a policy of continual retirement'.[32] From this point, the pressure on Mann grew considerably. Both he and Beckett were receiving more complaints from important figures in Yorkshire Conservatism. Beckett himself told Mann that he got the impression that the editor emphasized news critical of Chamberlain. 'Day after day the *Yorkshire Post* takes up an attitude more critical to the Government than any paper calling itself Conservative has any right to adopt.'[33] In November the executive committee of the York Conservative Association joined a resolution protesting against 'the anti-Government attitude adopted by *The Yorkshire Post*', and alleging that its articles were 'doing a signal disservice to the country in general and to the Conservative Party in particular'.[34] It is possible that some of these complaints were inspired by ministers or central party organisers – a point important for Cockett's argument about pressure from the government, that is to say from national leaders in London. Yet no

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[30] *Yorkshire Post*, 1 October 1938, p. 10; see Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 80.
[31] See *Yorkshire Post*, 3 October 1938, p. 8, and *Ibid.*, 5 October 1938, p. 17 October 1938, p. 8, 18 October 1938, p. 10.
[32] *Yorkshire Post*, 1 November 1938, p. 8; see also 8 November 1938, p. 10.
[33] Beckett to Mann, 10 November 1938, Mann papers Ms. Eng. c.3274 fols. 44-5; see Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 98.
[34] See *Yorkshire Post*, 26 November 1938, p. 8; see Gibb and Beckwith, *Yorkshire Post*, p. 87.

proof of this has been found, and Cockett can only offer the assertion that 'Beckett was a well-known figure in national Conservative circles and would have been in contact with Conservative Central Office'.[35] It is just as likely that the complaints were the spontaneous reactions of Beckett and other Yorkshire Conservatives. Beckett was probably also motivated by his awareness that the newspaper's sales were falling. As a businessman he was bound to be sensitive of fears that the paper's political views could be alienating readers.

Mann's reaction to the complaints was to reiterate publicly that freedom of speech involved the right to criticise 'authority', by which he meant the Conservative party – and that party loyalty was too narrowly interpreted when the safety of the realm was at stake.[36] Privately he was now prepared to criticise Chamberlain personally, accusing him of

> making of political capital for the party over the greater national interest … the situation would never have become so grave but for blindness as to Chamberlain's incapacity due to party loyalty. And by the same token those who would spread the truth and restore sanity are now asked to be silent![37]

On 8 December 1938 Mann went still further by publishing an article entitled '*The Yorkshire Post* and Foreign Policy', replying to those critics whom it described as 'Conservatives who are surprised to see a Conservative newspaper attacking the policy of a Conservative Prime Minister'. Although it conceded that Chamberlain 'could not have acted differently at Munich', it condemned the succession of errors that had led to the agreement.[38] It declared that Chamberlain had endangered the safety of Britain 'for

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[35] Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 64.
[36] See *Yorkshire Post*, 26 November 1938, p. 10.
[37] Mann to Forbes Adam, 30 November 1938, Mann papers Ms. Eng. c.3274, fols. 47-54; see Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 87-88.
[38] *Yorkshire Post*, 8 December 1938, p. 8.

the sake of a Party advantage'.[39] In a further article Mann stressed that 'in expressing these views our aim throughout has been to contribute to national unity and strength. To keep silence on causes of dissension and distrust cannot further this aim, and would be nothing less than a failure in patriotic duty.'[40] It criticised Chamberlain because in 'repeatedly surrendering to force, he has repeatedly encouraged aggression', and described him as 'by nature unfitted to deal with dictators'. Although the paper would give Chamberlain the benefit of the doubt if he now abandoned appeasement, it stated that 'it is because we believe that Mr Chamberlain's policy is even now threatening the safety of the realm, and it is likely in the near future to threaten it with danger still graver, that we are stating in some detail our case against it'.[41]

These criticisms of the prime minister and party leader were so forthright that it is hardly surprising that Mann now came under real pressure from his employers. Beckett declared that this direct attack on Chamberlain 'put the lid on' their disagreement over editorial policy, and that Mann had 'no right … to publish these extreme comments against the P.M. as the considered opinions of the Y.P'. He accused Mann of now being at the same level as an outright opponent of the government 'alongside the Sinclair Liberals, the Labour Party, and the *Manchester Guardian*'. His letter even implied that his resignation might be welcome:

> I will no longer be a part of the 'bounding down' of the P.M. day by day, and this must cease. I have heard you say more than once that you will never 'write to orders'; well, if you consider this letter to be an ultimatum to that effect you will of course make your decision as to the course you will adopt.[42]

Then, shortly afterwards, the newspaper's board of directors intervened, provoked further by Mann's publication of a pamphlet – *Appeasement or Peril?* – which was still

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[39] *Ibid.*; reprinted in *Appeasement or Peril?*, Mann papers, Ms.Eng. c.3274, fols. 97-9; see Gibb and Beckwith, *Yorkshire Post*, p. 86

[40] *Yorkshire Post*, 8 December 1938, p. 8: 'Encouragement of Aggression'

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] Beckett to Mann, 8 December 1938, Mann papers Ms. Eng. c.3274, fols. 59-60.

more critical of Chamberlain's policy.[43] Beckett told Mann that the board was 'fed up … with this steady spate of personal criticism and recrimination'. He again warned against 'this continuing exploitation of the lurid obsession … against the P.M. … [which] is damaging to yourself'.[44]

In response, Mann justified himself by arguing that the criticisms were not his alone: 'I am not creating lack of confidence [in Chamberlain's policy], but registering it'. He also attacked those who valued the fate of the Conservative party as higher than 'the fate of an Empire!!' He too hinted at the possibility of resignation: 'Does the Board want its Editor to exercise honest and sound judgement or doesn't it? If it wishes me to suppress or ignore facts and evidence that prove the miscalculations of the P.M. you will require another Editor'. Mann was also prepared to generalise the issue, and to issue a counter-accusation against his critics.

> But the unfairness of any such implied criticism of my conduct of the "Y.P." is a matter that raises an issue of much greater importance than my own particular fate. It is this; whether it is in the true interests of a Democratic country that honest expressions of opinion by Editors and experts trained to study public affairs should be stifled by newspaper proprietors who take their inspiration from interested Ministers or their agents or relatives. Judgements on Foreign Policy should be exercised above Party loyalties.[45]

In late December Mann summarised his argument with the chairman and other directors of the Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Association. 'We criticise or support Government policy whether it be in relation to Foreign Affairs or Rearmament from the standpoint of what best serves the national interest in our honest judgement'. Consequently, Mann argued, 'the "Y.P." does not serve any "master" … if, by that, is meant uncritical support of any Government or Minister'. He was now particularly troubled at learning that Hoare tried to persuade Stanley Jackson – a former

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[43] See 'Appeasement of Peril?', Mann papers Ms. Eng. c.3274, fols. 94-103.
[44] Beckett to Mann, 14 December 1938, Mann papers Ms. Eng. c.3274, fols. 67-68; on episode see also Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 98-9.
[45] Mann to Beckett, 15 December 1938, Mann Papers, Ms.Eng. c. 3274 fols. 69-71.

Conservative party chairman, and a *Post* director – to interfere with the newspaper's editorial policy. This confirmed his suspicion that 'an effective censorship may operate through subtler channels – for instance, through social contacts between newspaper proprietors and persons highly placed in Government circles'. He made it absolutely clear, however, that he had no intention of changing his style of editorship: 'I have never once been guided by any other principle than what I truly conceived to be the national interest, and I am not likely to depart from that guiding principle now.'[46]

In a leading article in the New Year – entitled 'A Newspaper's First Duty' – Mann made these accusations about newspaper-government relations public. He argued that the British public was no longer content with the newspaper coverage of events, and cited the growing number of newsletters as proof. He criticised newspapers which, although not directly influenced by ministers, were guided by the 'social contacts' of their owners. He accused those proprietors of turning their newspapers 'into organs of government propaganda', which did not serve the best interest of the country.[47]

Beckett was now in an extremely difficult position, fearing that he would be 'pilloried … as responsible for opinions in the paper which people either ascribed to my instigation, or charged to my lack of control'.[48] Yet he did not insist on Mann's resignation, as he might have done if he really had been subject to or sensitive towards ministerial or national party pressures. Despite his own considerable misgivings, he even now continued to defend Mann in public. At the Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Association's annual general meeting in February 1939 he stated that the paper's policy was based on reason and experience, not on hasty decisions. Against Mann's critics he declared that 'in so far as you ask me to say anything which will tie the hands of this newspaper and prevent it from giving free and honest expression of its

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[46] Mann to Beckett, 29 December 1938, Mann papers, Ms.Eng. c. 3274 fols. 74-6.
[47] *Yorkshire Post*, 3 January 1939, p. 6.
[48] Beckett to Mann, 1 February 1939, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 100.

views on policy which may be vital to this country, I shall not sit here and consent to that'.[49] Afterwards he privately commented to Mann that 'I think my reply was logical and fortified the independent attitude of our paper. I am pleased to gather from what you say in your letter that you are in agreement with this'.[50]

If any minister had indeed attempted to influence the outcome, this can only have increased their evident surprise at finding the chairman and editor in 'agreement'. For example, Hoare had expected Mann to be publicly rebuked, because no other newspaper 'tried to do Chamberlain more harm than the *Yorkshire Post* in recent months'. Indeed, Beckett's speech seemed 'simply a brief provided for him by Mann'.[51] These reactions underline the leading feature of the episode – that for all Beckett's doubts, in the end he thought it to be in the newspaper's interests that editorial independence should be upheld. Even a Conservative-controlled newspaper could take an independent line, critical of the party leadership.

After Hitler's invasion of the remnant of Czechoslovakia on 15 March 1939, all hopes for a peace in Europe lay in ruins. The *Yorkshire Post* had long criticised the British government for lack of leadership and urged it to take a firm stance against further Nazi aggression,[52] but it saw no immediate solution to what it considered to be one of the inevitable 'Fruits of Munich'.[53] Since nothing could be done about the international situation, Mann took issue with the state of the British public opinion. Only a few days before in a press briefing, Chamberlain had spoken of a hopeful future in international relations. For Mann, such words meant that the public was not prepared

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[49] *Yorkshire Post*, 25 February 1939, p. 9; see Gibb and Beckwith, *Yorkshire Post*, p. 87.
[50] Beckett to Mann, 25 February 1939, Mann papers Ms.Eng. c.3274 fol. 123.
[51] Hoare to Dawson, 28 February 1939, Templewood papers Box x(4); quoted also in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 100.
[52] See *Yorkshire Post*, 11 January 1939, p. 8, and 30 January 1939, p. 8.
[53] See *ibid.*, 14 March 1939, p. 8.

for possible conflict: in his view, there was 'an extremely dangerous complacency in the nation'.[54]

In the end, however, Mann did resign – but only after the outbreak of war, and then chiefly because of the newspaper's financial problems. Beckett believed that the paper's growing deficit demonstrated that 'it is futile to go on vainly attempting the sale of a newspaper in a form and style that the public have shown consistently that they do not want'.[55] Some directors suggested that the paper was losing money because of its long and critical leaders. But Mann drew the opposite conclusion from the complaints he had suffered after Munich:

> this pronounced and avowed attachment to the party has not helped our circulation … I have no hesitation … in saying that this blatant attempt to muzzle the newspaper in the supposed interest of the Conservative Party was harmful to that reputation for honest independence of judgement that any great journal must preserve, if it is to live.[56]

Beckett's solution to the financial problem was to merge the *Yorkshire Post* with the *Leeds Mercury*. Mann refused to accept the merger and to edit the amalgamated newspaper, believing it would lead inevitably to a lowering of journalistic quality.[57]

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The case of the *Yorkshire Post* is a prime example of government-newspaper relations in which an independent-minded editor was able to persist in the face of considerable pressures. There was a fierce dispute over editorial policy between the proprietors and the editor, in which Mann successfully preserved his freedom to criticise

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[54] *Ibid.*, 29 March 1939, p. 8.
[55] Beckett to Mann, October (undated) 1939, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p.128.
[56] Mann, Memo on Business, 2 October 1939, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p.128.
[57] *Ibid.*; for Mann's resignation see report by Mann, no date, Mann papers Ms.Eng. c.3274 fols. 227-29; Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 127-9; Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, pp. 596-7.

not just government policy, but also the prime minister personally – presenting his case so well that even Beckett felt that he had to support the principle of editorial responsibility.[58] Mann met his critics with appeals not just to a national interest larger than party loyalty but also to press freedom, and with accusations of government pressure.[59] These accusations are grist to the mill for those who argue that a 'free press' was suborned by the government. Yet, aside from the absence of firm evidence of such government intervention, Beckett and his fellow directors had adequate reasons of their own for being concerned about Mann's editorial policies. And whatever the influences and pressures, Mann was not silenced during the appeasement period.

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[58] See Mann to Beckett, 22 February 1939, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 100; for public statements, see *Yorkshire Post*, 2 March 1938, p. 8, and 11 March 1938, p. 10.
[59] See Mann to Beckett, 29 December 1938, Mann papers, Ms.Eng. c.3274 fols. 74-6; see also Mann to Beckett, 9 November 1938, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 63.

CHAPTER VII

THE *MANCHESTER GUARDIAN*

Even more than the *Yorkshire Post*, the *Manchester Guardian* was a regional newspaper with a national – and still wider – reputation. Always identified with the Manchester tradition of free-trade internationalism, during C.P. Scott's long and distinguished editorship (1872-1929) it had become the most respected Liberal quality newspaper, in a real sense embodying the conscience of progressive Liberalism. One indication of its significance is that both Scott and W.P. Crozier (editor 1932-1944) were, during their occasional visits to London, accorded privileged, confidential interviews with leading politicians, civil servants and diplomats (Commonwealth and foreign, as well as British).[1] Another is that the paper was read by political leaders of all parties: in 1938 Halifax told Crozier that he read 'the *Yorkshire Post* out of territorial loyalty, but I read the *Manchester Guardian* in any case',[2] and that 'he had been for some time studying [its] criticism of the Government's foreign policy'.[3] Indeed, the newspaper was said to have 'an international reputation as the Liberal counterpart of *The Times*'.[4] Yet for the 1930s the *Manchester Guardian* has received less examination than other leading newspapers. Ayerst's general history of the paper did not attempt a critical evaluation of its attitudes on foreign policy. Huttner's detailed study of the *Guardian* as well as *The Times* shed new light on its responses to changing conditions within Germany, but focused mainly on the German church struggle. Otherwise the paper is used to augment broader studies of the press in the 1930s, but Koss is sparing in his references to it and although Gannon gave it

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[1] See *Political Diaries of C.P. Scott 1911-1928*, ed. T. Wilson (London, 1970), and *Crozier Interviews*.
[2] *Crozier Interviews*, p. 80 (12 July 1938).
[3] See Crozier to Voigt, 28 July 1938, *Manchester Guardian* Archive [hereafter: MGA] 220/64a.
[4] Political and Economic Planning, *Report on the British Press* (London, 1938), p. 48.

comparatively generous treatment, he offered no sustained explanation of the newspaper's editorial line. Cockett attempted to place the *Guardian* within his general argument about newspapers yielding to government pressure, accusing Crozier of 'faithfully …supporting Chamberlain's efforts for peace' and aiming to help these 'in any way he could'.[5] But this verdict paid insufficient attention to both the paper's history and the editor's background. It also failed to address A.J.P. Taylor's statement that 'no English editor stood up to the impact of Hitler more firmly' than Crozier.[6]

Although the *Manchester Guardian* had given the Liberal party general support, the paper had never been officially connected with it, and as the party fragmented and declined after 1916 its perspectives had become even more independent.[7] Then, in 1936, the newspaper's ownership was reconstructed as a trust, probably following the example of *The Times*. Although Koss suggested that this step was taken as a 'safeguard against the Inland Revenue',[8] it seems more likely that it was taken to guarantee permanent editorial independence. In 1947 J.R. Scott, the governing director, stated that on editorial matters the board had no influence and refrained from taking part in editorial decisions.[9] Moreover, it was not the *Guardian* philosophy to run the paper purely as a profit-making exercise, but to act as a public service by espousing calm, rational and moral guidance to its readers.[10] Consequently, the *Guardian* editor was the sole arbiter of editorial policy; and the newspaper's integrity was such that once a policy course had been decided, it would maintain this line for as long as it believed it to be right, irrespective of the effect on circulation or advertising revenue. As a truly independent and nationally-respected organ of opinion located outside London, free

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[5] Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 77.
[6] *Crozier Interviews*, p. xx.
[7] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 75.
[8] See Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 554.
[9] See Royal Commission on the Press, *Minutes of Evidence* (11 December 1947), qq. 3934, 3935; Ayerst, *Guardian*, p. 495.
[10] Huttner, *Britische Presse*, p. 154.

from party connections and the network of connections so prevalent between the press and politicians, the *Guardian* had a unique place within the British press.[11]

Since the Great War the newspaper had been committed to several basic positions on European affairs. It argued for revision of the Treaty of Versailles – Crozier himself believed that 'Germany never had a "square deal"' – and during the 1920s had been regarded as Germany's 'consistent friend', wanting it to be fully reintegrated into the European states system.[12] It criticised the French government's rejection of German demands for equality.[13] It also expressed one of the central features of the Liberal conscience of the time: the desire to avoid another European war, at almost any cost. It was devoted to the League of Nations and the principle of collective security, as an improved method of international diplomacy and a means to maintain peace. Crozier was convinced that Germany – even Nazi Germany – had to be an important part of any lasting European settlement, and that consequently the regime could not simply be dismissed as being beyond civilised means.[14] In the broadest sense, therefore, the paper had been committed to 'appeasement' long before Chamberlain's premiership.

