THE ANSCHLUSS MOVEMENT AND BRITISH POLICY:

MAY 1937 - MARCH 1938

by

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PREFACE

For many centuries Austria had been closely connected with the German states. In language and culture, Austria and Germany had always looked to each other. As late as the twentieth century, Austria still clung to her traditional leadership in Germany. In the period following the First World War, Austria continued to look to Germany for leadership. Austria, beset by numerous economic and social problems, made many pleas for union with her German neighbor. From 1919 to 1933 all moves on the part of Austria and Germany for union, whether political or economic, were thwarted by the signatories of the peace treaties.

With the entrance of Adolf Hitler onto the European political stage, the movement for the Anschluss -- the union of Germany and Austria -- took on a different light. Austrians no longer sought union with a Germany which was dominated by Hitler. The new National Socialist German Reich aimed at the early acquisition of Austria. The latter was important to the Reich for its agricultural and natural resources and would improve its geopolitical and military position in Europe.

In 1934 the National Socialists assassinated Dr.

Engelbert Dollfuss, the Austrian Chancellor, in an attempt to take control of his country. The attempted Putsch failed when the government returned to the hands of the Austrians with Kurt von Schuschnigg assuming the position formerly held by Dr. Dollfuss. The period from 1934 to 1936 was one of surface recognition of the independence of Austria. During this time the Austrian National Socialists used devious means to strengthen their position in Austria. By the end of 1937 it had become apparent to Hitler's advisors that the use of force was necessary to achieve the Austrian objective. By March of 1938 Hitler was able to take the small Central European country without having to fight for it.

This thesis is a study of the background of Hitler's move into Austria in 1938 -- a move which was unchallenged by the major powers in Europe. It was a move which gave Hitler assurance that his next aggressive action in Central Europe -- Czechoslovakia -- would go unopposed.

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CHAPTER I

THE MOVEMENT FOR ANSCHLUSS: AUSTRO-GERMAN RELATIONS, 1918-1936

Historically, Austria was, for over a thousand years, closely connected with the German states. The first Germans to occupy the region the post-war world knew as Austria were the Bavarians. In the tenth century the Bavarian king lost his possessions to the head of the Bebenberger clan, which in turn was succeeded by the Habsburg dynasty in 1276. The house of Habsburg remained in control of Austria until the Dual-Monarchy disintegrated in October and November of 1918.

After the breakup of the Dual-Monarchy, German-Austria, as it called itself, attempted to effect a union with Germany.[1] The hope of union between the two countries, however, was thwarted in the final draft of the peace treaties which vetoed the Anschluss.

The Austrian Assembly, realizing that the immediate

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[1]M. Margaret Ball, Post-War German-Austrian Relations: The Anschluss Movement, 1918-1936. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1937), pp 8-17.

implementation of the Anschluss was impossible, ratified the Treaty of St. Germain on September 10, 1919. Named now Austria, she was obliged to preserve the independence of the new Republic. Only with the approval of the Council of the League of Nations would Austria be permitted to effect the link-up with Germany.[2]

After the conclusion of the peace treaties, Austria found herself in a pitiful situation. Not only had she lost her former territories, but with them she also lost her hope for a future. Austrian communications had broken down; the country was destitute; people were starving; and machines stood idle.

The movement for Anschluss in Austria was a product of Austria's political situation following the First World War. Austria was the German-speaking remnant of the Dual-Monarchy, which had been defeated and was suspected by the new nation states which had sprung up out of the Versailles Peace Settlement. Instinctively Austria turned to Germany for protection. Not only did she want protection, but Austria was already united to her northern neighbor by language, culture and four years of war.

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[2]Justice For Austria: Red-White-Red-Book, Descriptions, Documents and Proofs to the Antecedents and History of the Annexation of Austria (Vienna: Austrian State Printing House, 1947), p. 19.

By February of 1922, it was imperative that immediate aid be given to Austria or her financial situation would bring about her collapse. Consequently England, France, Italy and Czechoslovakia lent her money. By the last half of 1922 the situation in Austria was again so desperate that it was referred to the September meeting of the League of Nations Council.[3]

The Geneva Protocols, enacted by the League in October of 1922, laid out a scheme whereby reforms would be made in the Austrian budget if Austria would '... abstain from any negotiations or from any economic or financial engagement calculated directly or indirectly to compromise this independence.'[4] Austria's financial needs, then, gave the Powers a second opportunity to reassert the prohibition of the Anschluss. Again Austria obligated herself to preserve the independence that many did not want.

From October of 1922 to September of 1926 the Austrian Government was so occupied with financial reconstruction under the League of Nations that little thought was devoted to the Anschluss. Throughout the same period the German Government was so concerned with questions of reparations,

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[3]Ball, p. 44.

[4]Justice For Austria, p. 19.

Ruhr occupation, and currency inflation that it, too, had no time to concern itself officially with movements for union. The movement for union at this time in both countries, then, was confined to unofficial and popular demonstrations and semi-official statements of opinion. Throughout this entire period, advocates of the Anschluss felt as soon as Germany could be admitted to the League of Nations something definite could be done to bring about a union between Germany and Austria.

On September 8, 1926 Germany was admitted to the League of Nations. At this time Germany began to emerge as a leader in world affairs. Membership in the League was believed to be a means for the ultimate solution to Germany's problems of foreign policy. The most important points in her policy were disarmament, the minorities problem, and the union of Germany and Austria.[5]

Between the end of 1926 and October of 1929 neither Germany nor Austria made any official move towards Anschluss, whether political or economic. Ignaz Seipel, the Austrian Chancellor, was convinced that the time was not ripe for such a move. During this period, however, there was a tendency on the part of both Germany and Austria to cooperate

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[5]Ernst Jäckh, The New Germany (London: Humphrey Milford, 1927), p. 97.

in legal matters. In the event that the two countries should be united at a later time, this would simplify the process of making the two states one.[6]

Thus, although no official steps could be taken before 1929 to complete the Anschluss, popular and semi-official demonstrations continued in both countries. The expressions voiced in both countries during this period indicate that many Austrians and Germans desired a union. Union was not brought about, however, because the Governments of Germany and Austria did not feel the time was right for such a move. The German Foreign Minister, Gustav Stresemann, considered the maintenance of amicable relations with France to be of prime importance at this time; while Chancellor Seipel of Austria considered Anschluss impossible without a revision of the peace treaties and without a change of attitude on the side of the Entente Powers.

By 1929 Germany and Austria once more began to move for an economic or customs union between the two countries as the first step toward a political union which would complete the Anschluss. Again the Allied Powers interfered. The final defeat of the customs union ocurred in 1931 when Austria was forced to appeal to the Allied Powers to alleviate her financial situation. The Allied Powers, especially

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[6]Ball, p. 77.

France who feared that such a union would upset the balance of power in Europe, were willing to grant financial aid to the Central European country provided that the proposed customs union would never go into effect. Austria, along with her German neighbor, was forced to bow to the superior force of France. The customs union was officially buried before it ever had a chance.

Thus Austria, in 1932, although highly desirous of a union with the German people, bound herself to the maintenance of her economic independence to the World Court of the League of Nations for a period of at least ten years. She again was forced to promise that she would not 'violate her economic independence by granting to any State a special regime or exclusive advantages calculated to threaten this independence.'[7]

On January 30, 1933 Adolf Hitler made his entrance on the European political stage. The Anschluss, which until 1933 had been primarily an Austrian issue, now became a German one. From here on, due mainly to the pull of the international scene and its shift of a power balance, Austria moved slowly along the path to her extinction. Act one was completed with the Papen-Schuschnigg "non-intervention" pact of

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[7]Ball, p. 185.

1936, and the final act of the drama reached its conclusion less than two years later with Hitler's ultimatum to the Austrian Chancellor at Berchtesgaden.

The acquisition of Austria had long been the primary target of the German National Socialists.[8] From the day that he assumed power in Germany, Hitler openly and systematically prepared to cancel the peace treaties and create a Greater German Reich. For this purpose the Anschluss became a necessity. On the first page of Mein Kampf, Adolf Hitler had written:

> German Austria must return to the Great German Mother country, and not because of any economic considerations. No, and again no; even if such a union were unimportant from an economic point of view; yes, even it were harmful, it must nevertheless take place. One blood demands one Reich. . . . Only when the Reich borders include the very last German, but can no longer guarantee his daily bread, will the moral right to acquire foreign soil arise from the distresses of our own people.[9]

The goal of German foreign policy after the First World War was to be self-sufficient and sovereign.[10] Necessary to this policy was the union with Austria and the destruction

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[8]U.S., Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, I (1946), 450.

[9]Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock), p. 3.

[10]Hermann Rauschning, Hitler Could Not Stop. Reprinted from Foreign Affairs (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, Inc., 1939), pp. 8-9.

of Czechoslovakia. Thereafter Germany would be able to control the food and natural resources of South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans as a prelude to the mastery of Europe and the conquest of the granary of the Ukraine. George A. Messersmith, Consul General of the United States in Berlin and Vienna during the pre-war years, introduced testimony at the Nuremberg Trials which threw light on the Nazi policy in regards to Austria. Such Nazi policy, according to Messersmith, declared that "the incorporation of Austria into Germany was a political and economic necessity and that this incorporation was going to be accomplished 'by whatever means were necessary.'"[11]

Austria's troubles seriously increased soon after Hitler assumed a dictatorial position in Germany. On April 7, 1933 the Austrian Government decided not to permit the transmission of speeches made by German National Socialists to be aired over Austrian radio stations.[12] Austria had now decided that she did not want to join Germany after all. Many Austrians had decided that union with a Hitler-dominated Germany would be quite another thing from union with the Germany of the pre-Hitler era.

The change in Austria's attitude was quite comprehensible.

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[11]Floyd A. Cave (ed.), The Origins and Consequences of World War II (New York: Dryden Press, 1948), p. 369.

[12]Ball, p. 195.

The Christian Socialists -- the party of Chancellor Englebert Dollfuss and his successor Kurt von Schuschnigg -- were the Catholic Party, while in Germany the Catholic Center Party had been disbanded and allowed no political exercise. Hitler, furthermore, had made it quite plain that the church was absolutely subordinate to the state. The Austrian Communists had no desire to join a country that treated its Communists as Hitler did. The Austrian Socialists were against the new German Chancellor for he had destroyed their free trade unions. Also, many of the Socialists in Austria were Jews, or at least of Jewish origin, and had no desire to suffer the same fate as the Jews in Germany. The National Socialists alone in Austria were enthusiastic about the Anschluss and would desire nothing better than to become a part of an Austria united to Germany under the Führer.

At the beginning of the Nazi regime in 1933, Germany was too weak to make any open threats against the independence of the Austrian nation. It adopted a policy of securing its aims by obtaining a foothold in the Cabinet -- a position it achieved after the July 1936 Agreement -- controlling the police through the Minister of the Interior and eliminating all opposing elements.

As early as May of 1933 the slogans promulgated by the National Socialists in Austria, receiving directions from Reich headquarters, were 'increase of the moral undermining until

until Austria is ripe for any event' and 'Austria must not be allowed to rest.'[13] The plans of the National Socialists included intimidating the Austrian population, increasing the difficult economic situation, shaking the confidence of the outside world in the Austrian Republic and camouflaging the claim of the National Socialist Party for Anschluss as a passionate desire on the part of the Austrian populace.

At the end of May 1933 the German frontier was closed against tourists going to Austria by the imposition of a 1000 mark visa-tax. The breach between Austria and Germany was now complete. "There could be no further doubt that National Socialism was resolved by all possible means to bring about the Austro-German union which it desired."[14]

Following the closing of the border, Austrian Chancellor Englebert Dollfuss founded the Austrian Front which was soon to be replaced by the Patriotic (or Fatherland) Front which aimed to consolidate Austria. In answer to the formation of the Fatherland Front, the first wave of Nazi terrorism swept over the country. Tear gas attacks, cutting of telephone wires and bomb attacks on railways and public buildings were all designed to prepare Austria for the coming of National Socialism.

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[13]Justice For Austria, p. 25.

[14]Johannes Messner, Dollfuss: An Austrian Patriot (London: Burns, Oates and Washburne Ltd., 1935), p.46.

Nazi Terrorist activities continued in Austria until July 25, 1934 when the National Socialist Party attempted a revolutionary Putsch and murdered Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss. The attempted Putsch, however, was a failure as the government was soon returned to the hands of the Austrians with Kurt von Schuschnigg assuming the position formerly held by Dr. Dollfuss. The new Chancellor preached Austria's cultural mission within the framework of a German alliance and an independent Austria.[15]

Upon the attempted Putsch of July and the subsequent death of the Austrian Chancellor, Mussolini flew into a great rage and ordered troops to defend the Brenner Pass. Neither Great Britain nor France appeared to support his military gesture. André Francois-Poncet, the French Ambassador to Berlin in the thirties, noted in his memoirs:

> They believed that events themselves had given Hitler a satisfactory lesson and that he would from now leave Austria in peace. Looking on him as one isolated and disgraced, they considered that he lost ground and that he must perforce turn cautious . . . . Britain, furthermore, was reluctant to dabble in this Austrian business; at bottom she was not far from believing that the Anschluss would occur sooner or later and that it was bootless to struggle against a fatal current. France, for her part, hesitated to take measures without being assured of British collaboration.[16]

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[15]Kurt von Schuschnigg, Austrian Requiem (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1946), p. 8.

[16]André Francois-Poncet, The Fateful Years: Memoirs of a French Ambassador in Berlin, 1931-1938, trans. Jacques LeClercq (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949), pp. 152-53.

In the future, Hitler would not forget that his fears had been in vain and that the western democracies were less realistic and less energetic than he had supposed. "In dealing with them, he decided," recorded Francois-Poncet in his memoirs, "much might be dared without running too many risks."[17] Mussolini, likewise, would not forget the lesson that he had learned in July when Britain and France would not give him military support at the Brenner.

The blow struck at Austria in July was prepared with Hitler's previous knowledge and consent. The Kollerschlag documents, found in Austria on July 26, 1934, contained the exact instructions for the revolutionary upheaval which was to have resulted from the death of Dr. Dollfuss. The document proved that the death of the Austrian Chancellor was provided for by an organizational plan which was inspired by Theo Habicht, the head of the Austrian National Socialists, and was directed from Germany.

Hitler's Germany in 1934, however, was not sufficiently rearmed to allow the Führer to successfully flout world opinion and carry the Putsch to its intended conclusion. Thus Hitler was forced to repudiate the activities of the Austrian National Socialist Party which was responsible for the death of the Chancellor. Hitler called home the German Foreign

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[17]Francois-Poncet, p. 153.

Minister, appeased Mussolini, smoothed relations with Great Britain and reassured the Austrians by issuing a strong declaration which "guaranteed" the independence of Austria.

Four years later, on July 25, 1938, after the completion of the Anschluss, German officials no longer expressed regret over the death of Dollfuss. They were eager to reveal what the world already knew -- they were not only identified with the murder, but were also sponsors of the assasination.[18]

The failure of the coup d'etat brought about a superficial improvement in the strained relations between Austria and Germany. The documentary proof that the assasination had been planned, organized, financed and abetted by the central party in Germany forced Hitler to order a radical change in his Austrian policy. Propaganda from Germany ceased, the chief of the Austria Nazi underground was recalled to Germany, and the German Ambassador to Austria, von Reith, was replaced by Franz von Papen whose mission was to "bring about if possible an easing of the general situation, and especially to direct the relations with the German-Austrian state, which have been so strained for a long time, again into normal and friendly channels."[19]

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[18]Nazi Conspiracy, VII, 920.