Yet as a very self-consciously Liberal newspaper, it had from the advent of the Nazi regime expressed strong criticism of Hitler's domestic policy, especially the pressure on German churches and persecution of the Jews. Crozier regarded it as his and the *Guardian*'s special duty to keep the evidence of the regime's harshness in the minds of the British public, all the more so whenever other British newspapers lost

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[11] See *Crozier Interviews*, pp. xix-xx, xxiv; Ayerst, *Guardian*, pp. 494-500; Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 466.
[12] Crozier to Werth, 24 March 1936, MGA 215/171; Ayerst, *Guardian*, p. 507; Huttner, *Britische Presse*, p. 242.
[13] E.g. Crozier to Voigt, 28 January 1935, MGA 213/52.
[14] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 79.

interest in them.[15] Crozier's belief that Scott had been slow to uncover the truth about German intentions before 1914 explains much about his own attitude in the 1930s:

> C.P.S.[cott] had such a profound belief in the goodness of human nature. everybody's human nature, that he would just not believe that there was an important section in Germany who were a real danger to peace;... I want so far as ever possible to work for peace and good understanding, but at the same time to be quite realistic in describing the situation. We shall get into trouble with many people, but we are bound to do that anyway.[16]

He never had any doubt that it was his duty to tell the whole truth, so far as he could discover it, about what was happening inside Germany. The contrast with the editors of the other quality papers is striking: they were sometimes reluctant to print all they knew, and hesitated to comment on the internal politics of Nazi Germany. As an unrelenting critic of Hitler's regime, among the many opponents of the Third Reich the *Manchester Guardian* gained in prestige at the expense of *The Times*. Within Germany, it became the British newspaper most frequently confiscated by the authorities, and was finally banned from import altogether on 23 September 1936.[17] In the difficult task of urging peace while exposing the true character of Nazism, Crozier could use his own comprehensive knowledge of European politics. He could also call upon the expertise of Frederick Voigt, the special correspondent, who as a reporter in Germany from 1920 to 1933 had become an authority on German domestic affairs and established his own network of sources there.[18]

Long before Hitler came into power Voigt had grasped not only the brutal reality of National Socialism but also the problems this posed for the *Manchester*

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[15] E.g Crozier to Werth, 6 February 1933, Manchester Guardian Archive, [hereafter MGA], 207/53b; Ayerst, *Guardian*, p. 517; Huttner, *Britische Presse*, passim.
[16] Crozier to Voigt, 25 January1934, MGA 211/23; See also Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 76-7.
[17] See Huttner, *Britische Presse*, p. 239; Holzweissig, *Deutschlandbild*, p. 58.
[18] *Crozier Interviews*, pp. xix-xxiv; and for Voigt, Angela Schwarz, *Die Reise ins Dritte Reich. Britische Augenzeugen im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland (1933-39)* (Göttingen-Zürich, 1993); Ayerst, *Guardian*, pp. 501-503; Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 80-88; Richard Albrecht, 'F.A. Voigts Deutschlandberichte im 'Manchester Guardian' (1930-1935)', *Publizistik* 31 (1986), pp. 108-117.

Guardian. He was acutely aware of the difficulty of conveying to a British readership an adequate image of the Hitler phenomenon:

> the German situation ... is so abnormal – or at least must seem so to English people – that I fear the driest account of it must seem like a piece of sensationalism. ... I have described him as mildly as possible in my article, simply because I want to avoid raising incredulity.[19]

Directly after Hitler's seizure of power Voigt had no doubt that a 'terrorist' system had taken control in Germany, and that the Nazi regime would now try to increase its power without any consideration for democratic means. In his coverage from Central Europe he stressed that the 'Brown Terror' in Germany was far worse than the Communist terror:

> there is a Terror - a Terror is an organised thing, organised from top to bottom. It is systematic, and, while there are individual outrages too, it is war and a particularly ferocious one, a war against everything the Guardian has ever stood for, a war against people who are now unarmed and helpless.[20]

In contrast to many of his colleagues Voigt saw the terror not as a mere side-effect of a revolutionary change in Germany, but as a constitutive element of National Socialist rule. 'Goering and Hitler are the chief Terrorists and all they object to (and even this is by no means sure) is to certain forms it takes', he explained to the editorial staff.[21] He was convinced that Germany posed a threat to Britain, and even before the Rhineland crisis stressed the need for greater armament to protect Britain's interest and security: 'If we were not rearming, Germany would certainly prepare to attack France, leaving her eastern plans until later. If war is averted at all, it will be British rearmament that

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[19] Voigt to Crozier, 14 July 1932, MGA 206/207 (partially printed in Gannon, *British Press*, p. 81); and see Albrecht, 'Voigts Deutschlandberichte', p. 111.
[20] Voigt to Crozier, 15 March 1933, MGA 207/145; see *Guardian* 25 March 1933, p.10.
[21] Voigt to Crozier, no date, and 15 March 1933, MGA, 210/118, 207/145; Huttner, *Britische Presse*, p. 247-51. For Voigt's fuller analysis, see his, *Unto Caesar* (London, 1938), a very able and often neglected analysis of totalitarian systems in the 1930s. On the judgement of Hitler's responsibility for the Terror among British observers, see Schwarz, *Reise ins Dritte Reich,* pp. 333-5.

will have done it.'[22] But he had no illusions about the state of British preparation: he considered that Britain began to rearm at least one year too late. His own attitude was much like an aspect of Chamberlain's later justification for appeasement. 'We must gain time, whatever happens.'[23] Although this could be seen as 'support' for the principle of appeasement, it is only really belief in it as a means to an end, not an end in itself. It is more indicative that Voigt was one of the diplomatic correspondents who enjoyed a special relationship with Vansittart, the Foreign Office official most suspicious of German intentions.[24]

In contrast, the Nazi seizure of power did not change Crozier's conviction that revision of the European order created by the Treaty of Versailles remained necessary. The abhorrent practices of the new German rulers were, he maintained, no reason to reject justified demands:

> it simply won't do, in my opinion, to treat Germany as an outlaw, or a mad dog; she is entitled to have 'equality', whether she is run by Nazis or Communists or anyone else, and she has to be given the opportunity of coming into the Pacts that are being made around her. It does not follow that this policy will succeed, but it seems to me to be the only course that is politically wise.[25]

The *Guardian*, indeed, faced greater dilemmas than other newspapers in its coverage of European affairs. Its dislike and fear of the Nazi regime, its commitment to peace and collective security, and its desire to integrate Germany into a European settlement pulled it in different directions. The rise of Nazism forced its staff to reconsider their preconceptions on foreign policy, and to decide whether 'appeasement' of Germany – as they had advocated it since the 1920s – could have any validity while Hitler remained head of the German State. The newspaper's staff were often divided in their conclusions.

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[22] Voigt to Crozier, 5 February 1936, MGA 215/68.
[23] Voigt to Crozier, 14 December 1936, MGA 216/376e.
[24] Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 18.
[25] Crozier to Dell, 12 March 1935, MGA 213/138 (partially printed in Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 78-9); Huttner, *Britische Presse*, p. 243.

As the League of Nations grew weaker, it became increasingly difficult for Crozier to maintain the paper's unequivocal support for collective security. Yet if the *Guardian* came to accept the effective demise of the League, the policy alternatives were distinctly unattractive to it. From its perspective, it seemed clear that rearmament and alliances with other threatened states might increase the risk of war, yet making concessions to the dictators was morally abhorrent. In these respects, the *Manchester Guardian* expressed wider Liberal divisions on how to respond to fascist threats.

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Crozier and Voigt's divergent assessments were manifest in their differing reactions to the Abyssinian crisis. Crozier's main concern was that members of the League should fulfil their obligations towards Abyssinia under the Covenant, and ensure the success of collective security against Italian aggression. In contrast, Voigt's focus was set firmly on Hitler. As he had written earlier in the year: 'Hitler's "peace offensive" has only one purpose – to gain time… Now, as before, Nazi Germany wants war and will go to war as soon (if ever) it can do so with any chance of success'.[26] For him Abyssinia was a subordinate issue, and in his correspondence with Crozier, he strayed far from the line published in the *Guardian.* His concerns were most fully espoused in December 1935, when he described sanctions as 'a false and dangerous doctrine' because if they failed, as he believed they would, this would set a dangerous precedent for dealing with Germany.[27]

How could sanctions be successful against Germany when they already proved ineffective against a weaker Italy? Crozier's support for sanctions contrasted with the

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[26] Voigt to Crozier, 2 January 1935, MGA 213/8.
[27] Voigt to Crozier, 16 December 1935, MGA 214/344.

pragmatism of Voigt.[28] The friction between the two surfaced again in June 1936 when Voigt wrote to Crozier criticising his editorship, under which the *Guardian* had 'limped vaguely behind' since the start of the Abyssinian war.[29] As the League system became increasingly ineffective and European security increasingly unstable, for how long could the *Manchester Guardian* continue its idealistic, internationalist line, especially with the pragmatic Voigt increasingly at odds with the editor?

Crozier was a traditional 'appeaser' in the sense that he advocated the revision of Versailles, by modifications and readjustments, as a morally corrective measure to the unjust terms of 1919.[30] In February 1936 he foresaw the problem of the Rhineland in the same context as German rearmament; France would consistently refuse all German requests until Germany was forced to take matters into its own hands.[31] Such anti-French sentiments were not uncommon among Liberal circles in the 1930s,[32] but in this instance they were another issue on which the editor was at odds with the diplomatic correspondent's point of view. Therefore, wider differences emerged over the Rhineland crisis. Although Crozier declared privately that he was not 'deluded by Hitler and his aims and methods',[33] his perspective remained that of a critic of Versailles who looked for revision as the means of a general European settlement. In the *Guardian* his editorials argued that it was impractical to expect demilitarisation to last indefinitely, and that Hitler's peace proposals provided hope for a new understanding.[34]

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[28] See Voigt to Crozier, 13 May 1936, MGA 215/283.
[29] Voigt to Crozier, 17 June 1936, MGA 215/350f.
[30] Gilbert, *Roots*, pp. 159-88, draws a distinction between the concept of appeasement conceived as early as 1919 as a measure to correct the injustices to Germany as a result of the Treaty of Versailles, and the 'new' appeasement of the Chamberlain years that 'became increasingly a nervous, jerky, guilt encumbered affair; not a confident philosophy, but a painful surrender to threats'.
[31] Crozier to Alexander Werth, the Berlin correspondent, 3 February 1936, MGA 215/56.
[32] In a letter to Voigt he put blame on France for the current state of Germany and its rearmament: Crozier to Voigt, 8 December 1937, MGA 218/304a.
[33] Crozier to Voigt, 18 March 1936, MGA 215/168.
[34] See *Manchester Guardian*, 10 March 1936, p. 10; also Gannon, *British Press*, p. 95.

Voigt regarded an alliance with France as vital for British survival.[35] His belief in such an alliance shows the influence of Vansittart, the pro-French Permanent Under-Secretary, on the diplomatic correspondent. Nevertheless not only Voigt but also Robert Dell, the paper's Geneva correspondent, and Alexander Werth, the Berlin correspondent, wrote to Crozier warning of the disastrous consequences of the German action. Werth went so far as to criticise the editor himself, and what he considered to be the reason for his stance: 'the task of a newspaper is to guide public opinion and not follow it, even if sometimes it means going against the current'.[36] Voigt was particularly fierce against the German government: it was planning 'a European war and … the reoccupation was the first big strategic move in this war'. For him the conclusions were obvious – the end of the League of Nations and need for a British defence alliance with France. 'To pretend that there is <u>any</u> security for us in the League is not to be serious'.[37]

These disagreements began to be evident in the newspaper itself. As Crozier described the contents of one issue in April 1936, 'we have at the present time about five correspondents and one long leader, and between them, like the famous meeting of six economists, they have at least seven policies'.[38] In these circumstances, Crozier exerted tighter control over the substance of his correspondents' articles, especially these of Voigt. On at least thirteen occasions during 1936 he intervened to tone down or exclude Voigt's contributions.[39] This, it should be emphasised, occurred before Chamberlain became prime minister and without advice or pressure from the government. Rather, this was a matter of preserving the newspaper's overall editorial policy, and asserting of editorial responsibility towards public opinion and the national

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[35] See Voigt to Crozier, 14 December 1936, 216/376f.
[36] Werth to Crozier, 26 March 1936, MGA 215/172.
[37] Voigt to Crozier, 27 March 1936, MGA 215/179d: emphasis in original.
[38] Crozier to Voigt, 24 April 1936, MGA 215/253. Crozier never seemed to have put pressure on those on his staff whose opinions differed from his own.
[39] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 84.

interest. Privately he explained that some of the proposed articles were too bellicose, and might contribute to international tension. As he wrote shortly after the Rhineland crisis, 'I don't want to alarm people unduly by suggesting that the Germans are doing things which suggest an offensive intention'.[40] More often articles were altered or omitted for tactical reasons, rather than from any doubt about their accuracy. As Gordon Philips, who was occasionally acting editor, commented, 'it may in the present circumstances be more effective to assume that Hitler is not both so bad and so small-minded as I have not the faintest doubt that he really is'.[41]

The most common reason for such a step was a lack of space in the paper, and this was an issue long before Chamberlain might have tried influencing the press to foster a brighter outlook.[42] None of this meant, however, that Crozier was unaware of the mounting threat, nor that he did not contemplate alternatives to the *Guardian*'s established adherence to the League and collective security. By November 1937 his private thoughts were as follows:

> It seems to me to be almost inevitable that whether we like it or not, we shall be drawn steadily closer to Russia, if only for the simple reason that Russia would give Japan something to think about in the East…and would take over part of the German burden in Europe. I am all against alliances, coalitions etc. but if we are going to cold shoulder Russia, doesn't it mean that we and France are left to face the other three? … but what is the alternative?[43]

Crozier had recognised that the development of a fascist power bloc, now including Japan, required a diplomatic and strategic reassessment; yet his proposed solution remained uncertain. The old *Guardian* dislike of alliance systems, seen – on the parallel with 1914 – as destabilising, remained strong, and he was reluctant to argue that Britain should enter into formal obligations with other threatened nations. Nevertheless, this

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[40] Crozier to Voigt, 27 March 1936, MGA 215/177.
[41] Gordon Philips to Voigt, 17 November 1936, MGA 216/244.
[42] See Crozier to Voigt, 5 October 1936, MGA 216/257; Gordon Philips to Dell, 16 November 1936, MGA 216/328; Crozier to Fodor, 14 February 1938, MGA 219/61.
[43] Crozier to Voigt, 10 November 1937, MGA 218/251.

was not the Liberal vocabulary of the 1920s or early 1930s. The shift was still more evident among his correspondents. Dell argued particularly that 'whether we like it or not, we have to choose between Germany and Russia and in fact we are choosing Germany…If England, France and Russia stood together now, late as it is, they could stop aggression without a war'.[44] Voigt's arguments for a French alliance were based more evidently on the once-repudiated conception of the balance of power.

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This, then, was the background to the *Manchester Guardian*'s responses to the German aggressions during 1938, and to Chamberlain's form of appeasement. In early 1938 Crozier was again assailed by criticism among his staff. His correspondents in other European capitals warned him of the dangers of appeasement. Dell declared that British foreign policy was 'completely bankrupt',[45] and Werth (now in Paris) argued that Chamberlain's policy 'merely acted as an encouragement to Hitler to go ahead'.[46] During the height of the Austrian crisis, Crozier also happened to be in London and met Vansittart, who told him that 'the methods and intentions of Hitler were now at last openly disclosed and he hoped that people … would now at least pay some attention to what he had all along been telling them'. He also prophesised that 'one of these ultimatums will be coming our way sometime'.[47]

In his leading articles, Crozier nevertheless gave Chamberlain the benefit of the doubt, accepting the views that the *Anschluss* was not a cause for British objection and that this further revision of Versailles might ease the prospect of an understanding with

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[44] Dell to Crozier, 12 January 1938, MGA 219/23.
[45] Dell to Crozier, 19 February 1938, MGA 219/67(b)
[46] Werth to Crozier, 15 March 1938, MGA 219/99.
[47] *Crozier Interviews*, pp. 71-2 (11 March 1938); and see Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 55.

Germany. Cockett argues that Crozier's line 'shows how much an editor was prepared to use his paper to help the government pursue appeasement at the cost of ignoring his own staff'.[48] Yet this ignores the force of the *Guardian*'s existing commitments to peace and revision, and the extent to which Crozier had for two years preserved his editorial line against staff criticisms. Nor does the evidence suggest that he was subject to Chamberlainite influence. In his visits to London he met Chamberlain only once, in December 1937 – and then the discussion focused on Far Eastern, not European, affairs.[49] His most frequent contacts were with Vansittart.

Moreover, there were significant changes in the *Guardian's* stance. During February, as the Austrian crisis mounted, it had urged conciliation.[50] But once the German armies marched into Austria, its position hardened: as Gannon argued, 'Voigt's hand becomes very clear'.[51] The Nazi methods were condemned: 'no propaganda can disguise and ignorance fail to understand so concealed a threat of armed force. This is, as many have long realised, the only foreign policy known to the present German Government'.[52] But not even Voigt could offer a constructive alternative to British government policy, despite his long advocacy of a firm line against Germany. As early as March 1936 he had privately written that annexation of Austria and other German areas would not be a 'general catastrophe': 'indeed, it seems to me that there is a good deal to be said for the reunion of all German speaking peoples'.[53] Later that year he had even written about Czechoslovakia in similar terms.[54] Voigt's primary concern was the security of Britain itself; although he urged diplomatic resistance to German ambitions

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[48] Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 55.
[49] See *Crozier Interviews*, pp. 67-8 (17 December 1937).
[50] See *Guardian*, 16 February 1938, p. 15.
[51] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 155.
[52] *Guardian*, 12 March 1938, p. 12.
[53] Voigt to Crozier, 29 March 1936, MGA 215/181.
[54] See Voigt to Crozier, 19 December 1936, MGA 216/387.

in Central Europe, this fell far short of advocating war. The closest the *Guardian* came to any kind of policy recommendation was in the foreign leader on 14 March 1938:

> The British Government will have to reconsider its problems afresh. Rearmament is not itself enough. Everyone is rearming at top speed…Isolation will not help; does the attack on Austria encourage that idea? The Government must therefore search for the means of restraining the future aggressor, whoever he should be, and it must know that it can only be through some form or other of collective understanding that such a constraint can be construed.[55]

The difficulty for the *Guardian* was proposing a means to restrain future aggression. Its preference for collective action through the League of Nations had failed during the Abyssinian crisis. So had economic sanctions. It now fully accepted the need for British rearmament, but still could not bring itself to recommend an alliance of states – only 'some form or other of collective understanding'. Caught between its long-standing Liberal stance and the Nazi threat, it seemed wise for the editor to wait and see how events unfolded without lending the *Guardian*'s moral weight to any specific course of action.[56] For Gannon, the effect was that:

> The *Manchester Guardian's* coverage of the *Anschluss* must be adjudged a disappointing one. Had it matched the spunk and spirit of the *News Chronicle* to its own ideological perception and integrity, it might have served as a standard to which advocates of opposition to Hitler could rally. In the event, it only sat back and complained.[57]

Gannon's disappointment arose from an expectation that, as a leading opposition newspaper, the *Guardian* should have provided a firm alternative to appeasement. While critical of the Nazi government's domestic oppression and its aggressive international policies, it did not seek to promote a crusade against Hitler. Yet in these respects it was little different from the positions of the political opposition – the Labour and Independent Liberal parties. In the House of Commons debate on the *Anschluss* on

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[55] *Guardian*, 14 March 1938, p. 8.
[56] See *ibid.*, 15 March 1938, p. 10.
[57] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 158.

14 March, Attlee and Sinclair were remarkably ambiguous, merely invoking 'League principles' as the basis for British policy.[58] In other words, the *Guardian*'s uncertainty reflected the wider dilemmas among the British Left, as two evils collided – Nazism and the prospect of war. Moreover, for all their other differences over Germany, Crozier and Voigt were agreed on one point about the *Anschluss*, as they would be on the Sudetenland issue: that this was a matter of German self-determination – and national self-determination was another fundamental Liberal principle. No Liberal newspaper was likely to risk the horrors of another European war over such an issue.