[19]Nazi Conspiracy, IV, 441.

Nazi conspiracy pretended to respect Austrian independence and sovereignty after the death of Chancellor Dollfuss. In truth, however, it continued to work for the destruction of the Austrian State. According to George M. Messersmith, German activities during those years were on the surface efforts to win the support of prominent and influential men through the use of the German Diplomatic Mission in Vienna and its facilities and personnel.[20] Thus the tactics of the Nazis during this period were of keeping silent and awaiting further developments. They maintained their secret contacts with Reich officials through the use of front personalities such as Arthur von Seyss-Inquart and Edmund Glaise-Horstenau.

The German Government went overboard in keeping up a pretense of non-interference with Austria. It continued to assure Austria that it had no designs on her independence. If Austria could but hope for the execution of those assurances, she could find her way clear to the granting of concessions and obtain relief from economic and internal pressures. On May 21, 1935, at the insistance of von Papen who hoped to convince Chancellor Schuschnigg of establishing an Austrian coalition government with the National Socialists, Hitler in an address to the Reichstag asserted: 'Germany neither intends

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[20]Nazi Conspiracy, IV, 171.

nor wishes to interfere in the internal affairs of Austria, to annex Austria or to conclude an Anschluss.'[21]

In the course of 1935 and 1936 the international balance of power shifted in Europe. By the middle of 1936 Italy, the champion of the independence of Austria in 1934, was engrossed in a campaign in Abyssinia. The conflict that resulted between Italy and England led to the creation of the Rome-Berlin Axis. In this new situation Austrian foreign policy could no longer look to Italy for support.

By 1936 it became apparent to Chancellor Schuschnigg that his policies towards Austria would have to undergo a change. He wrote in his memoirs:

> I knew that in order to save Austrian independence I had to embark on a course of appeasement . . . . Everything had to be avoided which would give Germany a pretext for intervention and everything had to be done to secure in some way Hitler's toleration of the status quo.[22]

In the same year the diplomatic position of Germany had vastly improved. German rearmament was well developed, and the Germans had rocked Europe with their remilitarization of the Rhineland. Hitler's new position in Europe influenced Austria's willingness to make concessions to Germany and to come to terms. It appeared desirable that Austria legalize

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[21] Nazi Conspiracy, VIII, 369.

[22] Schuschnigg, Requiem, p. 5

her existing position with the German Reich by some sort of public agreement. This agreement was to be temporarily expedient until the re-establishment of a normal power balance in Europe.[23]

Such an agreement was concluded on July 11, 1936. Three published clauses reaffirmed Hitler's recognition of Austria's sovereignty; promised non-intervention in each other's internal affairs; and expressed a desire that Austria, in her foreign policy, would acknowledge herself as a German state. The secret clauses covered a relaxation of the press war between the two countries, granted an amnesty for political prisoners in Austria, contained provisions for dealing with Austrian Nazi refugees in Germany, provided for a resumption of normal economic relations, and provided for a removal of German economic restrictions on tourist traffic between Austria and Germany. Most important, the Austrian government agreed to give representatives of the National Opposition in Austria, "respectable" Nazis like Seyss-Inquart and Glaise-Horstenau, a share in political responsibility.[24]

The July Agreement contained the confusing provision to the effect that Austria, in its policy in regard to Germany

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[23]Schuschnigg, Requiem, p. 6.

[24]Germany, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, Series D, I (1949), 278-82.

would consider herself as a German State. But the other two provisions clearly stated that Germany recognized the full sovereignty of Austria and regarded the inner political order of Austria as an Austrian concern over which Germany had no direct influence.

Austrian Nazis developed a new strategy following the agreement between Hitler and Schuschnigg in July. They were now allowed to form an organization through which they could carry on their operations openly and with legal sanction in Austria. They also formed several organizations in Austria which had a legal basis, but were simply a device by which the Nazis would later seek inclusion as a unit into the Fatherland Front.

The Gentlemen's Agreement of July 1936 became the half-way point along Austria's path to Anschluss. The pact publicly proclaimed Austria's sovereignty, and at the same time mocked it. For the next year and a half, the Austrian Chancellor would cling to the letter of the agreement. For Schuschnigg the pact marked the end of Austrian concessions. For Hitler it marked only the beginning. The German Government would use the new agreement to exert increasing pressure on the Austrian Government and to extort further concessions. The Third Reich would whittle down Austrian independence in the next eighteen months. The process would reach its conclusion in the Berchtesgaden talks of February, 1938.

CHAPTER II

REACTION TO ANSCHLUSS: ANGLO-GERMAN AND ANGLO-AUSTRIAN RELATIONS, 1918-1936

The position of an independent Austria was important to the security of Central Europe. Were Austria to perish, Czechoslovakia would become indefensible. After the fall of Czechoslovakia the old German dream of a Central Europe ruled by, and subject to, Berlin would have become a reality from the Baltic to the Mediterranean. A realization of the German dream would mean incalculable consequences for Great Britain and her precious empire.

Great Britain never gave Austria a formal guarantee of her independent status. The British Government was not willing to consider a specific commitment, although it was bound to prevent the implementation of the Anschluss as a signatory of the treaties of Versailles and St. Germain. Great Britain bound herself to prevent a link-up of Germany and Austria unless the action was approved of by the Council of the League of Nations.

Great Britain, like German-Austria, had suffered

terribly in the four years of the war. Sir John Simon, the British Secretary of State, had recorded in his memoirs:

> After war problems and burdens were so crushing, and disillusionment so widespread that many almost forgot that our sacrifice was the price of freedom. They clung to the comforting assurance that, at any rate, they had fought and helped to win a 'war to end war', and they were determined that there must be no repetition of such horrors.[25]

Thus the desire to avoid any future European conflict became not only the cry of the British public, but also the object of the foreign policy of the British Government. British aims in Europe were to remove the grounds for disputes, or once disputes had arisen to peacefully settle them. These aims involved the political conciliation and the economic survival of Germany. This factor caused British policies to diverge from the French, who sought to maintain the restrictions imposed by Versailles.

Following the First World War, the British looked upon armaments as a cause of war. They believed that rearmament would deal a death blow to the newly formed League of Nations. These views of the British on world armaments caused them to pursue a policy of disarmament, pacifism and separation from the continent and consequent immunity to the problems of Europe.

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[25]John Simon, Retrospect: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Viscount Simon (New York: Hutchison and Co. Ltd., 1952), p. 178.

Beyond all this, the Englishman still held fast to his belief that God made a special effort to look after England, and she would manage to muddle through it all.

The leaders of the British Government in the post-war world -- The Conservatives -- reflected the mood of the British people. The Conservative leaders, on the whole, were products of the pre-war generation. Their careers had been shaped before the First World War; and their education, training and ideas were of the nineteenth century framework.[26] After the war, the Conservative in England favored a policy of withdrawal or isolationism, whereby all time would be devoted to affairs within the British Empire. Public opinion, as well, reflected isolationism, pacifism and the longing for normalcy. In her book, The Warped Vision, Margaret George described Conservative leaders in the following way:

> The uninspired and uninspiring Conservative leaders of the 1920's and 1930's reflected a national ostrich-like reaction to war and revolution, to social and economic insecurity; more precisely, they were indicative of the mold and temper of a fearful Conservatism of Tory groups clinging to the familiar and the same as a shield against the threatened changes of a dangerous age.[27]

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[26]Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1947), pp. 120-21.

[27]Margaret George, The Warped Vision: British Foreign Policy, 1933-1939 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1965), p. 14.

One of the new threatened changes in the dangerous age of post-war Europe was the advent of Adolf Hitler in 1933 as the Chancellor of Germany. His entrance into the European political arena was viewed by British statesmen with mixed emotions. The Labor Party disliked the dictatorship of Adolf Hitler, and the Conservatives disliked his threat to British security.

Labor sympathized with German grievances and believed that these had helped to put Hitler into power. They went on, therefore, preaching that these grievances should be redressed.[28] Some members of the Conservative Party sympathized with Hitler's national assertiveness, but most preferred national socialism to communism, which was supposed to be the alternative.[29] Most conservatives welcomed Hitler as the savior of Germany from the forces of communism.

The mixed emotions with which British politicians viewed the rise of Hitler's Germany was only one example of the extraordinary cleverness of German propaganda. Nazi propaganda played on the natural sympathy that many englishmen felt at Germany's efforts to recoup her fortunes. According to John F. Kennedy in his book Why England Slept:

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[28]George, p. 374.

[29]George, p. 374.

> Many people in England felt that Nazism was only a vigourous nationalistic movement that would shortly burn itself out. Others thought that it was largely a fascist movement carried on under the direction of Germany's leading capitalists.[30]

For his Reich, Hitler had planned the creation of a "new order in Europe" to serve the interests of the Aryan race. The new order -- the goals of the Nazi regime -- had been formulated by the Führer before he assumed a position of power in Germany. These aims were set down in Mein Kampf, but unfortunately few of those men in high place in the British Government who had read Hitler's work would pay much attention to his objectives spelled out.[31] They would not listen to his warnings, perhaps because they did not wish to hear.

Conservative leaders, then, were very poorly prepared for the explosion of Fascism. They were weighted down by their caution, ignorance and fear. Some Conservatives, however, saw the potential danger of the new movement in Germany. They thought that something must be done, but no action was taken. Others even believed that the Nazi regime would wear itself out. Some half-hearted stabs were made to prepare for the danger, but from there the retreat began. Most Conservative

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[30]John F. Kennedy, Why England Slept (New York: Wilfred Funk, Inc., 1940), p. 54.

[31]A.L. Rowse, Appeasement: A Study in Political Decline, 1933-1939 (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1961), p. 117.

leaders moved on with relief to easier occupations -- to stripping themselves of the few weapons, particularly those of collective security, which might have given them strength.

While Conservatives were moving away from collective security and moving towards hopes of peace for Europe, some British statesmen were becoming alarmed at Hitler's rapid rise to power and its implications on the European power balance. In 1933, the same year that Hitler assumed a dictatorial position in Germany, the British Foreign Office made stronger attempts to protect Austria from Germany. This policy was more the result of the initiative of Lord Vansittart, the Permanent Under Secretary, than a reflection of British foreign policy. Vansittart was a strong opponent of the new Berlin regime, and Hitler's aggressive Austrian policy only re-inforced this attitude. Vansittart tried to warn the British Government that the situation in Austria confronted Europe with a problem of the first magnitude:

> Austria has only been chosen for the first breakthrough of the renewed will to power because it is the easiest and weakest point . . . . The future of Europe turns largely on the fashion of our facing the German challenge over Austria, in which we are at present likely to lose. The seriousness of the challenge can only be realised if it is not seen as an isolated case, in which the country has no direct interest, but as the first of a series of challenges,

each one of which will carry with it a nearer threat to this country.[32]

Subsequent events would bear out Lord Vansittart's warnings. At that time, however, the effectiveness of his warnings was in proper proportion to the degree in which he was termed an alarmist. Vansittart regarded the prevention of an Austrian-German union as the primary objective in his foreign policy in dealing with Italy and France. He held Italian support against Germany "so essential that France ought to be prepared to pay for it in this and other matters where she is in a position to make concessions."[33]

On February 17, 1933 Great Britain joined Italy and France in the issuance of a communique on the necessity of keeping Austria independent and upon guaranteeing her integrity in accordance with the relevant treaties. One month later, Italy strengthened her position by economic treaties[34] with Austria and Hungary.

Such guarantees from the European Powers in regards to Austria forced Hitler to revise his policy toward the Central European Country. On March 16, 1933 he ordered that propaganda

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[32]Great Britain, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, V (1933), 254.

[33]Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, V (1933), 332.

[34]The economic treaties Italy signed in March of 1933 were called the Rome Protocols.

attacks on the Austrian Government must come to a halt. Although temporarily ceasing the propaganda war, Hitler continued financial restrictions and continued to attack Austria by methods of economic warfare.[35]

While Hitler's terroristic activities in Austria increased in 1933 and 1934, the English were awakening to the fact that Germany was beginning to be recognized as a potential menace to British and European well-being. By 1934, Great Britain began to consider rearmament, but the tragedy was that she only talked of rearmament in 1934. The only movement made toward rearmament was in 1934 when England began to negotiate an Anglo-German naval agreement with Germany. Such an agreement would give England time to rearm while attempting to keep German strength down. The Naval Agreement was signed in 1935. It would not be until 1937 -- under Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain -- that England would begin to enact the rearmament policy that she had outlined three years previously.

In the same year that England began to awake to the needs for her own security, Austria became aware of the fact that she, too, needed protection from the German dictator. The National Socialists had increased their terroristic activities, and on January 17, 1934 the Austrian Minister to Berlin,

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[35]Documents on German Foreign Policy, pp. 114-17.

Dr. Tauschitz, made a formal protest to the German Government.

The Austrian Minister demanded that the German broadcasting campaign should cease, the camps along the Austro-German frontier where the Nazis were concentrated should be abandoned, and the exports of explosive arms from Germany should be stopped. The protest demanded that Germany pledge herself to "desist from further interference and to respect Austrian independence."[36] In the event of a German refusal the Austrian Minister threatened to appeal to the League of Nations.

Baron von Franckenstein, the Austrian Minister in London, also appealed to the British to bring pressure on the German Government. Similar appeals were made in France and Italy. At this time Great Britain was engaged in an attempt to conciliate Germany on the armaments question and preferred that the question of Austria not be referred to the League Council. France was too busy with her own political problems to worry about Austria and Germany. Neither government wanted to force the Austrian issue at this time.

The German Foreign Minister, Baron von Neurath, denied any interference in Austrian domestic affairs, and Austria prepared to take the matter before the League of Nations. On February 9, 1934 Sir John Simon announced the British policy

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[36]Ball, p. 207.

with regards to Austria:

> His Majesty's Government have publicly stated that they do not seek to discourage Austria in bringing this appeal. The integrity and independence are an object of British policy, and while His Majesty's Government have no intention whatever of interfering in the internal affairs of another country, they fully recognize the right of Austria to demand that there should be no interference with her internal affairs from any other quarter.[37]

The British Government, becoming more and more aware of the situation developing in Austria, joined with Italy and France on February 17, 1934 in issuing a joint declaration to the effect that Austria's independence and integrity must be maintained in accord with the treaties:

> The Austrian Government has inquired of the Governments of France, Great Britain, and Italy as to their attitude with regard to their dossier which it has prepared with a view to establishing German interference in the internal affairs of Austria which it has communicated to them.
>
> The conversations which have taken place between the three Governments on this subject have shown that they take a common view in accordance with the relevant treaties.[38]

The year following the February Declaration on Austrian independence, Stanley Baldwin returned to his third Ministry. In 1935 the new Prime Minister was more occupied with Great Britain's domestic issues than he was in foreign affairs.

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[37]Ball, p. 210.

[38]Great Britain, 5 Parliamentary Debates (Commons), (1934), 8.