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The *Guardian*'s first substantial comment on the Sudeten problem, in April 1938, looked towards a peaceful settlement. Although it accepted that Hitler was likely to intervene at some stage, it regarded the dispute as primarily an internal issue for the Czechs and ethnic Germans. The Czechoslovakian government seemed prepared to make far-reaching concessions, and if these were firmly supported by the British and French, there was a good chance of avoiding international confrontation.[59]

So concerned was Crozier to assist this outcome that during the 'May crisis' he limited reports of German troop concentrations on the Czechoslovakian border and even – at the most critical moment – excluded an article by Voigt. For Cockett, this demonstrates that Crozier had 'adopted the government's desired course of omitting any information likely to inflame the international situation'.[60] Crozier certainly did not want to contribute to international tension; but this in itself gives no ground for

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[58] Parker, *Churchill*, pp. 142-3.
[59] *Guardian*, 29 April 1938, p. 12. Immediately after the *Anschluss* Dell told his editor that Czechoslovakia was Hitler's next victim, 'especially if Chamberlain lets them know tomorrow that the British Government will do nothing': see Dell to Crozier, 23 March 1938, MGA 219/127.
[60] Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 69.

implying that he was subordinating his paper to government wishes. He had his own reasons for taking this line, reasons reinforced by doubts about Voigt's specific claim of an imminent German invasion – doubts soon confirmed by Voigt himself. who reported that any German troop movements were merely a bluff.[61] As Crozier explained privately to Voigt, his original article was not published as

> a matter of tactics. What you write about the German plans for the conquest of Czechoslovakia is vivid, and, I have no doubt at all, accurate. On the other hand, I don't think that to-night, when we are hoping that we have just escaped, even if only for the time being, from the imminent outbreak of war, is the right time to describe the German plans for making war.[62]

As the Sudeten problem continued to grow, the *Guardian*'s attitude remained uncertain – urging conciliation on the specific issue, but becoming increasingly firm on the wider threat from German aggression. As Voigt argued immediately after the May crisis, 'we ought in no circumstances to commit ourselves to the defence of Czechoslovakia. But we must continue to make it quite clear … that if France goes to war, we hold the sea and Belgium and Holland, and co-operate in the defence of the French left flank'.[63]

The wording of this letter was evidence of the particular Liberal difficulties facing the paper and Voigt in particular. There was talk of 'co-operation' but the anathema of 'alliances' was kept out of the liberal vocabulary at this point. In private. Voigt even went so far as to suggest conscription,[64] feeling that a German attack on Czechoslovakia was a certainty.[65] Dell came to a similar conclusion but with fewer qualifications: 'The only possible way to avert war is the way of May 21st, which has not been repeated.'[66]

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[61] Voigt to Crozier, 23 May 1938, MGA 219/233.
[62] Crozier to Voigt, 22 May 1938, MGA 219/226; also Gannon, *British Press*, p. 168.
[63] Voigt to Crozier, 23 May 1938, MGA 219/233; see also Crozier to Voigt, 14 August 1938, MGA220/95a, and Voigt to Crozier, 11 July 1938, MGA 220/29.
[64] Voigt to Crozier, 22 May 1938, MGA 219/227b.
[65] See Voigt to Crozier, ?August 1938, MGA 220/108a.
[66] Dell to Crozier, 3 August 1938, MGA 220/77.

Even on the Sudeten issue, the editor envisaged limits. In late July he told Voigt that he did not object to the British government urging the Czechoslovakian government to offer concessions towards the Sudetens – and Hitler. His reasons were twofold: to avoid the risk of European war, and 'because in my opinion the Sudeten Germans have a moral claim to certain self-governing powers'.[67] Precisely what he meant is unclear, though he was aware (probably through Masaryk, the Czechoslovakian minister in London) of Halifax's proposal of cantonal autonomy. But it seems certain that he did not mean complete cession of the Sudetenland to Germany, because this would threaten the viability of the Czechoslovakian state. For the *Guardian* it was evident that 'her continued existence as an independent sovereign state … is essential to the balance of power in Europe'.[68]

The effect was that the *Guardian* was distinctly uneasy about Chamberlain's policies during the Czechoslovakian crisis itself. It was critical of pressure being placed on the Czechoslovakian government to make concessions, even though in early September Crozier privately commented that it was not yet time to speak 'even hypothetically of "betrayal" and "demolish" in connection with Czecho-Slovakia. The time for these words may, of course, come.' [69] Similarly, he was wary about Chamberlain's decision to fly to meet Hitler at Berchtesgaden, yet felt that his editorial responsibility meant that the *Guardian* 'ought not to do anything that would seem to "crab" his visit in advance'.[70] Accordingly, it praised the step as a 'bold move'.[71] Again, this might seem as if Crozier was offering up support for Chamberlain's version of appeasement. But a quite different perspective appears once one considers Crozier's contact with leading anti-appeasers, a contact which in itself suggests his independence

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[67] Crozier to Voigt, 21 July 1938, MGA 220/47.
[68] *Guardian*, 21 July 1938, p. 6.
[69] Crozier to Werth, 6 September 1938, MGA 220/132.
[70] Crozier to Voigt, 14 September 1938, MGA 220/146.
[71] *Guardian*, 15 September 1938, p. 8.

from government influence. A note to Voigt reads: 'PRIVATE – I spoke to-night on the telephone to Winston Churchill, who is deeply perturbed but agreed that we ought not to criticise until we had some results'.[72] In other words, the *Guardian*'s position was perfectly compatible with that of the anti-appeasers.

The *Guardian* leader columns became more critical after the Berchtesgaden meeting.[73] Not only was it becoming evident that German acquisition of the Sudetenland was now seriously contemplated; it also seemed that Hitler's policy was concerned less with the Sudeten Germans themselves than with the strategic importance of their territory. The editorial columns came close to offering a policy recommendation:

> When one thinks of the intolerable price of war in lives and misery it would be dirt cheap to pay the cost of transporting the Sudetens into Germany if there were enough common sense in the world to do so. It would be worthwhile, too, if there were time, to give Czecho-Slovakia [sic] an international guarantee of her future integrity should the Sudeten regions be torn from her.[74]

Once the Anglo-French proposals were announced on 20 September, the *Guardian* was indignant.[75] It condemned the plan not only because it left Czechoslovakia 'open to attack in the future', but also because the Germans had succeeded with 'a threat of superior force.' Chamberlain's policy was described quite simply as 'surrender'.[76]

Plainly this was not a newspaper subject to government influence, let alone control. We have seen that Cockett's assertions about Crozier's subordination to government policies are misleading; but it should be added that they also all relate to his position before the height of the Czechoslovakian crisis: his book has no comments on the *Guardian*'s criticisms between Berchtesgaden and the Munich settlement. As it happens, Crozier did withhold a Voigt article during this period, but he did so only on

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[72] Crozier to Voigt, 14 September 1938, MGA 220/143.
[73] See *Guardian*, 15 September 1938, p. 8; see Crozier to Voigt, 14 September 1938, MGA 220/143.
[74] *Ibid.*, 16 September 1938, p. 8.
[75] See Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 201-2.
[76] *Guardian*, 21 September 1938, p. 8.

his own initiative and for obvious prudential motives. The proposed article seemed to show that Voigt had access to secret information derived from Vanisttart and Leeper, and Crozier was warned about prosecution under the Official Secrets Act.[77] Fear of infringing the law was a quite different matter from yielding to any political pressure.

Yet although the *Guardian* criticised Chamberlain's readiness to concede Hitler's demands, even now it would not advocate a stand which might result in the outbreak of war. Consequently, the leader columns after the publication of the Godesberg memorandum were 'curiously tepid'.[78] Then, when Chamberlain seemed to be preventing war by accepting Hitler's invitation to Munich – welcomed, it should be emphasised by anti-appeasers, Liberal and Labour as well as Conservative – the *Guardian* too could see no choice but to support the initiative.[79] In effect, it again gave Chamberlain the benefit of the doubt, given the scale of what was at stake: 'For the moment there is respite. Beyond that there is hope.'[80] Even so, its attitude was plainly distinct from that of the government. This was most obvious in its criticism of the Russian government's exclusion from the Munich conference. Russia, as the strongest anti-fascist military force in Eastern Europe, was now part of the *Guardian*'s calculations for resisting Hitler. Not for another six months did the Cabinet begin to think seriously along these same lines.

The *Guardian*'s response to the Munich settlement itself was similarly complex. Although it had come to deplore Chamberlain's concessions towards Hitler, believed that the agreement all but spelt the end for the Czechoslovakian state, and had earlier in the crisis stated that such terms would be dishonourable, it could not but welcome the longer end product – peace:

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[77] See Crozier to Voigt, 21 September 1938, MGA 220/154.
[78] Gannon, *British Press,* p. 203.
[79] *Guardian*, 28 September 1938, p. 8.
[80] *Ibid.*, 29 September 1938, p. 8.

> It is also something for which to be thankful…that peace is still the greatest hope in the hearts of men…And great as are the injustices that Czecho-Slovakia suffers under the Munich Agreement, and they are for her calamitous, they cannot be measured against that horror that might have extinguished not only Czecho-Slovakia but the whole of Western Civilisation.[81]

Agreement was finally reached at Munich on 30 September between Chamberlain. Hitler, Mussolini and Daladier. The arrangement looked suspiciously like the 'Four-Power' policy that both Masaryk and Crozier had feared.[82] Almost all the fears that had appeared in the leader columns of the *Guardian* over the course of September, and the private concerns of its staff, had been justified by the Munich agreement. These factors made the *Guardian* response to Munich even more surprising. While it recognised that the agreement all but spelt the end for Czechoslovakia, the primary concern of the paper was that war had been averted. Perhaps more remarkable still was the *Guardian's* ability to revert to a critical line the following day. The *Guardian* mourned the loss of the 'democratic front' which it had consistently hinted at in its leader columns, but never advocated explicitly when the international situation became fraught with tension. Instead this had been 'replaced by the new conception of a European order governed by four states holding two opposite views of life'.[83]

Assessing these abrupt shifts of position, Gannon concluded that 'the truth would seem to be that once again, as in March 1936 and March 1938, despite its philosophically founded abhorrence for Nazism, the *Manchester Guardian* did not want war, especially a war over Czechoslovakia.'[84] This is accurate enough in itself, but his implied criticism is misplaced. Given its Liberal commitment to peace, it was hardly likely to advocate military action when no other mainstream newspaper and no leading politician – not even the anti-appeasers – were prepared to call for war. Nor did any of

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[81] *Ibid.*, 1 October 1938, p. 8.
[82] See *Crozier Interviews*, p. 86 (11 August 1938); Crozier to Werth, 21 September 1938, MGA 220/152.
[83] *Guardian*, 2 October 1938, p. 8.
[84] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 203.

this compromise its independent stance. Immediately after the Munich settlement it diverged from Chamberlain by urging preparations for a more determined stand against fascist powers in the future: 'Britain and France must keep and strengthen their association with Russia and the United States.'[85]

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Even now there were inconsistencies in the *Guardian*'s position, as it continued to wrestle with the impact of fascist aggression on the Liberal conscience. It demanded that Britain must continue to rearm, as 'no Government can discharge its duty or protect its interests unless its diplomacy has behind it material strength and confidence'. Yet at the same time an effect of Munich was the necessity for continuing in the arms race.[86] Privately Crozier accepted that disarmament and 'internationalist principles' were now 'unrealistic'; yet he still deplored the increased militarisation. Rearmament, he felt, would 'not produce peace but perhaps maintain it precariously until it produce[d] an explosion'.[87]

Nevertheless, the *Guardian* moved steadily towards a more resolute position. The *Kristallnacht* pogrom in November was taken as a further sign of the incorrigibility of the Nazi regime. When, during the following month, Chamberlain resumed appeasement, this time towards Italy, the *Guardian* was from the start critical. Crozier now encouraged his correspondents, writing to Voigt that he was 'all in favour of articles in the "MG" that will make it difficult for Chamberlain to give way in Rome'.[88] It now presented Chamberlain in an unfavourable light: 'his virtue is simplicity, and that

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[85] *Guardian*, 2 October 1938, p. 8.
[86] *Ibid.*, 29 October 1938, p.12.
[87] Crozier to Voigt, 21 November 1938, MGA 220/271.
[88] Crozier to Voigt, 20 December 1938, MGA 220/331.

has the defect of exposing poverty and nakedness'.[89] In contrast, it praised Churchill who 'since the Munich Agreement ... has delivered a fine series of speeches...[and recognised] the need for a moral basis for our [foreign] policy'.[90]

After the German occupation of Prague in March, Crozier finally caught up fully with Voigt's position since 1936 – that no country, not even Britain, was safe in the face of Nazi aggression:

> [t]hese terrible events should finally dissipate any illusions that remain about the character, aims and methods of Hitler. Whatever excuses might be made by apologists for his action over the Rhineland, over Austria, and over the Sudeten Germans, there can be none for this conquest of Bohemia. He will not stop there. In what direction will he "turn" no one can say...it might be Rumania or Poland, Holland or Switzerland, France or Britain.[91]

This did not mean that the *Guardian* immediately resigned itself to war. Hitler's actions were not tantamount to an attack on Britain or France, but provided a lesson to be learnt, and quickly. Prague gave an 'opportunity to reflect with shame on the past and to prepare with energy for the future.'[92] The newspaper still looked to 'methods of discussion rather than force', but now dropping its earlier equivocations – definitely recommended a policy of alliances.[93] There was no alternative but quickly to 'draw closer to all those who share our deepest interests and the growing danger'.[94] Voigt saw Britain 'passing from the passive to the active in foreign affairs and...assuming the leadership of a coalition'.[95] And while Crozier had moved close to Voigt, for his part Voigt now accepted an aspect of Crozier's thinking – the need to include Russia in an anti-fascist front.[96]

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[89] *Guardian*, 14 December 1938, p. 10.
[90] *Ibid.*, 12 December 1938, p. 8.
[91] *Ibid.*, 16 March 1939, p. 10.
[92] *Ibid.*, 15 March 1939, p. 10.
[93] *Ibid.*, 16 March 1939, p. 10.
[94] *Ibid.*, 20 March 1939, p. 10.
[95] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[96] Voigt to Crozier, 21 March 1939, MGA 221/69a. In general, Voigt remained highly sceptical about an Anglo-Russian alliance: see Voigt to Crozier, 10 April 1939, MGA 221/77 and Voigt to Crozier, 4 May

Slowly, the *Guardian* approved of the fact that despite the excesses and terror, in Russia's recent past it had shown a firmer stand 'on behalf of honesty in international affairs' than most other nations.[97] The shift in the *Guardian* line was further highlighted in April when the government announced its guarantee to protect Poland from German aggression. Although Crozier, like Chamberlain, was motivated by the belief that the guarantee would help to maintain peace after the dishonour of Munich, the editor of the *Guardian* would not have supported such a gesture if he were not prepared to see its obligations fulfilled. As he told Lambert in July, the British government should be prepared to fight: 'Then we may perhaps get peace'.[98]

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Nevertheless, at this point Voigt had embarked upon an independent initiative. As has been shown, he and Crozier had long differed over their assessment of the fascist states, and Crozier had on various occasions toned down or even suppressed some of his articles and declined to accept his private advice.

Voigt had been concerned that the British public were unaware of how potentially dangerous the Czechoslovakian problem was. In May 1938 he had written to Crozier stating the need for a 'psychological transformation' to be initiated from the pages of the British press.[99] These views were shared by Voigt's chief Foreign Office contact, Vansittart. In June Vansittart posed the question to Crozier: '[w]hy did not the press point out more clearly what was the German game? The last thing Hitler wanted was a good, firm settlement in Czecho-Slovakia'. Again, in August, Vansittart 'referred

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1939, MGA 221/113. He even suspected the possibility of a secret German-Russian pact, which was to be signed later in August 1939: see Voigt to Crozier, 10 March 1939, MGA 221/67.

[97] *Guardian*, 20 March 1939, p. 10.

[98] Crozier to Lambert, 24 July 1939, MGA 221/186.

[99] Voigt to Crozier, 22 May 1938, MGA 219/227.

to the press, which in general, he said, was by its "optimism" misleading the people. The people would "have a rough shock soon" he feared.'[100] With Crozier evidently maintaining his tight control over editorial policy, Voigt in the winter of 1938-39 sought another outlet for his own opinions.

In January 1939 Voigt with Peter Grieve, a former *Guardian* journalist, established a newsletter, *The Arrow*, in order to campaign for a still firmer stand against the dictators, and for greater British 'preparedness for the next crisis'.[101] Cockett presents this – and similar newsletters established around this time – as further evidence of government influence; that is to say, they represented the frustration of some journalists at government pressure on the press. Yet this was not the main force of their complaints: they were reacting not against the government as such, but against the newspapers themselves – which, as has been shown, had in many cases either supported government policy for their own reasons, or else felt obliged to withhold their doubts or criticisms from a sense of national interest and editorial responsibility.

Moreover, Voigt's initiative did not mark a breach with Crozier; on the contrary, Crozier had taken a benevolent attitude towards his independent activities.[102] In mid-1938 he had supported Voigt in becoming editor of a weighty review, the *Nineteenth Century*, so long as it did not interfere with his work on the *Manchester Guardian*. Indeed, he declared that he took pride in allowing more latitude than other editors of newspapers for his staff to write in other publications.[103] Voigt explained to Crozier that 'the idea of a periodical that would give some little guidance amid the growing disarray of the reading public has been "in the air" a long time'. This was so because 'discontent with the daily press is intense amongst multitudes of people who are concerned … over

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[100] Quoted *Crozier Interviews*, p. 76 (22 June 1938) and p. 85 (11 August 1938).
[101] See Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 101-2.
[102] See Crozier to Voigt, 10 January 1939, MGA 221/10.
[103] See Crozier to Voigt, 14 June 1938, MGA 219/161a.

the future of this country'.[104] But it is significant – a point not noted by Cockett – that he explicitly excluded the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Yorkshire Post*, and, with qualifications, the *Daily Telegraph*.[105] Clearly the discontent was not in fact directed against the *whole* daily press, but only against some newspapers. Voigt specified *The Times* (where dissatisfaction on this account 'is intense'[106]), but in all likelihood his main targets were the mass circulation Beaverbrook and Rothermere newspapers.

Crozier seems at first to have not just tolerated but approved of *The Arrow*. This probably indicated his own sense that editorial responsibility meant that the *Manchester Guardian* could not always be as forthright as he would have wished. But *The Arrow* was exclusively a campaigning sheet, not a responsible newspaper – and soon its vociferousness led Crozier to cool towards it, and to seek to establish greater distance between it and the *Manchester Guardian*.[107] As Voigt privately noted 'The M.G. … is jibbing at *The Arrow*. … To some extent I understand the M.G. – they don't want to row with, say, Sir Horace Wilson, on my behalf'.[108] But this was Crozier's own decision, not the result of any complaint from Wilson or any other government official or minister: in any case, the *Guardian* itself was by now an open critic of Chamberlain's policies.

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The *Manchester Guardian* abhorred Nazism, but at no point before 1939 did it call for resolute opposition to German government demands. Two factors influenced its

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[104] Voigt to Crozier, 15 January 1939, MGA 221/22.
[105] See Voigt to Crozier, 15 January 1939, MGA 221/22; cf. Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 101-2.
[106] Voigt to Crozier, 15 January 1939, MGA 221/22.
[107] *The Arrow* wrote about the international situation that the Western Powers 'may soon compel … to consider a preventive war very seriously': *Arrow*, 14 April 1939, p. 56, quoted in Gannon, *British Press*, p. 85.
[108] Voigt to Lady Milner, 9 May 1939, Lady Milner papers C657/2.

commentaries on foreign policy: its Liberal ideological outlook, and self-imposed editorial restraint. Both contributed to the characteristic *Guardian* response to international crises: condemnation coupled with ultimate acquiescence towards Hitler's foreign policy. Ideological commitment – especially opposition to war – was the predominant force, but the notion of editorial responsibility was also a significant factor in Crozier's attitude. Editors of quality newspapers did not need Whitehall to tell them that newspapers could complicate diplomatic negotiations or exacerbate international tension. As Koss has written,

> editors knew far more than they saw fit to communicate, perhaps even more than they themselves wished to know…Resolved to avoid – or, at least, not hasten – the inevitable, they took it upon themselves to calm prevailing fears. In this way, they qualified as appeasers or the *de facto* accomplices of the statesmen who practised appeasement.[109]

Koss was writing about the *Guardian,* and how Crozier, interested in preserving a calm composure in the newspaper, resisted Voigt's more alarmist statements. Yet to conclude that Crozier was a '*de facto* accomplice' in appeasement is to go too far. Rather the *Guardian* was caught in the hands of several dilemmas: it feared Hitler, but also feared war; it wanted collective security through the League of Nations, but this became impossible: with major powers outside of the League and countries embarked upon individual rearmament plans, the original conception of all nations pooling their resources against the one aggressor was no longer applicable. The alternative – alliances – had long been regarded as a regression to the power-bloc diplomacy which, it believed, had dragged Europe into the horror of the Great War. The result was not that the *Guardia*n supported Chamberlain's policies, but that it drifted and waited upon events.

In several key respects, the *Guardian* lies outside Cockett's explanations for his claimed government influence over the press. It was a provincial newspaper, free from

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[109] Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 542.

the London journalistic coterie which had close relations with the capital's political leaders and officials. Crozier's notes of his interviews show that he was not on intimate terms with the senior government figures most closely associated with appeasement.[110] Crozier was far removed from Dawson in terms of social contacts with ministers. Nor did the *Guardian* have a proprietor with such contacts, who could impose his views on the editor.

The only close contact between the newspaper and members of the government were through Voigt. Cockett is very likely right that Voigt was influenced by these contacts. Yet these were with Vansittart and with Leeper of the Foreign Office News Department, both critical of key aspects of appeasement – while Voigt himself remained a persistent critic of government policy. If, then, Dell was right to describe Voigt as one of Leeper's 'tame pets', this is far from amounting to evidence of Chamberlainite pressures on the press.[111] Indeed, Cockett's argument on the link between government appeasement and the *Guardian* descends into implausible speculation. Voigt, it is claimed, was 'merely panicked by Leeper into being overawed by the growing German military superiority and thus encouraged Crozier to take a more appeasing line than he otherwise might have done'.[112] In fact Voigt was not so overawed as either to become an appeaser himself, nor to recommend appeasement to Crozier. Nor was Crozier persuaded by Voigt to prefer conciliation and peace to war: he had his own reasons for doing so.

The *Guardian* was not an active supporter of Chamberlain; it had both moral and practical reservations towards his conduct of foreign policy. The foreign leader columns did not wholly wither under the uncertainty of the times; the paper did not have

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[110] Between 1935-39 Crozier met with Chamberlain and Halifax once each, and Simon twice. In contrast, he met with Vansittart on eleven occasions during the same period. For details of each interview see *Crozier Interviews*.
[111] See Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 18.
[112] Ibid., p. 24.

many answers but it maintained a questioning and critical line. It never hesitated to give the full truth about German domestic policies. Furthermore, after the Munich agreement, no other paper regained its critical line as quickly the *Guardian.* Far from being influenced by governmental pressure, it strove to maintain a Liberal line in its outlook, until the severity of the situation showed that such a policy was no longer tenable.

CHAPTER VIII

THE *NEWS CHRONICLE*:

"UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL"

Cockett placed particular emphasis on the case of the *News Chronicle* to support his argument that the government exercised considerable influence, and sometimes control, over newspapers. He claimed that the paper's chairman, Walter Layton, had by summer 1938 'already shown his willingness to help the government', adding that he 'increasingly sided with the more Conservative-minded Cadbury brothers [the newspaper's main owners] ... against the more zealously anti-fascist staff'. Layton is said during the September crisis to have been 'poised to silence' his staff's suspicions over events in order 'to help the Chamberlain government'.[1] Caputi, who accepted Cockett's argument, went still further, claiming that the *News Chronicle* provides 'perhaps the most egregious example of "muzzling"' by the government.[2]

However, Cockett's earlier examples of Layton's supposed 'pro-government' interventions date from summer 1937, *before* Chamberlain started to take a more active interest in newspaper comment on foreign affairs; and his argument is actually relevant to Layton's actions on just a couple of days in late September 1938. Moreover, in early 1938 the Foreign Office received German complaints about the 'vilification of Germany' in the *News Chronicle* (and *Manchester Guardian*), and in early 1939 Ribbentrop spoke of the *Chronicle* as 'a notorious mischief maker'.[3] Cockett's argument is further weakened by Chamberlain's remarks to a German official that he 'deplored' these newspaper 'attacks' and 'admitted that the *News Chronicle* was in fact

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[1] Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 60, 70.
[2] Caputi, *Chamberlain*, p. 167.
[3] Henderson to Foreign Office, 24 February 1938, FO 371/21709.1279; Ribbentrop, 20 February 1939, *DBFP* 3s, iv, app. II (2), p. 603.

the most dangerous British newspaper and that it had even attacked the King, the Queen, and the British Government in an irresponsible way'.[4]

The *News Chronicle* was the result of the amalgamation in 1930 of two Liberal newspapers, the *Daily News* and the *Daily Chronicle*. One of its founding principles was 'that consistent support should be given to the promotion of unity in the Liberal Party'.[5] Yet at that very time (as the statement implies) the historic Liberal party was in the course of its final fragmentation into several splinter groups. What could support for 'the Liberal party' mean when the party was split? Was the *Chronicle* able to follow one line, or was it subject to divergent influences? How could a single newspaper satisfy different Liberal sections, especially as one main group (the 'Simonite' Liberal Nationals) remained in the National coalition government, yet the other (the 'Samuelite' Liberals) left it after the 1932 introduction of tariffs? The Liberal party's divisions put the *News Chronicle* in a difficult position: both factions asked for its support, and the newspaper could not satisfy both (nor the other Lloyd George Liberal group), and was thereby liable to 'satisfy none of them'.[6] After the split, Samuelite leaders doubted whether the *News Chronicle* would 'remain loyal to "purified" Liberalism'.[7] In contrast, Simonites asked 'whether anything can be done to make the "News Chronicle" into a real Liberal newspaper instead of an organ which is merely anti-National Government'.[8] In practice, the newspaper became loyal to a more general Liberal body of thought, rather than trying to maintain the illusion of a united Liberal party. In other words, the party split gave the newspaper considerable freedom, as it was not obliged to follow any particular 'party' line. Indeed, Laurence Cadbury, head of the main group of the

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[4] Dirksen to German Foreign Office, 25 January 1939, *DGFP* 3s, iv, doc.300, p. 390.
[5] Heads of Agreement, 2 June 1930, quoted in Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 519; see also Gannon, *British Press*, p. 38.
[6] See Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 520.
[7] Sinclair to Samuel, 14 October 1933, quoted in de Groot, *Liberal Crusader*, p. 102.
[8] W.R.Davies to Layton, 20 March 1936, Layton papers 75/83.

newspaper proprietors, later claimed that the 'paper has always been, and still continues to be, independent and under no obligations to any political party'.[9]

All this meant that the *News Chronicle* accurately expressed mainstream Liberal beliefs – and difficulties – over European affairs.[10] The Treaty of Versailles, with its intention of the Allied powers to place the blame and punishment on Germany alone, was incomprehensible to Liberal-minded thinkers. Instead they argued for a policy of reconciliation, and as time passed the Liberal press generally developed a guilt complex over the British government's treatment of Germany. To this was added a further element. As the 'last citadel of Liberalism in the metropolitan morning press',[11] it was the *News Chronicle*'s lot to reflect the painful dilemmas of late 1930s Liberal thought – an attachment to peace and collective security, yet also an anti-fascism which accepted that force might be required to resist military aggression.

The *Chronicle*'s difficulty in formulating a consistent editorial policy in these circumstances was made more difficult by internal tensions. The Cadbury family was suspected by many of the more 'progressive' of the newspaper's staff as being 'Tory wolves in Liberal sheep's clothing',[12] who prevented the newspaper from expressing a more definite Liberal perspective.[13] In reality, however, Laurence Cadbury delegated the editorial responsibility to the chairman of the paper's controlling board, Layton – who was also editor of *The Economist*, 1921-38.[14] Both publications, as Layton's biographer stated, 'reflected his views on international affairs and, in particular, his

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[9] Laurence Cadbury to Layton, 16 December 1946, quoted in Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 385.
[10] For the Liberal attitude in the 1930s see Roy Douglas, *The History of the Liberal Party 1895-1970* (London, 1971), pp. 208-50; Chris Cook, *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-88* (London, 1989), pp. 118-29, and Alan Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism 1776-1988* (London, 1997), pp. 233-64.
[11] Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 519.
[12] Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 38-9.
[13] See Hubback, *No Ordinary*, p. 131; see also Thomas, 'Bad Press', pp. 28, 50.
[14] Hubback, *No Ordinary*, p. 128.

belief that security could only be assured if the League of Nations was made effective'.[15]

The internal difficulty actually arose because the *Chronicle*'s editor, Gerald Barry, was more radical and independent minded than either Layton or Cadbury. 'I am not', he told Layton, 'attached to any party and I don't find that any one may today represent my political ideas in general'.[16] Barry's radical stance on foreign policy was supported by his staff, particularly Vernon Bartlett, the diplomatic correspondent and a leading supporter of the League of Nations, and A.J. Cummings, the political editor, described by Gannon as 'probably the most influential, important, and well-informed radical journalist of the 1930s'.[17] In late 1938 they were joined by Reed, after his departure from *The Times*.

More generally, the paper employed numerous left-wing journalists, even, Hubback claims, some Communists.[18] At one point it was rumoured that the *News Chronicle* was moving markedly towards the Labour party.[19] In mid 1937 Lloyd George claimed that 'one had to turn to the *News Chronicle* to know what the Labour party was really up to'.[20] Cummings certainly showed sympathy towards Labour, and in mid-1939 suggested a Liberal-Labour agreement to 'avoid splitting the anti-appeasement vote'.[21]

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[15] See ibid., p. 92. See also speech of Lady Layton 'Public Opinion in England Today' (1939), Layton papers 1/24, which supported this view that British influence would increase 'within such a wider organisation as the League of Nations'. This interesting speech could easily have been written by Layton himself. It attacked Conservative politics for being ignorant of the value of collective measurements and praised the role the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Herald* played in changing 'public opinion'.

[16] Barry to Layton, 26 December 1933, Layton papers 1/38.

[17] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 40; see also Thomas, 'Bad Press', p. 26.

[18] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 41, and Hubback, *No Ordinary*, p. 135.

[19] Douglas, *History of the Liberal Party*, pp. 235-6, who states that '[t]he idea of a Liberal-Labour alliance was pressed hard in the *News Chronicle*. ... and, although officially Liberal, exhibited throughout its life much tenderness for Labour'.

[20] Jones, *Diary with Letters*, p. 351 (12-14 June 1937).

[21] Quoted in Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 591.

Despite the left-wing tendency among the staff, Layton's direction of the *Chronicle* remained true to his own Liberal convictions.[22] As he defined the newspaper's position, 'our attitude towards the Labour Party should be one of sympathy and support in matters where they are in agreement with Liberal ideas … But this does not mean that we should give the impression of supporting the Labour Party as it at present exists'.[23] The *News Chronicle*, in other words, was certainly free from the constraints of any party-political affiliation; and its Liberal-Left ethos meant that it was particularly unlikely to succumb to influence or control from the Conservative-dominated government.

In terms of circulation, the *News Chronicle* was the country's fourth strongest paper, with a readership of around 1,320,000 in 1937.[24] For a newspaper no longer identified with a major political party and lacking financial support from an indulgent 'press lord', maintaining this large circulation – and a consequent appeal to advertisers – was of highest commercial importance. Given this need to appeal to popular reading tastes, it is not surprising that questions were raised about the amount of space which the newspaper devoted to foreign news and international affairs.[25] Henry Cadbury, for instance, told Layton that he was 'quite sure that … the ordinary reader is not so politically minded as he was 30 years ago'.[26] The editor, however, had a different assessment of the requirements of a successful newspaper. In an undated speech he reflected on the main factors in selling advertising space, and concluded that they were not only circulation figures but also 'reader appeal'. It was, he argued, the task of the editorial staff to create this reader appeal by a distinctive editorial approach and by

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[22] See Charles Wintour, *The Rise and Fall of Fleet Street* (London, 1989), p. 72, and Hubback, *No Ordinary*, p. 135.
[23] Quoted in Hubback, *No Ordinary*, p. 136.
[24] See Gannon, *British Press*, p. 39.
[25] See ibid., p. 40.
[26] Henry Cadbury to Layton, 31 May 1938, quoted in Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 578.

'educating' its readers in this perspective: 'if it were not for a successful editorial policy, a paper would cease to exist'.[27] For Barry, part of this approach was to preserve good coverage of foreign news, with a focus on the League of Nations. This corresponded generally with Layton's conviction that international affairs should be controlled through 'collective security and economic cooperation'.[28] In addition, well-balanced leader comment was supplemented by the inclusion of leading voices from across the whole political spectrum. In good Liberal style, the paper always gave room to a variety of news: even when appearing sympathetic towards the government during major political crises, it reported other, critical, views.

* * *

The tension between the perspectives of the *News Chronicle* and the government first led to difficulties in July 1937, when the Foreign Office News Department informed Bartlett that it would be better, in the 'public interest', if an article he had written about the British Ambassador in Berlin were not published. Bartlett was on good terms with the News Department, and it seems likely that he submitted the article to it more because he wished to keep it informed, than because he believed that he should seek its approval. Bartlett's article stated that:

> despite the fact that Great Britain and Germany find themselves on opposite sides in the Spanish crisis, British efforts to achieve an Anglo-German agreement are continuing. The zeal of the new British Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Nevile Henderson, calls imperatively for a word of warning ... from three separate sources I have received confirmation that the Ambassador's activities are causing uneasiness and on occasion, indignation.[29]

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[27] 'An Editor Looks at Advertising', no date, Barry papers 3.
[28] Hubback, *No Ordinary*, p. 132.
[29] Quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 30-1.

Peake at the Foreign Office objected because of the inappropriateness of an attack upon a public servant who would be unable to reply, but also because it could have unfortunate consequences for Henderson's standing in Berlin. He 'sincerely hoped that the *News Chronicle* would refrain from publishing this article'. This appeal to 'public interest' persuaded Layton that the article should 'not be published'.[30] The incident has obvious significance in revealing how government officials were concerned about newspaper comment even before the full application of appeasement and even without German government involvement. Nevertheless, Peake had only expressed a 'hope'; the decision not to publish had been Layton's – and his attitude was shaped by his own concern not to aggravate Anglo-German tensions.

When Halifax's visit to Germany became publicly known, the *News Chronicle*'s reaction was only lukewarm. The paper was prepared to give his mission the benefit of the doubt, but commented that 'his visit may do great good' only if he adopted a strong position and made it clear that Britain would not be prepared to surrender its security.[31] After Halifax returned from Germany, Layton was among the newspaper controllers he contacted. According to Layton's later memoirs, Halifax,

> after carefully explaining to me that he had no intention of trying to influence me in any way, he merely passed on a message at Goebbels' request addressed to myself and … other journalists to the effect that Hitler was personally very sensitive to newspaper criticism and unfriendly cartoons and that this made it very difficult for an Englishman to deal with him.[32]

Cockett plainly wishes this to be read as evidence of government pressure. However, Layton also made a contemporary note of the conversation, which reinforces the conditional terms of Halifax's reported comments ('he had no intention of trying to influence me'). According to his note, Halifax said that he and Goebbels had discussed

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[30] Minutes in FO 371/2042/5137, 1495, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 31.
[31] *News Chronicle*, 13 November 1937, p. 8.
[32] Unpublished draft of 'Layton Memoirs', quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 43.

what actions their respective governments could take towards the problem of newspaper criticism which threatened to poison Anglo-German relations. Halifax had, however, told Goebbels that 'in the case of the British Press, the F.O. would inform the paper concerned, but of course, the latter would be under no compulsion but would be free to take whatever course it thought best'.[33] The extent of Halifax's efforts was therefore simply to report German government views to opposition newspaper controllers. He made it clear to both German ministers and to Layton (and so, presumably, to the other press controllers he saw) that the decisions on reports and editorial comment remained with the newspaper itself. Layton had been made aware of German complaints, but also been assured that there was no British government attempt to impose its own preference on editorial policy.

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Early in 1938 the Cadbury family established a new arrangement – a regular conference with Layton and Barry to review the newspaper's policy. The reasons for this are difficult to establish. From a declaration at the second conference, that the *News Chronicle* would continue its 'Liberal tradition' of support for 'liberty of conscience in the individual and for an anti-militaristic attitude towards international affairs',[34] it would seem that the Cadburys were uneasy about its editorial stance. Cockett's further suggestion, that they were warned about the financial implications of the paper's anti-

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[33] Note of Halifax-Layton conversation, November 1937, Layton papers 104/55: emphasis added.
[34] News Chronicle Policy Conference no.2, 18 February 1938, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 60.

appeasement stance seems unconvincing, because contrary to his assertion that it was in a parlous financial state, other sources suggest that it remained profitable.[35]

In any event, the new arrangement was an internal one: there is no evidence that it reflected any concern about government criticism. Indeed, the *News Chronicle* reacted vigorously when it was rumoured in early March 1938 that the government was attempting to muzzle newspaper freedom under German pressure, and gave considerable coverage and comment to the House of Commons debate. The newspaper defended press freedom and rejected calls for censorship in the strongest terms. It did agree with Chamberlain that no 'greater service could be rendered to the cause of peace than by the exercise of restraint and toleration by the press of all countries when dealing with foreign affairs, whether they are presenting or commenting on policies or personalities'.[36] This was, however, a characteristic identification with the principle of 'responsible journalism', underpinned by the natural Liberal desire to avoid outright Anglo-German hostilities. The newspaper's commitment to free expression was demonstrated a week later, when the editor allowed Cummings to go still further in asserting journalistic independence. He not only defended the unique position of the British press, and expressed satisfaction that governments had no means of controlling it. He also warned against more sophisticated channels of censorship, just possibly prompted by concern about the caution of the Cadburys and Layton:

> I am not concerned at present about the possibility of any open and direct assault on the liberty of the British Press. What I am concerned about is … approaches from abroad [which] either make cunning appeals for a 'self-imposed' Press censorship or so control information as to produce something of the effect of a minor censorship on news.[37]

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[35] See Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 60-1; cf. Hubback, *No Ordinary*, p. 131, who claims that the *Chronicle* became profitable the year after the amalgamation and stayed so for the next 25 years, and Wintour, *Rise*, p. 71.