Because of this interest there was no guiding hand in British foreign policy during his administration. This vacuum in foreign affairs left Baldwin open to the ideas and pressures of his friends.[39] Baldwin's foreign policy was ignorant, apathetic and apprehensive. It was not a policy which would actively combat the rise of Hitler's Germany:

> Baldwin's intuitive approach to leadership set the tone of the British response in the first years of the Fascist challenge; the nation was reduced to a policy of no policy, or more precisely, to a policy hastily devised and empirically arrived at as each foreign problem arose -- the empiricism, however (and most importantly), well within the framework of the fixed ideas and attitudes of Mr. Baldwin and his associates.
>
> With Stanley Baldwin as sometimes guide, British Conservative leaders (most of them) as well as the British people (most of them) sauntered through the period of the early thirties, only casually glancing outward, and largely unaffected by the alien affairs of Central Europe.[40]

During the year 1935 British statesmen were beginning to become more cognizant of the growing threat imposed by Nazi Germany. In July of 1934 Nazi Terrorists had tried to take

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[39]One group of people which exerted a great deal of pressure on the Prime Minister's foreign policy was the Cliveden Set. This Set consisted of a circle of influential people in British politics who met frequently at the home of Lord and Lady Astor on their estate at Cliveden to discuss political, domestic and foreign problems. The decisions reached by the guests at Cliveden would be carried back to Stanley Baldwin through his Private Secretary, Thomas Jones.

[40]George, pp. 45-46.

control of the Austrian Government. The plan failed when Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg assumed the position formerly held by the murdered Dr. Dollfuss. Although there was a lull in terrorist activities after the attempted Putsch, by 1935 the National Socialist group had begun to reassert itself.

The Western Powers were aware of this reassertion of National Socialist activity and in February of 1935, England joined with France and Italy in agreeing to hold joint consultations if Austria's independent status was threatened. The agreement, reached at the Stresa Conference, stated that if the independence of Austria was menaced, Great Britain would consult with the other Powers:

> Britain and France did not acknowledge Germany's right to modify its obligations under the peace treaties but hoped nevertheless for a 'general settlement' freely negotiated between Germany and the other Powers.[41]

The new alignment of the Western Powers, called the Stresa Front, was not as substantial an alliance as Austria had hoped for. The failure of the British to sound out Mussolini on his Abyssinian intentions destined the newly formed front to failure.

When the Duce had read the final clause of the Stresa

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[41]Dennis Bardens, Portrait of a Statesman (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1955), p. 124.

Agreement which pledged all powers to oppose "' with all suitable means the unilateral repudiation of treaties calculated to endanger the peace of Europe . . . .'"[42] he paused and gave a challenging look to the world leaders assembled. He meant that the status quo applied only to Europe and had no bearing on his future intentions in Abyssinia. The British should have investigated Italian intentions, but they failed to do so in order to bring back to England a settlement of Europe's problems.

Lord Vansittart, present with Ramsey MacDonald at the Conference, wrote in his book Lessons of My Life:

> It has often been asked why Mussolini was not warned at Stresa against the consequences of invading Abyssinia . . . . I did, of course, warn the Italians in personal talks; but it seemed better tactics, with an eye on Laval, first to secure agreement on Austria, that is, to provide a bait before administering admonition. The bait, however, was not enough. It was notorious that Britain had still a horror of 'commitments,' while Mussolini besotted with dreams 'of Africa and golden joys,' was speculatively bent on making the best of both continents by acquiring Abyssinia and pressing Austria -- an impossible combination.[43]

The Stresa Front was the only commitment that Great Britain ever made on behalf of Austrian independence. The English, French and Italians had pledged themselves to "consult

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[42]Randolph S. Churchill, The Rise and Fall of Sir Anthony Eden (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p.85.

[43]Lord Vansittart, Lessons of My Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943), p. 40.

together" in the event of any threat to Austria's position. British failure, however, to discuss Abyssinia at the Stresa Conference destroyed any assurances that England could have given to Austria. Stresa, then, hardly a guarantee in any sense of the word was by no stretch of the imagination a military guarantee. The only thing which it gave to Austria was a diplomatic alternative to Germany's aggressiveness. It was the only security that the Western Powers would offer to Chancellor Schuschnigg.

The Stresa Front was doomed to collapse when Mussolini invaded Abyssinia in 1935. Its collapse was not only an Austrian, but also a European, tragedy. Italy, the only source of military power close to Central Europe, had fallen away. Both Austria's hopes for independence and Europe's hopes for peace disappeared with the dissolution of the Stresa Front.

The collapse of Stresa was further complicated by the fact that the Austrians opposed the Italians even more than they did the Germans. The Austrians were anxious to rejoin South Tyrol, and the Austrians were also aware that Italy seemed not as concerned with Austrian independence as she was in keeping Germany from the Brenner. Austria had welcomed Italian intervention in 1934 during the July Putsch, but perhaps she would not be so willing to accept that help again especially if it were to bring Italian intervention in

domestic affairs.

One month after the Stresa Conference, Sir Anthony Eden, the Under Secretary of the British Foreign Office, and Sir John Simon, the British Secretary of State, paid a visit to Adolf Hitler in Berlin to find a basis for Anglo-German cooperation. The discussions also touched on the Austrian question. The German Chancellor told the British representatives that Germany did not threaten Austria, but

> . . . could not forget that the regime in Austria was in contradiction to the great majority of the people over which it maintained power. Many difficulties resulted from this. Germany could not cooperate with a Government which, both at home and abroad, insulted the German Government and the German ideal.[44]

In speaking of Austria later on in the Berlin talks, Hitler continued to point out that if a free vote were possible, the population of Austria would vote for closer relations with Germany, if not complete incorporation within the new Reich. Anthony Eden has recorded the following observations regarding Hitler's attitude toward Austria in the Berlin talks:

> On this occasion Hitler assured us once more, as one who knew Austria, that he had no desire to increase the economic difficulties of his own country by annexation of another whose economic difficulties were greater still. The Chancellor declined to take the lead

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[44]Anthony Eden, Facing the Dictators: The Memoirs of Sir Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon (Cambridge, Mass: The Riverside Press, 1962), p. 150.

> in giving Austria a guarantee of non-interference. Since Germany contemplated no agression, the Austrian question was not a problem at all.[45]

Sir John Simon expressed his opinion regarding the Austrian question when he told the Führer that "Britain had not the same interest in Austria as, for example, Belgium. She never had interfered in Austrian affairs and was still confining herself to the hope that the problems would be solved."[46] Simon seemed convinced that England might give up Austria under the right circumstances, and he seemed just as convinced that Germany planned to incorporate Austria into her boundaries. He recorded in his memoirs:

> The practical result of our Berlin visit was to establish that Germany greatly desires a good understanding with Britain, but that she is determined to go her own course in rearmament; that she expects in time to get all Germans within her borders, including Austria . . . .[47]

The year following the Berlin talks saw a turning point in European history. In the first place 1936 saw the end of the old British foreign policy based on the League of Nations. The other important event was the German march into the Rhineland, which spelled the end of British security and the ideal of Locarno.

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[45]Eden, Facing, p. 152.

[46]Jurgen Gehl, Austria, Germany and the Anschluss: 1931-1938 (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 114.

[47]Simon, p. 203.

In January of 1936 Sir Anthony Eden prepared a number of dispatches for private circulation as an educative warning to Hitler. First it was necessary that England hasten her attempts at rearmament and secondly, while pursuing rearmament that England must find some modus vivendi with Hitler's Reich. Eden was in favor of coming to terms with Germany, but made it mandatory that no concessions must be made merely to keep Hitler quiet:

> We should be prepared to make concessions to Germany, and they will have to be concessions of value to her if they are to achieve their object, but these concessions must only be offered as part of a final settlement which included some further arms limitation and Germany's return to the League.[48]

Two months after Eden's dispatches, the Government of Great Britain submitted its White Paper on Defense. This new White Paper indicated the need for rearmament in order to safeguard England against agression and thereby enable her to play her part in the enforcement of international obligations. As in 1934, the proposed rearmament agreement was postponed until May of 1937 when Sir Neville Chamberlain would begin its implementation.