[36] *News Chronicle*, 1 March 1938, p. 2.

[37] *Ibid.*, 8 March 1938, pp. 10, 13, with the reference to R.A. Butler, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, which stressed the complete freedom of the British press on matters of concern to the country; see also *News Chronicle*, 22 March 1938, p. 10.

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The *News Chronicle* was more than ready to challenge the isolationist creed of the Beaverbrook newspapers. It feared that if Britain did not get involved in Europe, 'we shall run the terrible risk of being left alone'. In early 1938 it called a revitalised system of collective security, built around Czechoslovakia:

> we should maintain without qualification the principle of international right and thereby enlist the moral forces of the nation and the world, for if international right perishes, the British Empire, which cannot be defended by British force alone, will also perish.[38]

The newspaper was certain that Hitler would only negotiate if he knew that force would be met with cooperative resistance from other states: 'this – and no nebulous idealism – is the hard practical reason why to throw over the collective principle is suicide for Britain'.[39] Even so, the proposals were not specific, and it can be argued that the *News Chronicle* did not offer a workable solution to the European crisis. Gannon remarks, dismissively, that 'the words were strong, but their application vague and very probably impossible'.[40] Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the paper was not just opposing Beaverbrook's isolationism. This line was also critical of Chamberlain and the government, who remained reluctant to revive notions of armed collective security. Showing considerable political independence, the newspaper argued that Hitler would only understand 'the threat of force', and consequently demanded that 'we must rearm to the full and couple with rearmament the most energetic efforts possible to reconstruct the collective system while there is still time'.[41]

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[38] See *ibid.*, 11 March 1938, p. 10; see Gannon, *British Press*, p. 158.
[39] *News Chronicle*, 4 April 1938, p. 9.
[40] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 159.
[41] *News Chronicle*, 14 March 1938, p. 1.

The decision to advocate a stand on Czechoslovakia and to press for further rearmament represented a shift in the newspaper's editorial policy. Whereas before the *Anschluss* it supported collective action through the League, it now put its faith in a more robust support for guarantees and rearmament – ideas much in tune with the arguments of Churchill. This convergence between Churchill and the *News Chronicle* was significant in two senses. First, it indicated that Churchill was gaining support in Liberal quarters: this would earlier have been unlikely, but a contributing element was perhaps that the *Chronicle* shared Churchill's stance during the abdication. Second, and more important, this convergence meant that the *News Chronicle* broke ranks with existing Liberal efforts to preserve peace.

The *News Chronicle*'s problem remained that it could not formulate a consistent policy towards Germany. It clearly opposed German aggression; but it shifted between advocating a firmer action on rearmament, and a softer rhetoric about 'the rule of international law and decency'.[42] This uncertain stance was manifested regularly in the paper, the more so because it opened its pages to a range of other opinions: after the *Anschluss*, Churchill, the trade union leaders and Labour politicians were all invited to publish their concerns about the threat to Czechoslovakia. The *Chronicle* especially promoted Churchill's call for collective security and accelerated rearmament as one which would give 'a moral basis for British policy'[43] and gave much publicity to Churchill's parliamentary speeches.[44]

It is therefore not surprising that in late March 1938 the newspaper made its first attempt to promote an all-party coalition. Given the pro-Labour elements on its editorial staff, it looked especially towards the Labour party, expressing the hope that finally the

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[42] *Ibid.*, 15 March 1938, p. 10. This was in agreement with the Liberal party, which realised that rearmament was necessary, but insisted that arms could not substitute for diplomacy: it had to be part of a cohesive foreign policy based primarily on diplomacy: see De Groot, *Liberal Crusader*, pp. 125-26.
[43] See *News Chronicle*, 16 March 1938, p. 10.
[44] See *ibid.*, 17 March 1938, p. 1.

Liberal and Labour parties would find a practical and constructive basis for co-operation in pursuit of peace. 'The old party divisions lose their meaning when the existence of civilisation is threatened.'[45] When the Labour spokesman rejected the proposal, the newspaper declared that it found the move incomprehensible:[46] Cummings called it 'diehardism at its narrowest and most stupid'.[47] Even so, the *News Chronicle* did not give up hope of eventual co-operation, because it believed that

> an Alliance of the Progressive force *is* the only effective way of ensuring that peace and democracy will be preserved. Mr. Chamberlain's Government cannot be trusted to advance these causes; and it will not be defeated unless the Progressive forces concentrate on fighting *it* instead of fighting each other.[48]

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So far we have seen that over a period of three months the paper's editorial comment underwent a definite process of evolution – advocating a stronger collective system, then security guarantees coupled with increased rearmament, then a Lib-Lab alliance to defeat the Chamberlain government. During the 'May crisis', it welcomed what it believed to be a firm government stand. It claimed that an outbreak of hostilities had been averted by 'the commendably prompt and vigorous representations of the British and French Governments to Berlin'.[49] The next day, Bartlett argued that 'straight talk from Lord Halifax … caused the greatest surprise in Berlin',[50] and that 'if European peace is to be preserved', this would rest on the British position being clearly conveyed

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[45] *Ibid.*, 26 March 1938, p. 6.
[46] See *Ibid.*, 14 April 1938, p. 8; see also *ibid.*, 17 and 18 April 1938, p. 8.
[47] *Ibid.*, 19 April 1938, p. 8.
[48] *Ibid.*, 14 May 1938, p. 6. See also Layton's article on support for an alliance in *ibid.*, 17 May 1938, p.10: 'For the Peace Alliance'.
[49] *Ibid.*, 23 May 1938, p. 10.
[50] *Ibid.*, 24 May 1938, p. 1.

to the German government.[51] The *News Chronicle* welcomed the Runciman mission, but nevertheless warned of a danger: 'there is one possibility even worse than Britain's standing aloof and giving the Nazis a free hand against Prague and that is for Britain actually to help the Nazis'.[52] Rather, it should insist on Czechoslovakia's inclusion in a revised system of European security.[53] 'For Great Britain to say plainly where it stands is to lessen the danger of conflict. It is not war-mongering to declare that in certain eventualities we should have to fight, but the very reverse.'[54] It was also a line consistent with the principles of defending democracy and upholding obligations under the League of Nations covenant. British support was therefore seen as a necessity by the *News Chronicle*, and it urged the government 'to stand firm on that positive policy, well-founded in their obligations under the Covenant of the League of Nations'.[55]

In September 1938, the *Chronicle* was sure that a stand should be taken against Germany. It even asserted that if Britain had made its resistance towards Imperial Germany clear in 1914, there would have been no Great War.[56] In marked contrast to Chamberlain's attitude, it argued that 'today Great Britain is solidly united ... in a firm resolve to resist aggression'.[57] It also argued that firmness towards Germany should be linked with the inclusion of Russia in any collective action, a line it pursued with greater conviction than any other newspaper. 'Peace can still be preserved', a leading article stated, 'but it calls for the most resolute action by the British Government working in the closest agreement with Czechoslovakia itself and with France and Russia; and there is not a moment to be lost'.[58] Right up until the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact it

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[51] *Ibid.*, 24 May 1938, p. 10.
[52] *Ibid.*, 29 July 1938, p. 8.
[53] *Ibid.*, 25 July 1938, p. 10; *ibid.*, 29 July 1938, p. 8; see also *ibid.*, 27 July 1938, p. 10.
[54] *Ibid.*, 29 July 1938, p. 10.
[55] *Ibid.*, 15 September 1938, p. 10; also 17 September 1938, p. 6; for Bartlett's point see *ibid.*, 9 September 1938, p. 2.
[56] See *ibid.*, 20 September 1938, pp. 6, 1.
[57] *Ibid.*, 12 September 1938, p. 10.
[58] *Ibid.*, 14 September 1938, p. 10.

maintained that any discussion about the future of Central Europe should include Russia. It was anxious about the government's apparent indifference towards Russia's significance. Cummings noted that 'no British Minister has committed the indelicacy of even mentioning Russia in a public speech',[59] and warned that if Russia was excluded from any joint action, 'the Western Powers could not stand for a day against German aggression'.[60]

When Chamberlain announced his decision to visit Hitler, the *Chronicle* supported his readiness to make such a bold move, without 'standing on his dignity'. It hoped that he would take a firm stand – but was speedily disillusioned.[61] The paper was strongly opposed to the Anglo-French proposals; so when Chamberlain visited Hitler for a second time, the *News Chronicle* was much less enthusiastic, and pointedly argued that public opinion was hardening against cession of Sudeten areas.[62] When it then saw Czechoslovakia 'deserted by France and Britain', it criticised the democracies for 'not only [having] failed to relieve the totalitarian pressure on Czechoslovakia but [having] dissolved before it'.[63]

There was a further reason for the *Chronicle* urging a firm stand. Barry had been in contact with Carl Goerdeler, who was connected with the German political opposition and in touch with officers in the *Wehrmacht*. Goerdeler urged Barry to promote a strong British resistance towards Hitler, because he believed that in such circumstances the *Wehrmacht* would not march on Hitler's orders.[64] This, and also other sources of information on opinions critical of Hitler, proved to be of great importance

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[59] *Ibid.*, 6 September 1938, p. 8.
[60] *Ibid.*, 13 September 1938, p. 10; also 14 September 1938, p. 10, 19 September 1938, p. 10, and 1 October 1938, p. 6.
[61] *Ibid.*, 16 September 1938, p. 10.
[62] *Ibid.*, 21 September 1938, p. 10.
[63] *Ibid.*, 22 September 1938, p. 10.
[64] See records of conversation with Goerdeler, 6 and 7 August, 11 September, and 15 October 1938, Barry papers 5.

later in September, when Barry and his colleagues came under pressure from Layton, who had been contacted by Hoare.

For Cockett to write of these discussions as resulting in 'spectacular success' for Hoare (and so for the Chamberlainite efforts to control press comment) is to overstate their effect, as other evidence indicates.[65] Hoare was not confident that Layton had been convinced by his arguments. Kennedy, the United States ambassador, who spoke with Hoare shortly after his meetings with newspaper controllers, reported that 'he hoped that Layton would [play ball] but was not quite sure yet'.[66] According to Hubback, the exchange was far from one-sided. Layton tried to persuade Hoare that Britain and its potential allies were together stronger than Nazi Germany, and that to show weakness and concede Hitler's demands would be to hand over Central Europe to Hitler.[67]

Nevertheless, it is certainly true that Layton now intervened in the editorial process. On 28 September 1938 he stopped the publication of an article reporting on a leaflet obtained from Czechoslovakia, which claimed to reveal Hitler's timetable of territorial acquisitions.[68] Instead he sent the leaflet, reporting his own intervention, to Chamberlain, for which he received Hoare's thanks.[69] Publication would probably have complicated – perhaps jeopardised – Chamberlain's efforts for agreement with Hitler, by supplying further ammunition to the anti-appeasement critics. Cockett makes much of this incident. Yet Hubback records that Layton had discussed the matter with Barry, and while they were still discussing whether or not to publish, the Munich negotiations

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[65] Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 79.
[66] Kennedy to the Secretary of State, 17 September 1938, in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers 1938*, vol. I (Washington, 1955), p. 611; on the episode see Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 75.
[67] See Hubback, *No Ordinary*, pp. 156-7.
[68] For a more detailed discussion of the timetable, see Hubback, *No Ordinary*, p. 157.
[69] See Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 79.

made it seem redundant. As Layton later remembered, 'as so often happens when great issues are at stake some practical consideration settles the matter'.[70]

Several years later, Barry himself recalled that Layton had 'caused a much modified leader to be written', replacing, without prior consultation, a Barry text which was more critical of Chamberlain's policy.[71] On the day Chamberlain left for Munich an article by William Forrest, to which Barry had no objections, was suppressed on Layton's instructions. Layton's explanation for this second incident is important: 'at such a desperately dangerous moment'[72] it would be unfortunate to publish criticism of Chamberlain, and he may well have thought the same of Barry's leader.[73] Layton's objection was one of timing, rather than the substance of Forrest's article. As Barry later wrote to Layton, the article was 'stopped by you, your ruling being that we must go a bit slow, as the P.M. had received a great national welcome'.[74]

Another difficulty arose over a report from Bartlett. Sent to Prague to comment on the Czechoslovakian dimensions of the Hitler-Chamberlain discussions, Bartlett wrote that the Munich settlement was 'an almost complete capitulation to Hitler'. According to Barry's later recollection, Layton questioned the accuracy of this verdict, while he argued that 'we ought to trust our man on the spot!'[75] A fierce discussion apparently followed, after which, according to Cockett and Koss, Layton got his way and the article was withheld. 'If that's the news', Barry was told, 'it's too yellow to print'.[76] Yet other evidence indicates a different outcome. Margach recalled that Barry and his editorial staff 'joined in unprecedented (and successful) strike action' against

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[70] Layton memoirs, quoted in Hubback, *No Ordinary*, p. 158.
[71] Barry to Layton, 14 December 1944, Barry papers 11.
[72] Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, pp. 546-7.
[73] It is possible that Barry's 1944 recollection actually referred to the Forrest article – that he had misremembered the details.
[74] Barry to Layton, 14 December 1944, Barry papers 11.
[75] Ibid.
[76] See Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 79-80; quoted also in Gannon, *British Press*, p. 39, and Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 547.

Layton's decision.[77] Barry had 'at once reacted vigorously to his boss's assault on his editorial freedom. He announced that he would not bring the paper out because he had total trust in Bartlett's judgement'.[78] Faced with this rebellion, Layton withdrew his veto on Bartlett's report. Bartlett's own recollection supports Margach's account:

> [t]he effect of this article was so depressing that Walter said it couldn't be used in the N.C., but Gerald Barry and other important members of the N.C. staff said the paper would not be printed without the article from its special correspondent. Walter gave way, and my article was printed in full. I, of course, knew nothing of all this.[79]

What should be made of all this evidence? Hoare undoubtedly tried to influence Layton, and Layton undoubtedly tried to influence editorial decisions. Yet Layton – as well as the *News Chronicle*'s editorial staff – had been critical of government policies before the Munich visit, and (as we shall see) would be so again. These incidents refer only to the very specific period of the Munich negotiations, which seemed to be on the edge of peace or war – and which had the potential to create a new basis for Anglo-German relations. Rather than Layton cravenly submitting to ministerial pressure, he seems to have debated the issue with Hoare. It appears likely that in deciding to intervene, he acted on his own 'highly [developed] sense of responsibility', concluding that the *Chronicle* should not at this point print controversial material which might cause difficulties not just for the government, but for the nation.[80] And it seems that the decision turned on the issue of appropriate timing, rather than on content.

This interpretation is supported by the way that in the following weeks, the *News Chronicle* became a fierce critic of the Munich agreement: clearly, if its controllers had yielded to government persuasion, this had only been in exceptional circumstances. Although it acknowledged the agreement had brought universal relief, it declared that

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[77] Margach, *Abuse of Power*, p. 5.
[78] Ibid., p. 60.
[79] Bartlett, in April 1982, quoted in Hubback, *No Ordinary*, p. 163.
[80] Hubback, *No Ordinary*, p. 159, and Wintour, *Rise and Fall*, p. 73.

'we may already begin to ask what is the price we have had to pay. That price is the sacrifice of a small and noble people'.[81] The newspaper criticised Chamberlain for confusing the 'enthusiasm resulting from relief at the sudden removal of the threat of war with endorsement of the policy by which that removal was brought about'.[82] It regarded Munich as a lost opportunity: 'Hitler had faltered. This was the moment when we could have won an important diplomatic victory for democracy and have decisively checked dictatorship and what it stands for. It was the hour of destiny, but the opportunity was lost.' It also identified the contradiction in government policies: 'If Mr. Chamberlain has truly made friends with Germany, against whom shall we be arming?'[83] When reflecting on future British policy, it again seemed close to Churchill in its promotion of increased international cooperation. The *News Chronicle*, it declared, 'has consistently held that the democracies could and should stand up to the dictatorships and that by doing so they could ensure without war the rule of order as against aggression'.[84]

Further, striking, evidence of the *Chronicle*'s stance lies in the attitudes of its owners, the Cadbury family. Paul Cadbury was so disillusioned by the newspaper's criticism of Chamberlain that he told his brother Laurence that he proposed to exchange his shares in the *Chronicle* for an interest in another newspaper, the *Birmingham Post*, which had for over 50 years been under Chamberlain' family influence. Laurence, however, the chief force behind the editorial conference established earlier in the year, told Layton that he disagreed with his brother – and revealed that he himself was in touch with Eden.[85] The newspaper's chief owner was therefore in sympathy with Barry and his staff. And by the middle of October, they criticised the Munich agreement as

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[81] *News Chronicle*, 1 October 1938, p. 6.
[82] *Ibid.*, 3 October 1938, p. 10.
[83] *Ibid.*.
[84] *Ibid.*, 3 October 1938, p. 10, and 7 October 1938, p. 10.
[85] See Laurence Cadbury to Layton, 8 October 1938, quoted in Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 582.

'nothing but a tragic farce', and deemed Cabinet ministers as 'not up to the standard' required to deal with the international problems ahead.[86] A week later it declared that 'the Cabinet must be made more representative of the nation', and argued for the inclusion of Churchill and opposition politicians in a re-modelled government.[87] Even if, through Layton, the newspaper had been subjected to some degree of government influence in late September, this had clearly only been momentary. It very soon reverted to its independent – and critical – line.[88]

There was, however, a further instance of Layton's interference. In November the newspaper published an opinion poll on attitudes towards the government and its policies.[89] Layton withheld one result, and reported his action to Chamberlain: that 86% of those polled did not trust Hitler's promise that the Sudeten areas had been his last territorial demand.

Cockett draws large and sweeping conclusions from the incident: 'it proved more than anything else that the press as a whole was no longer expressing public opinion, or even attempting to express it. The press had become an instrument of foreign policy'.[90] Yet this statement fails to stress that the *News Chronicle* was the very first newspaper to commission a Gallup poll, and that it did publish the rest of the poll's findings, which would not have been entirely to Chamberlain's liking: that 37% were dissatisfied with Chamberlain's leadership, and 72% wanted increased armaments. To this extent, the *News Chronicle* was most certainly expressing public opinion, and in an innovative way. Nor does Cockett's statement give adequate weight to Layton's own explanation of his action. He told Chamberlain that he had withheld the findings about Hitler's intentions not because he had 'any doubt that they faithfully reflect British

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[86] *News Chronicle*, 13 October 1938, p. 10.
[87] *Ibid.*, 20 October 1938, p. 10.
[88] See *ibid.*, 8 October 1938, p. 6; see also *ibid.*, 4 October 1938, p. 10.
[89] For the result, see Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 101.
[90] Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 101.

opinion', but because he feared that 'so blunt an advertisement of the state of British opinion on this matter would exacerbate feelings in Germany'.[91] In other words, Layton had made an independent judgment about the risks of contributing to increased German aggression. The fear and horror of war was so great that, as he would later recall, the newspapers tended 'not to arouse antagonism with the Germans', and that the general 'atmosphere of the thirties tended towards caution'.[92] This attitude was not equivalent to a newspaper subordinating its content and editorial comment to government wishes, as is clear from the *Chronicle*'s criticism of Chamberlain's policies, indeed of the continuation of his present government. The criticisms were by this time so fundamental that it is difficult to understand how the *Chronicle* could be considered 'an instrument' of Chamberlain's foreign policy. Moreover, one should consider why Layton sent the poll result to Chamberlain, emphasising that he believed it an accurate expression of public opinion. Plainly he was, in his own way, warning Chamberlain against a continuation of his existing policies.

Moreover, Chamberlain can have had no doubt of where Layton and the *Chronicle* stood. Aside from the content of the newspaper, they had recently demonstrated their opposition to the government very clearly. Earlier in November 1938, they had supported the candidature of Bartlett, the *Chronicle* journalist, in the Bridgwater by-election. Increasingly, 1930s by-elections had come to be regarded as referenda on foreign policy, and Bartlett stood on an anti-Munich platform against the government candidate.[93] His victory on 17 November was widely regarded as a 'triumph for the opponents of Munich'.[94]

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[91] Layton to Chamberlain, 26 November 1938, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 101.
[92] Royal Commission on the Press, *Evidence*, qq. 8206, 8208, 4 March 1948.
[93] See John Ramsden, 'Note: 1931-1939', in Chris Cook and John Ramsden (eds.), *By-Elections in British Politics* (London, 1997), p. 91, and Iain McLean, 'Oxford and Bridgwater', in Chris Cook and John Ramsden (eds.), *By-Elections in British Politics*, p. 113.
[94] McLean, 'Oxford and Bridgwater', p. 121.

Whatever Layton's earlier concerns about Barry's editorial decisions, by early 1939 he had discarded any doubts. As he wrote to Barry, 'your outline of news policy will, of course, have my fullest support'.[95] What this meant after Hitler's entry into Prague, was intensified criticism of the government. It was almost contemptuous of Chamberlain's House of Commons speech. His arguments that the German action gave no reason to act upon the guarantee to Czechoslovakia, 'were those of a distant spectator of a tiresome conflict in a land of which he "knows nothing"'.[96] At Munich Chamberlain had 'believed he was righting an injustice, but instead he has opened the floodgates of injustice'.[97] The *Chronicle* argued that a new policy was urgently needed, but feared that while he remained prime minister no one would believe that appeasement was dead.[98]

The *News Chronicle* argued that this new line of policy should be a 'Peace Front', which should include Russia as 'an equally essential element' in the coalition.[99] But it was well aware that this approach remained unacceptable to the government. 'Latent prejudice' against Russia remained strong, indeed it feared that the Cabinet 'would still prefer to deal with Hitler's Germany than with Stalin's Russia'.[100] But its staff and controller were now sure that they expressed public opinion: 'in view of the almost unanimous feeling of public opinion in favour of an alliance with Russia … we should continue to press the Government to lose no time in concluding their negotiations with that country.'[101]

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[95] Layton to Barry, 25 January 1939, Barry papers 21.
[96] *HC Deb* 345, col. 223, 14 March 1939; *News Chronicle*, 15 March 1939, p. 10.
[97] *Ibid.*.
[98] See *Ibid.*, 16 March 1939, p. 12, and *ibid.*, 18 March 1939, p. 6; see also *ibid.*, 17 March 1939, p. 10. The paper was therefore in line with the leader of the Liberal Party, Sinclair; see De Groot, *Liberal Crusader*, p. 134.
[99] *News Chronicle*, 20 March 1939, p. 10; also 21 March 1939, p. 10.
[100] *Ibid.*, 22 March 1939, p. 1.
[101] Policy Conference, 19 May 1939, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 116.

The *News Chronicle* welcomed the government's commitment to Polish security, but still thought that it did not go far enough: it continued to press for a Russian alliance.[102] When in August 1939 the German-Russian pact was concluded, this was a great blow for the *Chronicle*. Barry, probably the strongest supporter of an Anglo-Russian alliance, concluded that 'Russia and Germany have now obtained complete mastery over Europe' and suggested that Britain should now advise 'Poland to negotiate its … independence with Germany'.[103] Ironically, Layton opposed Barry's suggestion, taking the firmer line that Britain should stand by its guarantee.[104]

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In the early part of the war, Layton was not among the economic experts and technocrats recruited by Whitehall. Chamberlain's Downing Street remembered the criticisms of the *News Chronicle*.[105] In contrast, soon after Churchill became prime minister, Layton was brought into government service, as he had been in the First World War. His actions in late September 1938 left him open to criticism at the time, and have provided fuel for subsequent historical arguments about the role of newspapers in the 1930s. A wider criticism is that at times the newspaper appeared to be 'journalistically and ideologically inconsequential'.[106] In this, it embodied the dilemmas of Liberal journalism. Layton's own views were 'very much in keeping with the progressive thinkers of his generation who were convinced that there must never be

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[102] See *News Chronicle*, 31 March 1939, p. 12.
[103] Policy Conference No. 34, 24 August 1939, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 117.
[104] Ibid.; see also Hubback, *No Ordinary*, p. 166.
[105] See Hoare, *Nine Troubled Years*, p. 396; also Hubback, *No Ordinary*, p. 167.ok
[106] Gannon, *British Press*, p.38. Equally the very sympathetic study of George Glenton and William Pattinson, *The Last Chronicle of Bouverie Street* (London, 1963.), p. 58.

another war'.[107] Like the owners, the Cadburys, and like Barry and his editorial staff, he found that the main Liberal prescription – collective security and economic co-operation under the League of Nations – could not withstand the force and ruthlessness of Italian and German fascism. The *Chronicle* was uncertain about specific means to check such aggression; and during the worst points of the Czechoslovakian crisis Layton was torn between doubts about government policy and the desire to assist any effort for peace. Nevertheless, the newspaper maintained a strong anti-fascist and anti-Nazi position, and was a persistent critic of Chamberlain's appeasement. Once the newspaper – and indeed Layton himself – is assessed on the record beyond a small number of (ambiguous) incidents in September and November 1938, it becomes plain that the case of the *News Chronicle* refutes more than it supports Cockett's argument.

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[107] Hubback, *No Ordinary*, p. 147.

CHAPTER IX

THE *DAILY HERALD*: MOUTHPIECE OF LABOUR OR INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE LEFT?

Cockett treats the *Daily Herald* as another case of successful government influence; yet this was the newspaper which expressed the views of the chief opposition party. The Labour party and the Trade Union Congress were doubly opposed to Cabinet policies. As staunch supporters of the League of Nations, they continued – even after the Abyssinian and Rhineland crises – to advocate collective security.[1] Although from 1935 they abandoned their earlier commitment to disarmament,[2] they were so suspicious of the National government's foreign policy and unilateral rearmament that the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) at first continued to vote against the service estimates.[3] Only from 1937 did it concede implicit support for the government's rearmament by abstaining on the estimates, but at the same time it became increasingly critical towards Chamberlain's appeasement towards Germany and Italy.[4]

Cockett's argument depends upon the fact that the *Herald* was under dual ownership, with 51% of its shares owned by its publishers, Odhams Press, itself chiefly owned by Lord Southwood.[5] Cockett's evidence is that Southwood was among the newspaper controllers seen by Halifax after his German visit, that there were evidently later meetings between the two, and that during the Czechoslovakian crisis the *Herald*

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[1] See John F. Naylor, *Labour's International Policy. The Labour Party in the 1930s* (London, 1969), p. 3; also Jerry H. Brookshire, '"Speak for England", Act for England: Labour's leadership and British national security under the threat of war in the late 1930s', *EHQ* 29 (1999), pp. 255-6.

[2] See Brookshire, '"Speak for England"', here p. 251.

[3] See Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* (London, 1997), p. 90; also Naylor, *Labour's International Policy*, pp. 148, 253.

[4] Best explored in ibid, 154-7, 191-6; also Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 149; Brookshire, '"Speak for England"', p. 256.

[5] Julius Salter Elias, born 1873, was made Lord Southwood in 1937 for his attitude during the abdication crisis, in which the *Daily Herald* criticised the King from a strictly constitutional point that the King had to follow Cabinet advice: *Daily Herald*, 3 December 1936, p. 8; see also R.J. Minney, *Viscount Southwood* (London, 1954), p. 293. A more critical picture is given in Francis Williams, *Dangerous Estates* (1957), pp. 188-9, 192-3, and *Nothing So Strange* (1970), p. 141.

argued that Chamberlain's efforts for peace should be supported. Cockett concludes that Southwood was a 'pliant visitor' to Halifax's rooms at the Foreign Office, and that the *Herald*'s line in September 1938 was 'prompted by the government's warnings'.[6]

Yet Cockett himself offers another explanation for the attitude of both Southwood and the *Herald.* 'By favouring the prospects of Anglo-German rapprochement in his paper, he [Southwood] would be fostering the economic conditions which would attract advertising to his own paper.'[7] This was even more so because, along with the *News Chronicle*, the *Daily Herald* was 'least able to resist the commercial implications arising out of the European situation in 1937-40'.[8] Cockett in effect offers two explanations for the *Herald*'s stance just before Munich, and it is not obvious that the one he prefers is accurate. Were government efforts to influence the newspaper effective or relevant, if its stance was determined by commercial considerations? There is a further, crucial issue: who really controlled the *Daily Herald*'s editorial policies?

Although Odhams had become the majority shareholder, the *Herald*'s traditions in the recent past had considerable bearings on its political character. From 1922 to 1929 it had been wholly owned by the TUC and Labour party, and was ostensibly their official organ.[9] Yet the editorial staff had run it as an independent Labour newspaper, free to criticise the Labour leadership and Labour governments.[10] When the larger part of the *Herald* was sold to Odhams, the TUC retained 49% of the shares and overall control of editorial policy.[11] On the other hand, Southwood (or Elias as he then was) became chairman of the newspaper, with control of its publishing and commercial

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[6] Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 43-4, 59-60.
[7] *Ibid.*, 44.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2.
[9] Richards, *Bloody*, p. 2.
[10] See Henry Hamilton Fyfe, *My Seven Selves* (London, 1935), pp. 258-9; also Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 440 and Richards, *Bloody*, p. 80.
[11] For details of purchase see Richards, *Bloody*, pp. 136-8 and Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, pp. 482-4.

activities. In practice this arrangement worked quite well.[12] Richards, the newspaper's main historian, argues that the *Herald* was different from other national newspapers in that 'where other Fleet Street papers were essentially commercial in motivation, the *Herald* was overtly political. Fleet Street's ideology was capitalist, but the *Herald* espoused anti-capitalism'.[13] Yet for Southwood the newspaper's blend of political engagement and commercial outlook was clearly a 'marriage of convenience'.[14] His initial interest was wholly commercial: as a publisher he wanted a newspaper to keep his printing machines busy during the week, and keep his company commercially sound. As Wintour remarked, 'to safeguard business … it was necessary to expand. … The needs of the presses were indeed driving the whole strategy of the company'.[15]

This apolitical stance is emphasised by the fact that he had originally tried to gain control of the Conservative *Morning Post* and then the Liberal *News Chronicle*, before turning to the *Herald*.[16] He had an 'ultra commercial approach':[17] Francis Williams, editor from 1937-40, described him as 'a salesman of journalism, not a journalist',[18] while for Cudlipp, Williams's successor, he was 'never a journalist, always a printer'.[19] Southwood was not, then, a 'press baron' like Beaverbrook or Rothermere, because he did not use the *Herald* as an instrument for his own political agenda.[20] Yet because the *Daily Herald* was not part of a larger newspaper empire, it did not have the same financial strength of the Beaverbrook and Rothermere newspapers, and so had to be more responsive to the market than the *Daily Express* or *Daily Mail*. Sales and

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[12] See Minney, *Southwood*, p. 230.
[13] Richards, *Bloody*, p. 1.
[14] Adrian Smith, 'The Fall and Fall of the Third Daily Herald, 1930-64', in Peter Catterall, Colin Seymour-Ure and Adrian Smith (eds.), *Northcliffe's Legacy. Aspects of the British Popular Press, 1896-1996* (London, 2000), p. 172.
[15] Charles Wintour, *The Rise and Fall of Fleet Street* (London, 1989), p. 51.
[16] See Minney, *Southwood*, pp. 220-2, and Wintour, *Rise*, p. 54.
[17] Wintour, *Rise*, p. 58.
[18] Williams, *Nothing so Strange*, p. 131.
[19] Hugh Cudlipp, *At your peril* (London, 1962), p. 268.
[20] Graham Murdock and Peter Golding, '1914-1976', in Boyce, Curran, and Wingate (eds.), *Newspaper History*, p. 142; see also Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 44.

advertisers became a large concern for Southwood. The *Daily Herald*'s readership was working-class and lower middle-class in background, and it had been brought back on the newspaper market with an offensive design of free gifts (e.g. books) and insurance schemes, supported by door-to-door canvassing. In 1933 it became the first British newspaper to attain a circulation of two million.[21] Even so its financial position remained vulnerable, because it could not attract really large sums in advertising revenue.

Formally, political control of the *Daily Herald* lay with the Labour movement, and more directly the TUC. Bevin, the dominant individual in the TUC General Council was in the habit of calling the *Herald* 'my paper'.[22] Lloyd George claimed that 'Bevin controlled the *Herald*', to such an extent that in order to find out what was happening in the rest of the Labour party 'you had to read the *News Chronicle*'.[23] Certainly Williams was a friend of Bevin, and their views were in close accord. But in practice neither Bevin nor the rest of the TUC or Labour party exercised close supervision. Williams later recalled that although he attended meetings of the newspaper's board, he only 'kept such contact as he felt was necessary with the political leaders and the trade unionists'. The initiative lay with him: he 'would approach them, and not be approached by the Party or the Trade Unions'.[24] Moreover, many events developed so rapidly that the *Herald*'s editorial staff had no time to seek guidance from party and TUC committees. These could consult with the editor over the general framework of editorial comment and journalistic commentary on foreign and defence policies, but could not determine reactions towards one of Hitler's 'weekend surprises'. Smith has concluded that 'other than at moments of national crisis, such as August 1931 or September 1938

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[21] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 42.
[22] See Naylor, *Labour's*, p. 177 and Thomas, 'Bad Press', p. 24.
[23] Quoted in Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, pp. 555-6, and Richards, *Bloody*, p. 183.
[24] Royal Commission of the Press, *Evidence*, 15 October 1947, q. 437; see also Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 552.

[they] simply kept an eye on editorial content. Day-to-day management of the paper's affairs they left almost entirely to the presumed experts'.[25] Consequently the editor and his staff were sometimes more critical of government policy than the Labour leadership. As Koss stated, 'the *Daily Herald*, however closely bound to the Labour hierarchy by its managerial structure, frequently diverged from the official Labour position, which, in any case, was seldom firmly established'.[26] Its support for greater rearmament during 1938, in advance of the Labour leadership's position, was particularly indicative of a substantial independence from an official party line.

Any differences with the Labour movement's leaders on political issues were marginal compared to those between the editor and Southwood over commercial matters.[27] Southwood was uneasy about Williams' *Herald*, while Williams later stated that he 'came to hate him [Southwood] more than any man I have ever known'.[28] Williams and his staff maintained a high quality of political reports and commentary, including considerable amounts on the dangers of the Nazi regime. But given the commercial pressures, especially once the *Herald* was overtaken by the *Daily Express* in circulation figures, Southwood pressed Williams to include more lighter news and entertainment: 'Make them smile – cheer them up. The news is grim enough. We ought to have something on every page to lighten their hearts'.[29] Williams later claimed that his resignation as editor in 1940 was a result of the 'numerous occasions on which the commercial proprietors of the paper felt sure, that the political stance of the paper 'was likely to drive away some public support for the newspaper, and some advertising

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[25] Smith, 'Fall', p. 172.
[26] Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, pp. 552-3.
[27] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 43.
[28] Williams, *Nothing So Strange*, p. 131.
[29] Francis Williams, *Press, Parliament and People* (London, 1964), pp. 155-6; Minney, *Southwood*, p. 286. For similar pressure on the editor, see Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, p. 272.

support'. He even accused Southwood of cutting and sub-editing articles 'on the grounds that the expression of policy was too vigorous'.[30]

Cudlipp also claimed that Southwood mourned that 'the only idea our editorial people have is to depress and horrify our readers'.[31] Many years later another member of the editorial staff, Douglas Jay, claimed that there were commercial pressures on the paper to support Chamberlain's policy.[32] Yet neither Williams nor Cudlipp went so far as to accuse Southwood of political motives. At the time of Williams' criticisms in 1948, Odhams Press firmly denied that the paper's editorial policies and political views were affected by commercial purposes. If any article was cut, this was because of its length – and a member of its editorial board insisted that in such cases Williams was always informed, and had the last word.[33] Though members of staff confirmed that Southwood 'very likely did ... talk generally about optimism',[34] this happened in a friendly atmosphere, usually over lunch, and the word 'pressure' certainly does not apply here. Cudlipp himself did not regard Southwood's desire for a more cheerful paper as a pressure that affected his political comment.[35] Quite what was the truth of the matter between Southwood and Williams is hard to define; but what seems clear is that Southwood was not regarded as acting as an agent of Chamberlain's government.