While Great Britain was talking of plans to rearm, Mussolini was invading Abyssinia. The Duce's Abyssinian campaign became the turning point of the thirties. Hitler now

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[48]Eden, Facing, p. 363.

realized the weakness of Great Britain in dealing with the crisis. He would draw upon this knowledge to invade the Rhineland successfully on March 7, 1936. Anthony Eden, the new British Foreign Secretary replacing Sir Samual Hoare who had been disgraced by his proposed settlement of the Ethiopian issue, urged British preparation against this growing European menace. Eden insisted that it was in the interest of England to conclude with Germany a far-reaching and enduring settlement while "Herr Hitler is in the mood to do so."[49]

Hoping to reach an agreement with the Führer, Sir Anthony Eden sent an optimistic questionnaire to Hitler in May of 1936. One question was pointed at Hitler's intentions in Austria:

> Was Germany, in proposing pacts of non-aggression with 'the States on Germany's S.E. and N.E. frontiers' (which in a strict geographical sense meant Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Lithuania) ready 'to interpret these words so as to cover at least also the Soviet Union, Latvia and Estonia, as well as the states actually contiguous to Germany?' And would she define the distinction between 'non-aggression' and 'non-interference in the affairs of other States?'[50]

The questionnaire was never answered.

Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland on March

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[49]Eden, Facing, p. 387.

[50]R.W. Seton-Watson, Britain and the Dictators: A Survey of Post-War British Policy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 261.

7, 1936 has been recognized as the turning point in Germany's plan for aggression. This was the last occasion upon which Germany would have been stopped without blood-shed. Only a few battalions had been sent to the Rhineland, and they had orders to withdraw if the French marched. Some British statesmen, such as Duff Cooper and Robert Vansittart, believed that if Hitler had been bluntly told to go back his power for future mischief would have been severely shaken.

The majority of the British public, however, would have been directly opposed to such an action in the Rhineland in 1936. To go to war with Germany for walking into her own backyard -- which was how the British viewed it -- at a time when discussions were progressing regarding Germany's right to resume occupation was not the sort of thing people could understand. So the last chance of securing peace without bloodshed went by.

British foreign policy after Hitler's move into the Rhineland assumed a hesitant and indecisive character. The permissiveness with which Great Britain had accepted the German action, which was a violation of the Locarno Pact, was a crucial marker on the road to appeasement. All England asked of Germany at this time was a fresh guarantee of European security with an assurance that British interests would not be disturbed. In the next two years England would ask, and would

receive, more German assurances for securing European security. Along with such assurances, England would watch Hitler break one promise after another as he swallowed up Austria, the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia.

As German aggression was growing more acute so were the problems facing the Austrian people. In June of 1936 the French Foreign Minister, Yvon Delbos, and his British counterpart, Sir Anthony Eden, began discussing the Austrian question. They had invited Kurt von Schuschnigg, the Austrian Chancellor, to discuss Austro-German problems with them. The invitation was turned down by von Schuschnigg. The official explanation was that though von Schuschnigg was quite happy to accept such an invitation, he was kept busy at home, and "that the internal position of Austria was one of a clarity that left nothing to be desired."[51] The exact matter that was keeping the Austrian Chancellor in his own country was the July Agreement with Hitler.

Thus it had become evident by the end of 1936 that Kurt von Schuschnigg was growing closer and closer to Hitler and the eventuality of the Anschluss. At the same time Great Britain was beginning to draw further and further away from

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[51]Charles A. Gulick, Austria: From Habsburg to Hitler, Vol. II: Fascism's Subversion of Democracy (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1948), p. 1723.

guarantees of Austrian independence. Britain had recognized the inevitability of the Anschluss from the time the Dual-Monarchy had broken up in 1918. As an ally of the Western Powers she had maintained her veto of the Anschluss as provided for by the treaties. Recognizing the key position of Austria in Central Europe, she had gone so far as to join Italy and France in guaranteeing at least "discussions" if Austrian independence was threatened.

If England was beginning to recognize the inevitability of the Anschluss by 1936, she was also beginning to realize the need for a strong foreign policy against Germany. A few statesmen, such as Lord Vansittart and Duff Cooper, had begun to grasp the nature of Hitler's Third Reich and its fearful implication for world power, but the majority of British political leaders were not cognizant of the essence of Hitler's fascist state. Had an understanding of the real nature of Nazism been more exact and had the Government been less desirous of making a general and lasting agreement with Germany and holding the balance of power in Europe, Hitler might not have been able to accomplish his next major triumph in Europe[52] -- the dissolution of the independent status of Austria.

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[52]P.A. Reynolds, British Foreign Policy in the Inter-War Years (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1954), p. 108.

England would rely on Austria's neighbor, Italy, to provide the same protection that had been given in July of 1934. But Italy was moving closer to Germany, and with the collapse of the Stresa Pact, the Duce could no longer be relied upon to provide military support for little Austria. In May of 1936 Prime Minister Baldwin confided to his secretary Thomas Jones that:

> We should not be compromised into undertaking to protect Austria from falling into the lap of Germany. We do not mean to fight for Austria any more than for Abyssinia. We are not going to impose sanctions against Germany under any formula of collective security.[53]

If Baldwin was already beginning to give up Austria by the end of 1936, how would his successor Sir Neville Chamberlain, view the growing aggression of Germany towards the independent Central European state in the year to come?

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[53]George, p. 89.

CHAPTER III

ALONG THE PATH TO ANSCHLUSS: JANUARY 1937-NOVEMBER 1937

The closing months of 1936 and the opening months of the following year provided a difficult period for the Austrian Chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg. While Great Britain and the other Western Powers appeared to be close to abandoning the Austrian cause, von Schuschnigg faced the problem of implementing the last clause of the July 1936 Agreement which provided for giving the National Socialists a share in political responsibility in the Austrian Government.[54]

The dilemma that von Schuschnigg faced was how he could fulfill the last condition of the 1936 pact with Hitler without endangering his own position within Austria. He was finally forced to accept two persons from the national opposition camp into the Austrian Government. The first appointment was given to Edmund Glaise-Horstenau, who was given the position of Minister without Portfolio and eventually be-

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[54]Documents on German Foreign Policy, pp. 278-282.

came the Minister of the Interior in November of 1936. The second appointment went to Guido Schmidt who became the new State Secretary to the Foreign Minister.

In his attempts to appease the national opposition -- the most important lever that Germany had for inducing pressure on the Austrian Government within the confines of the Gentlemen's Agreement -- von Schuschnigg faced resistance from his own party, the Christian Socialists. The members of the Christian Socialists were not willing to lend support to von Schuschnigg in order to relinquish some of their own position within the Austrian Government to the National Socialists, who were to be called upon to participate within the government in compliance with Hitler's July Pact.

The course that Chancellor von Schuschnigg was subsequently forced to adopt was a difficult one. The Chancellor had to appease the Austrian Nazis and, at the same time, maintain the confidence of his own Christian Socialist Party.[55] Such a course of action was looked upon with disfavor in Berlin. Baron von Neurath, the German Foreign Minister, in structed Franz von Papen, the German Minister to Austria, to protest the double line of approach pursued by the Austrian

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[55]Gehl, p. 146.