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When Halifax asked to speak with Southwood on his return from Germany in 1937, it seems that his main concern was not so much with the *Daily Herald*'s political

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[30] Royal Commission on the Press, *Evidence*, 15 October 1947, q. 435; see also Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 546.
[31] Royal Commission on the Press, *Evidence*, 31 March 1948, q. 9064.
[32] See Douglas Jay, *Change and Fortune* (London, 1980), p.71.
[33] Royal Commission on the Press, *Evidence*, 31 March 1948, q. 9059.
[34] See *Ibid.*, qq. 9062 and 9063.
[35] *Ibid.*, q. 9064.

reports and editorial commentary, as with the ridicule directed against German leaders by the newspaper's cartoonist, Will Dyson. On this matter Southwood was sympathetic. Halifax later commented that 'I think you were disposed to take the view that the temper in which we all wished to see cartoonists portraying public characters was that of humour without cruelty'.[36] Southwood suggested that Halifax should contact him directly if he had any complaint, and a few days later Halifax did so.[37] He described a cartoon in that morning's *Herald* as 'malevolently' and 'unjustly cruel', and likely to make efforts to improve Anglo-German relations more difficult.[38] Southwood agreed that it might have been 'less grotesque', and said that he had spoken with Dyson. He also assured Halifax that he largely agreed with him on 'the big issues that matter'. Yet by this he can only have meant the maintenance of peace, because Halifax seems to have been satisfied with Southwood's comment that the newspaper's editorial line was based on Labour party policy. In other words, the *Herald* was essentially only making the same criticisms of the government as those of the chief opposition politicians – and on that, Halifax, as a parliamentary politician, could have no reasonable complaint.[39]

In June 1938 Jay claimed that after Halifax became Foreign Secretary in February, he had 'several times' sent for Southwood. Jay concluded that these visits had 'some reflection … in pressure' on the *Herald* 'to prevent too critical a line on foreign policy'. It is this evidence which Cockett renders as meaning that Southwood was 'pliant'.[40] However, for proper assessment of Jay's evidence – and of how far Halifax rather than commercial concerns effected any 'pressure' on the *Herald*'s editorial staff, and, indeed, whether there really was significant and effective 'pressure' – what is

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[36] Halifax to Southwood, 1 December 1937, Halifax Papers, A4.410.3.2 (xviii).
[37] See Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 43.
[38] Halifax to Southwood, 6 December 1937, Halifax Papers, A4.410.3.2 (xviii).
[39] See Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 43-4.
[40] *The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton, 1918-1940*, ed. by Ben Pimlott (London, 1986), p. 233 (5 June 1938); Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 44.

needed is close examination of the newspaper's reports and commentary on German actions and British government policy.[41]

In the weeks before Halifax's appointment to the Foreign Office, the *Herald* had published a series of leading articles on the League of Nations and collective security, which clearly expressed its opposition not just to British conciliation towards Nazism, but also to the British government itself.[42] On 21 February Williams supported the Labour party line that 'this Government must go', because Chamberlain had no belief in collective security but instead followed powerful financial interests in seeking close collaboration with fascist powers.[43]

When Eden resigned as Foreign Secretary and was replaced by Halifax, the *Herald* expressed support for Eden as a champion of the League.[44] The newspaper's diplomatic correspondent, W. N. Ewer, discussed Chamberlain's concerns for 'appeasement of Europe, general settlement, removal of misunderstandings' as praiseworthy – but 'it isn't a policy.' It also criticised Chamberlain's notion of a four Power Pact, excluding Russia and the League of Nations.[45] And it firmly reasserted its own independence, amidst the rumours that the government was seeking to silence or 'guide' the British press. Ewer declared that any such efforts would be unsuccessful 'except in a few cases' – meaning the Conservative newspapers – while a leading article insisted that the government had 'no legal right to control the press. … That principle is vital to democracy'.[46]

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[41] It is not entirely clear from Cockett's paragraphs whether he thinks that Halifax or 'commerce' was the larger influence with Southwood, though of course the whole book implies the former. What is clear is that Cockett uses no evidence from the *Herald* itself in this period. Rather (and oddly), his discussion shifts to a different Southwood publication, *John Bull*, at a different date (March 1939): Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 44-5.

[42] See *Daily Herald*, 4 February 1938, p.10; *ibid.*, 15 February 1938, p. 10, and 16 February 1938, p. 10.

[43] *Ibid.*, 21 February 1938, p. 10.

[44] *Ibid.*, 22 February 1938, p. 8.

[45] *Ibid*, 24 February 1938, p. 10: 'What Now, Prime Minister', by Ewer, and *ibid.*, 28 February 1938, p. 10.

[46] *Ibid.*, 5 March 1938, p. 1: 'Hitler's Terms: "Gag Your Press"', by Ewer; *ibid.*, p.10: 'Our Free Press'.

When the Austrian *Anschluss* took place, the *Daily Herald* argued that this was because of Chamberlain's weak foreign policy on the one hand, and Eden's resignation on the other. In contrast to Chamberlain's and Halifax's policy, it urged the restoration of collective security and a firm stand against further aggression, including an immediate assurance of British support for Czechoslovakia.[47]

In response to Chamberlain's announcement that rearmament would be accelerated, the *Herald* declared that 'Arms Are Not Enough': rearmament without a firm and constructive foreign policy would be futile, but so long as Chamberlain was prime minister there could be no such policy.[48] Its conclusion was stark – that Chamberlain should resign: 'his continuance is a danger to this country and to international peace'.[49]

The *Herald*'s reactions to further events similarly reveal no evidence of a softened line towards the government and its policies. After the 'May crisis', it published an article by Harold Laski[50] which, on the first anniversary of Chamberlain becoming prime minister, condemned 'the follies and ineptitudes of a year of premiership unequalled in British history'. He went on to reiterate the *Herald*'s essential analysis of Chamberlain's policy, that he was 'pretty clearly … the obliging instrument of big business and little more. His interests are the safeguarding of the property-system and the maintenance of British imperialism'.[51]

Nor did the *Daily Herald*'s critical comment and independent attitude abate in the period after Jay's June assertion about Halifax's influence. In July it leaked a story about what had been planned as a secret visit to London of Wiedemann, a close

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[47] *Ibid.*, and 14 March 1938, p. 10; *ibid.*, 25 March 1938, p. 10.
[48] See *ibid.*, 15 March 1938, p. 10.
[49] See for example *Daily Herald*, 17 March 1938, p. 10.
[50] Professor of Political Science at University of London; member of the Labour party's National Executive Committee and of Socialist League ('the guardian of the party's left wing conscience': Pimlott, *Labour*, pp. 41-2); editorial board of *Tribune*.
[51] See *Daily Herald*, 27 May 1938, p. 10: 'Twelve Months of Mr. Chamberlain', by Harold Laski.

associate of Hitler – a leak which had the potential to weaken government efforts at rapprochement.[52] Chamberlain declared that the *Herald* had acted in a 'completely irresponsible manner'.[53] Shortly afterwards, it gave prominence to articles by the Labour party leader, Attlee, who accused the government of increasing the likelihood of war by its pursuit of a weak foreign policy. In contrast, he wrote, the Labour party represented collective security and a firm stand against aggression.[54]

During August the *Herald* argued for a strong stand against Hitler over Czechoslovakia, even to the point of risking war. Only by a firm expression of resistance could Hitler be checked and war prevented, avoiding similar wrong assessments to those which had precipitated the 1914 war.[55] In a further article, Attlee made much of Simon's Lanark speech, presenting it 'as a warning that there is a limit to the tolerance which has been given hitherto to Fascist aggression.' But he went well beyond the Cabinet in calling for a 'positive peace policy' in the form of rallying the anti-fascist powers, on the basis of the League of Nations.[56]

More generally, a review of the *Herald*'s reports during the first eight months of 1938 supports its own reactions in August towards comments that different newspapers were offering news reports 'painted' by their editorial policy. The *Daily Herald*'s editor stated firmly that: 'This paper does not paint the news. It *gives* the news. If the news is good, we give it. If the news is bad we report it, even though we know (and we know all right) that some people can't take bad news.'[57] The terms of this statement are such that they seem to be a riposte not just to the debate about 'biased' news reporting, but also to Southwood's commercial interest in 'brightening' the newspaper's content. In any event,

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[52] *Ibid.*, 19 July 1938, p. 8.
[53] Quoted in Larry William Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement. A Study in the Politics of History* (New York, 1982), p. 134.
[54] E.g. *Daily Herald*, 26 July 1938, p. 8: 'The Peace That People Seek', by Attlee.
[55] *Ibid.*, 29 August 1938, p. 10.
[56] *Ibid.*, 1 September 1938, p. 8: 'Policy to rally the world', by Attlee.
[57] *Ibid.*, 16 August 1938, p. 8: 'News and Views'.

there is no evident sign of any curb on the editorial independence, not from Southwood and still less from the government.

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As the Czechoslovakian crisis developed, the *Daily Herald* added its voice to those of other 'anti-appeasers' in calling for an early recall of Parliament. Its purpose was clear: to enable the various groups of MPs critical of the government to have better opportunities to press it to take a tough stance towards the German government. It rejected the assumption that this would emphasise 'divisions in public opinion'. Instead, considering the circumstances, it would offer leadership when it was most needed. Parliament, in the newspaper's view, 'does not habitually make a fool out of itself in a crisis. If it speaks, it will speak with restraint and, we believe, with unity'.[58] It should be clearly conveyed to the German leader that aggression towards Czechoslovakia would be met by united British, French and Russian resistance.[59]

Nevertheless, when Chamberlain's decision to visit Hitler was announced, its tone shifted: 'Good luck, Mr Chamberlain!' Chamberlain's mission 'must win the sympathy of opinion everywhere, irrespective of Party'.[60] Cockett comments that 'how much of this attitude was due to the discussions Southwood had with Halifax is impossible to tell, but it was far removed from the usual tone of the paper's reporting up to that time'.[61] The revealing piece of evidence is the American Ambassador's report of Hoare saying that he had just spoken with Williams, and that he 'felt that the *Herald*

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[58] *Ibid.*, 9 September 1938, p. 8.
[59] *Ibid.*, 14 September 1938, p. 8.
[60] *Ibid.*, 15 September 1938, p. 8.
[61] Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 80.

would play ball'.[62] But this Hoare-Williams meeting occurred two days after the *Herald*'s support for Chamberlain's first visit to Germany. The most plausible explanation for both the *Herald*'s comments and Hoare's impression of Williams' attitude is the obvious one: that no British newspaper, however critical of the normal tendencies of government policy, would criticise a major effort to prevent a European war in advance of knowing the terms of such preservation of peace. Yet once the terms of Chamberlain's negotiations did become known, the *Daily Herald* (like the Labour party) recoiled with considerable force. In an editorial entitled 'Hitler Wins', it declared that the 'British government is involved in a shameful surrender to the threat of Herr Hitler', and feared that not only the interest of the Czechoslovakian people, but also Britain's vital interests were in danger; ultimately no border in Europe was safe.[63]

In contrast to Chamberlain's appeasement towards Nazi Germany, the *Herald* now firmly supported the Labour party's calls for an anti-fascist alliance with Soviet Russia.[64] Russia was now deemed to be an important part of any possible alliance.[65] It welcomed the Labour party's statement that 'Britain, France and Russia should openly join hands together and let it be known that henceforward they would act in perfect concert', against further 'unprovoked aggression'.[66]

The *Herald* did welcome the Munich settlement, but only to the very limited extent of sharing the widespread public relief that an immediate European war had been avoided. The sense of relief that entered the public's consciousness when the Munich conference was announced was perhaps natural, and was reflected in the newspaper.

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[62] Kennedy to the Secretary of State, 17 September 1938, in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers 1938*, vol. I, p. 611; Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 75.
[63] *Daily Herald*, 22 September 1938, p. 8, and see similar comments by Attlee to Chamberlain the previous day: Dalton, *Fateful Years*, p. 188.
[64] See Brookshire, 'Speak for England', pp. 261-2, for Labour party's earlier doubts.
[65] *Daily Herald*, 23 September 1938, p. 10; see Naylor, *Labour's*, p. 293.
[66] *Daily Herald*, 27 September 1938, p. 8; see also *ibid.*, 24 September 1938, p.8. See Pimlott, *Labour*, p. 4.

However, its reaction is described by one historian as 'reserved in the extreme'.[67] This relief, it declared, 'does not in any way absolve us from the necessity of continued clear analysis of the facts'.[68] These facts pointed to severe criticism of Chamberlain. The Munich settlement was in effect a bilateral Hitler-Chamberlain agreement; but peace could not be secured 'bilaterally. It can be achieved only at a conference of all the Powers', by collective security.[69] More particularly, no agreement or policy which excluded the Russian government could really deter Hitler from another episode of aggression. So the *Herald* concluded that 'war has been averted, but peace has not been secured'; indeed it went further and argued that it was Chamberlain's appeasement which had been 'directly responsible for the war situation of last week', in encouraging Hitler to pursue his ambitions.[70] The *Herald* also went some way beyond official Labour policy in calling for an attempt to strengthen rearmament more drastically, so that Britain would not be threatened again by a more powerful neighbour.[71]

Through the winter, the *Daily Herald* continued to argue that the continuation of Chamberlain's policy would mean that further states in Europe would gradually be sacrificed, as a price for Britain's safety. Consequently, this would end in war.[72] The newspaper repeatedly called for Chamberlain's resignation. Williams wrote that the prime minister symbolised 'a policy of slavish acquiescence in the aggression of the dictators, of readiness to sacrifice every democratic principle for a temporary reprieve'. The *Daily Herald* now called for a return to the original idea of collective security in the form of a widespread alliance system of the United States as well as France and Russia.[73]

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[67] Gannon, *British Press*, p. 218.
[68] *Daily Herald*, 29 September 1938, p. 8.
[69] *Ibid.*, 1 October 1938, p. 8.
[70] *Ibid.*, 3 October 1938, p. 10.
[71] *Ibid.*, 29 October 1938, p. 8.
[72] *Ibid.*, 7 February 1939, p. 10; and *ibid.*, 15 March 1939, p. 10; also *ibid.*, 16 March 1939, p. 10.
[73] *Ibid.*, 17 March 1939, p. 10; see *ibid.*, 21 March 1939, p. 10, and *ibid.*, 20 March 1939, p. 10.

The *Daily Herald* saw the German occupation of Prague as a consequence of the weak policy of Western Powers, which enabled Hitler to go ahead with his aggressive policy. 'Let the British people not deceive themselves. This does concern us – and it is only inevitable because of our own failures and treacheries.'[74] However, in no sense was Hitler's last act to be justified: 'It is naked aggression, the planned and deliberate conquest of another country; an act of war.'[75] Over the following days, however, the *Herald* was to be disappointed about the British government's inaction: 'Is the Government prepared to face up to the implications of German aggression and act accordingly, or is it not? It is time we had a definite answer'.[76] On the day the British government announced its guarantee to Poland, it painted a grim picture of the international situation:

> On the face of it the crisis of the minute may be Polish. But at bottom it is not a Polish crisis. It is a European crisis … and unless swiftly and without more ado Europe faces its own peril and bands together to resist the common menace then nothing is plainer than that the free States of Europe will 'hang separately'.[77]

As war approached in August, the *Herald* had no doubt where, aside from the Nazi regime, the responsibility lay. Chamberlain's 'criminal hesitation' towards the Russian government had made it distrustful of Britain and led to a pact with Hitler, a pact which enabled him to loose his armies against Poland.[78]

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It is, then, very difficult to conclude that the *Daily Herald* was subjected to successful government pressure or persuasion. There is some evidence of ministerial

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[74] *Ibid.*, 16 March 1939, p. 10.
[75] *Ibid.*, 16 March 1939, p. 10.
[76] *Ibid.*, 29 March 1939, p. 8.
[77] *Ibid.*, 31 March 1939, p. 8.
[78] *Ibid.*, 22 August 1939, p. 8.

efforts to influence it, but it would be rash to conclude too much from this material. Certainly Halifax met and corresponded with Southwood in late 1937, but the exchange evidently focused on the 'cruelty' of the *Herald* cartoonist's caricatures of German leaders, rather than on its editorial criticisms of government policy. The further evidence is tenuous: an unsubstantiated claim about further Halifax-Southwood meetings during the first half of 1938, and a second hand report about a Hoare-Williams meeting during the Czechoslovakian crisis. Aside from Jay's claim in June, there were no complaints about government pressure made by the editorial staff, not even in retrospect. Rather, the criticisms of Williams and other colleagues, and these include Jay's later complaints, were directed against Southwood, for arguing on commercial – not political – grounds that the newspaper contained too much grim reporting and comment on European news and foreign policy. This, it can be asserted, represented a form – a different form – of 'capitalist' political pressure. Yet the effect of any such pressure cannot be found in the issues of the newspaper. This is where Cockett's large claims about the *Herald* really fall, in his failure to pursue his argument about 'pressure' into an examination of the newspaper's reports, feature articles and editorial leaders. The *Herald* was the organ of the chief party opposed to the government; it extensively reported Labour politicians' assaults on the Cabinet: and its journalists and editors freely and persistently criticised Chamberlain and his policy. This was hardly a newspaper which was, in Cockett's phrase 'surrendering its freedom' towards the government. Only for a few short days in September 1938 did it relent, and then for the same reason as those of the Labour party and all other anti-appeasers, including Churchill: because, in a desperately dangerous condition, it was prepared to give Chamberlain the benefit of the doubt and allow him the chance to demonstrate that he

could, after all, prevent a European war on acceptable terms.[79] But once the prospective terms became evident, like other anti-appeasers it reverted to its critical stance.

Commercial and financial considerations were the foremost worries of the newspaper's proprietors; concern about political influence and pressure from the government were negligible or non-existent. A paper based purely on the financial success on the market would have to react to market forces and the thinking of its target readership, and it needed no hint from the government to avoid exaggerating the already volatile international situation. As an owner, Southwood was no exception: he was concerned about financial implications that would affect Odham`s Press from running at full capacity, rather than by the quest of political influence. And clearly, the editor and the other journalists in the late 1930s were not interested in appeasing Hitler. It can be assumed that for the *Daily Herald* any attempts by Southwood to soothe the editorial line were likely to have caused the editor to be more critical in his stance towards appeasement.[80]

Newspapers are always subject to varying degrees of influence from different directions. In the case of the *Daily Herald* it was from party leaders, trade union leaders, movement activists and journalists as well as commercial controllers, each anxious to articulate their point of view in the columns with their own specific ultimate goal. Although Labour leaders may have envisaged it as a loyal mouthpiece of their movement, the *Daily Herald* did not always adhere to the party line. But as McKibbin wrote: 'The *Herald* had one indispensable quality; it was the only paper Labour had got',[81] making it therefore 'a major price in intra-party battles'.[82]

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[79] Richards, *Bloody*, p. 156.
[80] See Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 546.
[81] Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-24* (Oxford, 1974), p. 222.
[82] Richards, *Bloody*, p. 5.

CONCLUSION

It is not possible or accurate to speak of there being such an entity as a 'monolithic' press in the 1930s. The newspapers reflected the divisions and differences that existed between and within the political parties, and nowhere were these more pronounced than on the issues of German diplomacy and British rearmament. It was the political stance of each respective newspaper, rather than governmental pressure or 'control', which determined whether its pages contained support for or criticism of Chamberlain's policies.

It should not surprise us, however, that the government should have attempted to influence the newspapers, and through them the opinions of their readers, at such a critical time. It is clear that at various points in the increasingly fraught years of the late 1930s Chamberlain and Halifax were greatly concerned at the possible effect of British newspaper comment on the opinion of the German government. In this context their desire to influence the newspapers and to moderate some of their reporting is understandable, especially if one argues on the basis of 'national interest' that avoidance of war was desirable. This is even more so given a real fear that the Nazi leaders were so unstable that British press comment might trigger uncontrollable German reactions, and exacerbate the already tense situation. To appreciate this need, however, is not to say that the British press was directly controlled. In a pluralistic society, where each newspaper was subject to a range of pressures and influences, the attitudes of the various British newspapers were as various as the range of opinions in the country at large. The actual period where real, if somewhat oblique, governmental 'influence' may be seen at work is limited to those few days in September 1938 when Beaverbrook asked for some 'guidance'. If newspapers were prepared to listen at this juncture, however, it was out of a sense of responsibility towards the national interest, on the

grounds that everyone was united in the desire to avoid another war. Consequently, even normally critical newspapers from politically opposing ends of the spectrum, like the Liberal *Manchester Guardian* or *News Chronicle*, the Labour *Daily Herald*, and also the Conservative *Yorkshire Post*, toned down their criticism and gave Chamberlain the benefit of the doubt.