Chancellor.[56] Kurt von Schuschnigg immediately backed down from his stand in an effort to reconcile the Führer and to prevent any further complication of relations with the Reich Government. The Austrian Chancellor told von Papen that 'I am well aware that the historical position of Vienna has come to an end and that the focal point of the German mission now lies in Berlin.'[57]

Kurt von Schuschnigg, who was becoming more convinced of the inevitability of the Anschluss, now found himself in the position of finding another manner in which reconciliation with the National Socialists might be made.

While von Schuschnigg was facing the problem of how to recognize the Austrian Nazis without openly antagonizing his own party, the national opposition was facing a problem of its own. They were working to find a way to contact the Austrian Chancellor and to seek inclusion in the Fatherland Front. Captain Josef Leopold, the leader of the National Socialists group, envisioned the formation of an association which would unify all national forces in Austria with the Nazis as its core. The association was to be called the Deutsch-Sozialer Volksbund, and its objective was inclusion into the Fatherland Front. In order to achieve the goals of

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[56] Documents on German Foreign Policy, p. 351.

[57] Gehl, p. 148.

the proposed Volksbund and to make contact with the Austrian Chancellor easier, Captain Leopold formed a Committee of Seven, an organization consisting of National Socialist leaders and contact men within the von Schuschnigg Government.

On February 11, 1937 representatives from the Committee of Seven met with Chancellor von Schuschnigg to discuss the introduction of statutes for the Deutsch-Sozialer Volksbund. Von Schuschnigg informed representatives of the Committee that it was too early to introduce such statutes, and he declared that he was willing, however, to do everything in his power short of official recognition to facilitate the activity of the national opposition.[58] He offered to recognize the Committee of Seven, to remain in contact with it, and see that its activities were not impeded. Von Schuschnigg furthermore offered to appoint contacts from the Fatherland Front to establish a liaison in national matters and make possible collaboration of the National Socialist Party within the framework of the front. Persons in the von Schuschnigg administration that were found objectionable by the national opposition were to be gradually removed.[59]

Under the chairmanship of Captain Leopold, the Committee

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[58]Gehl, p. 151.

[59]Gehl, pp. 151-52

of Seven found no recourse open to them but to accept von Schuschnigg's proposals. They felt that if they insisted on the admission of the Deutsch-Sozialer Volksbund, they ran the risk of having von Schuschnigg withdraw all of his proposals.

Kurt von Schuschnigg and Josef Leopold had each found a temporary solution to their respective problems. von Schuschnigg had saved face with his Christian Socialist Party by rejecting any official recognition of the Austrian National Socialists. At the same time, Captain Leopold secured for himself a freer hand for his activities. The Austrian Nazis would take advantage of this new freedom in the course of 1937. They set up offices for the Committee of Seven in the Teinfaltstrasse in Vienna. Gradually the Teinfaltstrasse became the Nazi headquarters in Austria under the direction of Dr. Leo Tavs. Nazi activity from this headquarters would culminate in a plan designed to overthrow the Austrian Government in the spring of 1938.

For the moment, however, Captain Josef Leopold was unable to achieve this immediate goal. None of his associates reached office in 1937, and he was not optimistic that von Schuschnigg would grant recognition to the illegal Nazi party. The Austrian National Socialists were unable to achieve success in Austria without pressure exerted from Germany. The Austrian Nazi Party was not strong enough on its own to force von Schusnigg

to grant them recognition.

As the year 1937 opened, von Schuschnigg faced pressure not only from the National Socialists operating in Austria, but also from the Christian Socialist Party as well. The clerical circles of the Fatherland Front had exerted pressure on von Schuschnigg not to go any further in his concessions to the Austrian Nazis nor to the Germans.[60] From 1937 on, von Schuschnigg's policy would be one of strict adherance to the July 1936 Agreement. His policy was fashioned from a fear of Hitler's growing power and from a fear that Austria would be abandoned by the Western Powers should a crisis with Germany arise.

It had become increasingly obvious by 1937, then, that National Socialist Germany imposed a threat to the Western World. Nazi Germany's Central European policy, furthermore, imposed a threat to British security. In 1937 England still favored Austrian independence to keep the status quo in the Danube Basin. But the British Government could not, and would not, give any further guarantee -- outside of the Stresa Pact -- concerning Austrian independence and sovereignty. England was not in any position to take on new European obligations.

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[60]Gehl, p. 153.

England was not ready to offer any new guarantees to Austria and Chancellor von Schuschnigg, in turn, maintained that Austria did not seek any new assurances of her independence. He merely wanted a guarantee as to whether Great Britain would stand behind her previous policy in Central Europe.[61] Austria would have liked to reawaken the Stresa Front, but von Schuschnigg and his colleagues did not feel that the Western Powers were willing to save Austria should they be called upon to do so. Austria appreciated that the key position was held by Great Britain, but nothing was done to awaken her interest in Austria. Since the 1936 German-Austrian Agreement, the Embassies in London and Paris had been left to work entirely on their own to interest the British and the French in the Austrian question.[62] Not until it was too late did Chancellor von Schuschnigg try to explain the position of Austria to the British.

Von Schuschnigg feared that any appeal to Great Britain would result in action not designed to go far enough to protect Austria's independence. At the same time, the Austrian Chancellor feared that any overtures made to England would provoke Hitler to take action against the Central European State on the

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[61]Von Schuschnigg, Requiem, p. 162.

[62]Martin Fuchs, Showdown in Vienna: The Death of Austria, trans. Charles Hope Lumley (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), p. 114.

basis that she was not living up to the July 1936 Gentlemen's Agreement. For these reasons the Austrian Chancellor went out of his way to avoid meeting leaders of British foreign policy. Von Schuschnigg kept contact with England limited to official business between the two Embassies.

During 1937 -- the last year of Austria's independent existance -- there was no desire or effort, then, shown for a policy of cooperation between Austria and Great Britain. Had any effort been shown on either side, perhaps it might have enabled the other to overcome its hesitation. The conviction, however, in London and Vienna was that the key to the problem lay in Italian policy and so individual efforts on the part of either Austria or England would have come to no avail.

Any hope of Italian interference had begun to die away by the spring of 1937. In February Hitler sent the head of the Luftwaffe, General Goering, to meet with the Italian dictator in Rome. The purpose of this visit was to feel out Mussolini on German-Italian questions and on the Austrian issue. Paul Schmidt, Hitler's interpreter, attended the meeting and was impressed by Mussolini's changed attitude regarding the Anschluss. Schmidt recorded in his memoirs:

> Times had changed, and the discussions of the Austrian question itself showed how fundamentally Mussolini's attitude had altered. Goering was very outspoken on this matter, frankly telling Mussolini that the

> Anschluss would and must come and that the events could not be delayed.[63]

Mussolini's response to Goering was silence, and this silence might have been taken to mean that he still regarded the Anschluss movement with mixed emotions. He did, however, realize that it would and must come. Schmidt, the interpreter, expressed a belief that it had been the main part of Goering's visit to feel out the Duce on the matter of the Austro-German union. Schmidt also expressed surprise at how far Mussolini had at this time fallen away from the Western Powers.[64]

Two months after Goering's visit to Rome, Dr. von-Schuschnigg received a message from Mussolini in Venice. The Duce led the Austrian Chancellor to believe that he must stand alone against the German menace. Mussolini told him that his sentiments still stood where they had in July of 1934, but von Schuschnigg must be made to understand that times had changed. Since the July Putsch, England had allowed Germany to rearm; Italy had committments in Abyssinia and Spain and had felt the menace of British hostility; and Mussolini had also made an agreement with Hitler. "And so his old friend von Schuschnigg must understand that despite the

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[63]Paul Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), p. 64.