The tacit approval of appeasement in certain newspapers around this time, at least until the terms of the Munich agreement became evident, owed little or nothing to government 'interference' with the press. It was in part a reaction to practical considerations, but primarily it was determined by the ideological background and outlook of the respective newspapers. Born as it was out of the desire to avoid any repeat of the horrors of 1914-18, appeasement was, for many, a credible policy before the onset of Hitler. Some German grievances were seen as justified, not only by British newspapers, but also by politicians and the public. Even with the rise of Nazism the legitimacy of Hitler's demands for German equality remained as valid in principle as they had done under chancellors of the Weimar Republic, and Hitler skilfully tried to redress German grievances in such a way that he dealt with the least contentious issues first. Although a more daring move than those that had gone before it, the *Anschluss* in March 1938 was portrayed, with some success, as an extension of the doctrine of self-determination by German people. Up to that point, there seemed no strong argument for armed intervention, and the newspapers, on the whole, reflected this attitude. Only when confronted with the grievances of the Sudeten Germans did the issue became critical, due to the impact that self-determination would have upon another, non-German, nation state.

Faced with the worsening international situation, newspaper editors and owners were aware of their role in shaping public opinion, but were also united in their belief that ultimately responsibility for their papers' content should remain where one would

expect it to be, with the owners and editors. They were prepared to exercise self-censorship out of their *own* sense of what was publicly desirable, when the 'national interest' was at stake (the attitude known as 'responsible editorship'). And given that in September 1938 everyone, including the anti-appeasers, wanted to avoid immediate war, it is not surprising that those with a part to play in shaping public opinion should, for a time, set criticism to one side and support Chamberlain's negotiations with Hitler.

The editorials and news coverage of the newspapers in the late 1930s attracted the attention of a Royal Commission of the Press in 1947, on the grounds that they were regarded as having led the public astray. In particular the Commission focused upon perceived deficiencies in the papers' foreign policy coverage, which 'invited subsequent accusations of collusion and censorship'.[1] Despite the fact that the Commission's main aim was concerned with the effects of concentration of ownership and influence of advertising on editorial policy, it found itself nonetheless addressing the possibility of censorship on the part of the government.[2] It concluded that advertising had no great effect on a paper's policy, and that the allegation of political manipulation in this area was also unfounded.[3] It did concede that advertising played a greater role for newspapers with a weaker financial background (*Daily Herald*) than for the Beaverbrook newspapers, which could afford to compensate losses with profits from other newspapers.

There might be some truth in the view that the Commission found nothing because the journalists did not want to draw attention to any collusion with the government on their part during the appeasement years, and that therefore advertising was an 'easy scapegoat' for any perceived shortcomings.[4] This is some way short, however, of Cockett's sentiment that the Commission 'could unfortunately detect no

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[1] Koss, *Rise and Fall,* ii, p. 542; also Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 1.
[2] Royal Commission on the Press, 1947-49, *Report*, para. 18, p. 4.
[3] See Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 640 and Seymour-Ure, *The Press, Politics and the Public*, p. 120.
[4] Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 127.

such insidious influence',[5] which implies that the newspapers acted the way they did in response to pressure from the government. Cockett's choice of words, that it was 'unfortunate' not to find the results he obviously expected to find, raises questions about the motivation of his thesis and his claim that the government did, in fact, exercise considerable control over the direction of the press at this time.

Although the British government may, on occasion, have felt greater influence over the newspapers to be 'desirable', it simply had no legal means of bringing any such pressure to bear. In fact, its ability to exert influence had been reduced by the gradual loosening of its ties with newspapers in the years that followed the First World War. The result of commercial developments in the 1920s and 1930s was a press which was more independent from both the government and the political parties. In itself, an independent press was not a cause for concern for the politicians, because in the past newspaper owners had shown that they were quite reliable supporters of particular parties. What was crucial in these interwar years was that at a time of great uncertainty and anxiety the newspaper owners, most notably the 'press barons', were both aware of their potential influence and prepared to use their newspapers to voice their own political views, which were not always in accordance with the official party policy.

The increased autonomy of newspaper owners greatly limited the British government's ability to directly influence a paper's policy. This explains Chamberlain`s interest in the media: this interest is testimony to the vigorous independence and freedom of the press – not evidence of its subservience. The difficulties created by a vibrant press also explain his determination to muffle or silence alternative views from within government, particularly the Foreign Office News Department.[6] The News Department, with Leeper at its head, and Vansittart as a strong supporter, had growing

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[5] Cockett, 'The Government, The Press and Politics in Britain 1937 to 1945' (PhD thesis, University of London, 1988), p. 6; see also idem, *Twilight*, p. 2.
[6] See Shepherd, *Class Divided*, p. 111.

reservations about Chamberlain's policy, and briefed its 'own' favoured journalists, the so-called 'diplomatic correspondents', according to the Department's particular point of view.

Chamberlain's approach to the media was, therefore, crucially informed both by an appreciation of its effectiveness, and an awareness that parts of the Foreign Office were critical of his policy of achieving a comprehensive agreement with Germany. It was, however, difficult to put his ideas for a combined policy of deterrence and appeasement, with the ultimate goal of achieving Anglo-German understanding, into a format that could be easily promoted. This was, on the one hand, due to the independence of the British press; on the other, because his policy was not without its opponents within Whitehall.

Chamberlain had been used to briefing the press himself in areas where he had particular involvement, i.e. from 1931 the Treasury (and in the particular circumstances of late 1936, the abdication). In foreign affairs, however, there was already a well-established form of news 'management', and from 1937 this Foreign Office line tended to give different emphasis in its briefings to those issues Chamberlain wished to promote. The disparity between those briefings offered by the Foreign Office and Number 10 increasingly bore witness to Chamberlain's attempts to counter what he perceived to be the alternative agenda proposed by Leeper and his colleagues. Chamberlain's increased concern with the content of certain newspapers was thus partly (and significantly) evidence of the government's awareness of the potential authority of the newspapers, and also a measure of the differing agendas operating within the government at this time. When assessing the late-1930s situation as part of the broader matrix of government-press relations, however, we should not be surprised that the government attempted to influence the newspapers, because that is what they always did.

Of great significance was the effect of newspaper criticism on Chamberlain himself. This study confirms Cockett's conclusion that he wrongly thought that what appeared in newspapers reflected 'public opinion',[7] and not the opinion of just a few individuals directing a paper's policy. It needs to be kept in mind that this thesis is not intended as a sociological study, and the question of how or if newspapers influenced the public is not its prime concern. It is, however, important to note that the British government and Hitler both thought that such influence existed. But Cockett's second conclusion about 'public opinion', that 'by controlling the press he [Chamberlain] was merely ensuring that the press was unable to reflect public opinion', has to be qualified. Obviously, the majority of Conservative newspapers tended to support Chamberlain in its editorials, but this was only one feature in a newspaper: features like news reports, letters or coverage of political speeches offered a broader and critical spectrum of opinion. Quite naturally, the Liberal and Labour press was less reserved in its criticism.

Governments have tried to establish this control since the moment newspapers were first published in the early 18th century. Nor is it surprising that attempted control should be intensified at moments of great national danger; this had after all occurred during the First World War. The essentials had not changed in 1938. It remained the case that no government had an effective legislative or administrative means of controlling the press: it could not coerce, but only try to persuade. The success of persuasion depended ultimately on the decision of the owners and editors, not on what ministers said. This study has shown that throughout the 1930s the British government was not sure about how the press would react to certain domestic and international events – in other words, that the press was independent.

What this independence amounts to is: (a) newspapers which did not sympathise with the government did not go to the government for opinions, and openly voiced their

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[7] See Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 122.

opposition; and (b) those papers which were not opposed to the government did listen to the government. Is any of this surprising? And taking (b) especially, is this not crucial for understanding the situation? Chamberlain and his allies certainly wanted to influence the press, but they only had influence because the owners and editors were already inclined to agree or approve or sympathise – that is to say, the initiative in such an exchange lay with the newspapers.

The question of why Halifax decided to see Layton, Southwood and Beaverbrook, but not other newspaper owners, after his 1937 visit to Germany is certainly important if seen within this context. It may have been the case that he did not need to make a point of seeing Dawson, who as a friend he saw often anyway, and he may have assumed that owners of other Conservative newspapers were broadly in sympathy with the government line, and that it was best to stick to seeing owners of the more independent-minded papers. If such was the case, it would explain his meeting with Layton and Southwood, representing as they did the main Liberal and Labour dailies. The fact that Halifax complained to Southwood about the cartoonist Dyson is probably indicative of why he also approached the independent-minded Beaverbrook – because of David Low. Halifax's concerns were specific: he was not attempting the impossible task of seeking to control opposition newspapers, but asking for greater sensitivity towards unusually touchy and dangerous foreign leaders, in the form of moderating the stronger criticisms. And his chief concern was not with reasoned political articles and editorials, but with the deliberately malicious caricature of cartoonists.

In the wake of such meetings, however, the ultimate decision to shape a newspaper's content and tone still rested with its owner, and it follows that if some journalists were alienated to the point of producing their own newsletters it was in response to the decisions of their owners and editors, more than to pressure from

Chamberlain and the government. If this is so, the explanation for the support some, perhaps most (but never all) papers gave to Chamberlain lies chiefly with the press controllers, not the British government. Charles Warner, a Foreign Office official, confirmed that the growth of newsletters 'is the reaction of the independent minded journalist to the control of the Press Lords and other interests'.[8] If support for the government was *given,* rather than successfully *demanded*, however, then we must regard it as proof that the press was fundamentally independent of government control. Such a press could, in certain circumstances, be susceptible to influence, but never to coercion.

The extent to which Cockett's evidence consists of criticism of the attitude and conduct of newspapers as such, as opposed to proof of actual government influence on the content of the newspapers in question, is striking. Because he assumes that the newspapers were under government influence, he interprets complaints against newspapers as complaints against the government, and in doing so wholly overlooks the possibility (borne out by the evidence offered in this study) that papers adopted their own attitudes towards appeasement for their own reasons. Cockett is also prone to interpret criticisms of 'the press' or 'newspapers' as applying to all newspapers, when it is quite clear that the complaints are actually against just a few of them, mostly *The Times* and the Beaverbrook newspapers.

In his desire to support his thesis Cockett offers certain words by Cranborne – a comment made retrospectively in August 1940 – as evidence of government control on the press, but his use of that quotation is characteristic of his style. What Cranborne said was *not* that the press was controlled by Chamberlain, but that the responsibility lay with the '*personal* interests and ambitions' of '*certain* owners', meaning the 'press

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[8] FO 395/362.2508, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 102.

lords'.[9] Cockett treats these words as a general condemnation of 'the press', and in doing so goes from particular cases to general assertions.

The strongest alternative to the straw man of government pressure is the possibility that owners and editors had strong views of their own on Germany, British policy and the prospect of war – and that these created a *prior* reason for their support for Chamberlain, or at least their readiness to exercise restraint when urged to do so by ministers. If some press controllers did not sympathise with Chamberlain's policy, then they publicly disagreed even though they were financed by the Conservative party, as happened with the *Yorkshire Post*.

The reaction of the so-called 'anti-appeasers' or opposition, further illustrates the lack of government press 'control'. Did Churchill, Eden, Amery and Liberal and Labour politicians believe that alternative views were being suppressed in the press? The anti-appeasers may have been worried about the arguments in the editorial pages, but were their own views suppressed? If they had been as worried as Cockett suggests, there would surely have been complaints from them. Memoirs, diaries and correspondence of the leading critical politicians contain no serious complaints. Aside from the free speech available in Parliament and transmitted by the still strong practice of newspaper reporting of parliamentary debates, the non-parliamentary speeches of leading politicians were printed in full, or substantially so, in the leading broadsheet national newspapers – whether *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Manchester Guardian*, *News Chronicle* or *Daily Herald* – as well as in most local newspapers. Understandably each tended to be biased in their choice of reports towards members of the party to which they felt allegiance, but *The Times*, for instance, normally printed the speeches of Churchill, Eden, Sinclair and Attlee.[10] Anti-appeasement politicians were also invited to write articles in the major papers, some in series. From 1937 to 1938 Churchill wrote

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[9] Cranborne to Arthur Mann, 13 August 1940, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 186: emphasis added.
[10] See Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, pp. 572, 577.

fortnightly articles in Beaverbrook's *Evening Standard*, and although he was dropped because he contradicted Beaverbrook's views, he was immediately re-employed by the *Daily Telegraph*. Again, any 'censorship' located in these examples owes more to the views of the respective newspaper owners than a co-ordinated policy of government 'control'.

The views of the left were also very actively propagated in the publications of the Left Book Club or in different newsletters. They were indeed so successful that other parties felt they had to counteract them, fearing the success of socialist and communist ideas - hence the creation in 1937 of a Right Book Club, National Book Association, and Liberal Book Club. This was a period of intense ideological debate, propaganda and publication. The creation of the British Association for International Understanding was a reaction to fears in late 1938 that the government was *losing* the propaganda war, not a further example of government control of the media.

This study, informed as it has been by a wider range of primary documentation than Cockett chose to employ for his research, has shown that Cockett's claims that 'the Chamberlain government, through its close control of the press, certainly succeeded in subverting democracy during the years 1937 to 1940' and that 'no alternative policy to appeasement as pursued by Chamberlain could ever be consistently articulated in the British press', are inaccurate.[11]

Aside from what has been suggested above – that anti-appeasement opinion and press criticism continued to be expressed – one might reflect on what happened from March 1939. Appeasement was undermined, and finally collapsed; Chamberlain's control of his own Cabinet was challenged from within, and newspaper criticism mounted; following political and newspaper pressure, he had to bring Churchill and Eden into the Cabinet in September 1939; and in May 1940 he was overthrown. What

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[11] Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 189 and 188.

Cockett chooses to see as increasingly critical newspaper comment surely contradicts his strong claims about government 'control' – because here we see press owners and editors, even the previously most 'loyal' ones, criticising the government.[12] What we see in this period from March 1939 is not the failure of Chamberlain's efforts at control, but a reduced readiness of some newspaper controllers to listen to and take heed of his appeals. There were, then, further efforts at influence, which were unsuccessful. These attempts were now being made from a more defensive, even beleaguered, standpoint: the government felt it was in danger of losing the propaganda battle, and so was counter-acting. None of this suggests that free speech, free press or 'democracy' had been subverted.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 changed the relationship between the government and the press completely. The government now acquired the legal means to interfere with newspaper policy on the grounds that national security might be endangered by excessive criticism. The Ministry of Information set up a Press and Censorship Bureau to control and centralise news dissemination.[13] The reactions of the newspapers to this development are significant: they give clear indications on how its relationship with the government had worked earlier. The Ministry's efforts to censor the newspapers were regarded as contrary to what had existed at any earlier time except during the 1914-18 war. Protest against these efforts immediately surfaced, and even Dawson, a steadfast supporter of Chamberlain, had to admit that 'censorship were committing incredible follies'.[14] Initially, the Lobby journalists themselves demanded a return to the pre-war relationship, which 'had proved so mutually valuable in the past'.[15] Then, only a few days later, the Ministry of Information's own press committee

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[12] See especially ibid., pp. 112-6.
[13] For a detailed examination see Ian McLaine, *The Ministry of Morale* (London, 1979).
[14] See Dawson diary, entries of 5,6, September 1939.
[15] Lobby Journalists Committee to the Prime Minister, 21 September 1939, PREM 1/391.

expressed concern.[16] These reactions show that all levels of the press were dissatisfied with the newly-introduced censorship powers. While they accepted the principle of a wartime need for some government 'influence' on the content of the media, they disliked it in practice and contrasted it with the freedom of newspaper comment before the war – including that of the appeasement period. Furthermore, this study shows that the Lobby system, so heavily criticised by some historians,[17] was content with the way it worked before the war, because it worked both ways, with mutual advantages for the government and the press.

It is fitting to conclude this study with a statement from Chamberlain, who was accused of having 'manipulated' the British press, but who as late as February 1939 complained about the lack of influence he could exert. His comment that 'I wish the Press could be controlled a bit better'[18] shows not the success of a policy of control, but rather an awareness that the newspapers' fundamental independence kept them outside his influence. What makes this statement still more remarkable is the fact that it was not, as one might expect, a comment on the opposition newspapers, but was directed against the two most important Conservative papers, the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*. This comment also needs to be set in the context of Hitler's cancellation of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, which he justified as a response to 'the anti-German attitude of the British Press, prompted by the British Government'.[19] The comment clearly refers to the sharp change in attitude of some papers, including the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*. This highlights a strong contrast between two arguments: firstly, Cockett's claim that Chamberlain 'controlled' the press in favour of appeasing Germany; and, secondly, the German government accusations that the British press was mostly hostile, indeed

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[16] See Press Committee of the MOI to the Prime Minister, 28 September 1939, PREM 1/391.
[17] See Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 4-8; also James Margach, *The Anatomy of Power: an Enquiry into the Personality of Leadership* (London, 1979), p. 129.
[18] Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 12 February 1939, NC 18/1/1085.
[19] See *Times*, 29 April 1939, p. 13; see also Gannon, *British Press*, p. 269.

provocative, towards Germany and, most importantly, its claim that this hostility was encouraged by the British Government. The distinction between the two claims could hardly be sharper, even if one bears in mind that the German government's accusations had a propaganda purpose. Even so, it is plain not just from the German complaints but also from the Chamberlain-Halifax efforts to restrain the press that there was not in fact British government 'control'. If Chamberlain had no control over supposedly 'friendly' Conservative newspapers, he certainly lacked influence on the opposition press. Without denying that Chamberlain and his closest allies attempted to influence newspapers and on occasion had success with some sympathetic newspapers, it remains doubtful that even in these cases this 'pressure' was decisive because, as Koss commented, editors 'were resolved to commit their own mistakes'.[20]

Newspapers shared with the public the feeling that another war had to be averted. To achieve this ultimate goal they needed no external pressure to remind them of the power newspapers could wield over public and political attitudes towards the international situation: the outbreak of the First World War proved to be reason enough.[21] It was therefore the decision of the proprietor or editor whether to calm the fears of his readers and to support appeasement, as long as it was in accordance with the overall policy of the paper. In the final analysis, therefore, it was the press controllers, and not the government, who decided the political stance of a paper and who had direct influence on the control of news.[22]

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[20] Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, p. 576.
[21] See ibid., ii, p. 543, and Bernhard Rosenberger, *Zeitungen als Kriegstreiber? Die Rolle der Presse im Vorfeld des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Cologne, 1998).
[22] See Koss, *Rise and Fall*, ii, pp. 544, 579, and Seymour-Ure, Press, *Politics and the Public*, p. 16.

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Gwynne, H.A.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
Halifax, 1st Earl of	Borthwick Institute, York
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Mann, Arthur	Bodleian Library, Oxford
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Simon, 1st Lord	Bodleian Library, Oxford
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CAB: Cabinet

PREM: Prime Minister's private office

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NS 18	Reichspropagandaleitung
NS 42	Reichspressechef
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R 901	Nachrichten- und Presseabteilung des Bestandes Auswärtiges Amt
R 43	Bestand Reichskanzlei

Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin

Politische Abteilung

R 77125	Journalisten, Pressevertreter – England
R 77131	Pressewesen – England
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