[64]Schmidt, p. 64.

the utmost good-will, there was very little now he could do to help him."[65]

Without Mussolini's agreement, Hitler would have been extremely hesitant to carry through his plans for the annexation of Austria and the demise of Czechoslovakia. It was the German-Italian alliance which opened the way to the realization of Hitler's most ambitious plans. According to Andrè Francois-Poncet, "The understanding between the twin dictators gave rise to World War II."[66]

By the spring of 1937 Austria had begun to face her fateful year and the turning point of history prior to the Second World War. The first written evidence fell into Austrian hands confirming that Germany was breaking her "non-interference" pledge of the previous summer. The Austrian police had raided the illegal Nazi headquarters in the Helfersdorferstrasse in Vienna. These raids yielded accounts of talks between the Austrian party leaders and Adolf Hitler. The raids, furthermore, revealed correspondence material between Austrian and German SS officers over addresses for a courier service and proof that the Germans were pouring money

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[65]G.E.R. Gedye, Fallen Bastions: The Central European Tragedy (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1939), p. 210.

[66]Francois-Poncet, p. 236.

and propaganda into Austria for the underground movement.[67]

Instead of using this incriminating evidence to Austrian advantage, Dr. von Schuschnigg attempted to keep his part of the July 1936 Agreement even though Hitler appeared to be breaking his word. The Austrian Chancellor not only didn't show this evidence to the Western Powers, but he continued on the same policy that he had pursued since the July Agreement. He was still fearful that an appeal to Great Britain would irritate the German Chancellor and perhaps force him to take action against Austria.

This policy was in evidence when the Austrian Foreign Minister, Guido Schmidt, was sent in May of 1937 to England to represent his country at the coronation ceremonies of the new British King. In London Schmidt came in contact with the directors of British foreign policy. He advised British diplomats against any strong foreign intervention in Austrian affairs, for the independence of that country was fully protected by the Rome Protocols and the July 1936 Agreement.[68]

During his visit, the Austrian Minister called on Sir Anthony Eden in the Foreign Office. At this time Eden asked Guido Schmidt what Great Britain could do regarding the

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[67]Gordon Brook-Shepherd, The Anschluss (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1963), p. 13.

[68]Fuchs, p. 114.

situation in Austria. In keeping with the policy of the Austrian Government, Schmidt informed the British Foreign Secretary that England could serve Austria best by "showing a general interest in Central European affairs, rather than by referring to Austria specifically by name."[69] Instead of trying to increase England's interest in Austria, Schmidt dampened any awakening enthusiasm British diplomats might have had.

Guido Schmidt left England in May, and in the same month Stanley Baldwin gave up his office to Sir Neville Chamberlain. By the time Baldwin left the office of Prime Minister the best hopes for development of British foreign policy had vanished. The League of Nations -- with its ideals of international cooperation to prevent another war -- had been smashed by Benito Mussolini's Ethiopian campaign. The Allies had accepted German rearmament and had left Hitler's reoccupation of the Rhineland unchallenged. In Spain the peace of Europe had been broken by civil war. By 1937 Baldwin's England stood in self-imposed imperial isolation.

On May 31, 1937 Sir Neville Chamberlain succeeded Stanley Baldwin to the position of British Prime Minister. With the arrival of the new Prime Minister, British Foreign

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[69]Eden, Facing, p. 569.

Policy in regards to the dictators became divided into three camps. On one side was Sir Neville Chamberlain, supported by his Conservative Cabinet and the House of Commons, who believed in an approach to Italy with the intention of establishing warm Anglo-Italian relations with no conditions required. After the first objective was completed, Chamberlain would launch an all-out effort to earn the friendship of the German dictator.[70]

The Prime Minister believed that both Italy and Germany could be placated by concessions on the part of the British and French and eventually be brought into a four power pact -- a sort of revival of the old Concert of Europe.[71] Chamberlain's foreign policy was one of appeasement. This policy rested on the illusion that the European dictators had a human side and could be dealt with in tête-à-tête discussions. Lord Birkenhead has described such a policy in his biography of Lord Halifax:

> The policy of appeasement . . . was based on the fallacious belief that such personal contacts must inevitably better understanding, and that when the dictators met the English statesmen they would discover that they were reasonable men who appreciated their problems, and were prepared to make various suggestions of how they could be met, usually at the

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[70]George, p. 176.

[71]This theme will be repeated by Lord Halifax when he visits the German dictator at Berchtesgaden in November of 1937.

> expense of someone else's territory or colonies which would not be consulted. It was a policy that rested on the supposition that Hitler and Mussolini were normal statesmen who would have enough sense to recognize a favourable deal, and could be dissuaded from further acts of violence, and it showed fundamental misunderstanding of the character of men already degraded by the narcotic of absolute power. It was not a policy of peace at any price, for there was a limit beyond which Chamberlain was not prepared to go, but it was an extreme limit indeed. Always in his mind also was the need to play for time while re-arming in order to reinforce his diplomacy, but not in a manner so drastic as to cause alarm at home or abroad.[72]

Chamberlain's foreign policy was implemented in Berlin as Sir Neville Henderson was appointed to replace Sir Eric Phipps as British Ambassador. Henderson was appointed by Sir Anthony Eden, who had never met him. Eden would later admit in his memoirs that Henderson's Berlin mission was a grave error in British diplomacy:

> It was an international misfortune we should have been represented in Berlin at this time by a man, who, so far from warning the Nazis, was constantly making excuses for them, often in their company. Henderson's confidence in Nazi good intentions and his support of their claims in Austria and Czechoslovakia accelerated events it was his duty to retard.[73]

Rather than becoming a 'faithful interpreter' of his country's foreign policy, Sir Neville Henderson often used the diplomatic technique of expressing his personal opinion. On

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[72]The Earl of Birkenhead, Halifax: The Life of Lord Halifax (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), p. 363.

[73]Eden, Facing, p. 570

such occasions he went very far in accepting the German point of view on Central European questions. In view of such utterances, the German had good reason to question the seriousness of British determination.

Sir Neville Henderson viewed the German Führer as a "psychopath and a visionary, subject to outbursts of rage and swayed by sudden intuitions."[74] Henderson would believe that Hitler's decision to realize the Anschluss had been an act of anger at the decision of Chancellor von Schuschnigg to call for a plebiscite on the Austrian question in March of 1938. The British Ambassador would not recognize the Anschluss as a result of a well-defined plan for German aggression.

In an essay from The Diplomats by Felix Gilbert and Gordon Craig, the former describes Henderson's influence on British foreign policy in Berlin as the following:

> Henderson never for a moment suspected that he was wrong or that this failure to appreciate the purpose and the definiteness of Hitler's policy was really promoting the Führer's aims. Yet his repeated argument that the moderates had a real chance of dominating German policy not only made it possible for Hitler to win major concessions from London but gave British policy-makers a fallacious basis on which to plan their German course.[75]

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[74]Great Britain, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 3rd Series, I (1938), 97-100.

[75]Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert (eds.), The Diplomats, 1919-1939 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 544.

Sir Neville Henderson had gone to Berlin with a mission -- to carry through the appeasement policy of the new Prime Minister, Sir Neville Chamberlain. Such a policy recognized the dictators as reasonable men, capable of being dealt with in orderly discussions. Henderson had a burning desire to triumph in this mission,[76] but triumph in Germany depended upon finding a basis for cooperation with Hitler's Reich. Henderson, therefore, set out to find the good side of Nazi Germany.

By July 1935, he had made his position regarding Austria known to the German diplomats. William Shirer, an American correspondent stationed in Berlin in the thirties, reported that on July 5 Henderson had told Goering that "Hitler can have his Austria so far as he, Henderson, is concerned."[77]

Besides appeasement, Chamberlain's foreign policy rested on the concept of the traditional defense of the British Isles. Chamberlain did not believe that the defense of England depended upon the independent status of von Schuschnigg's Austria.[78]

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[76]Sir Neville Henderson, Failure of a Mission: Berlin, 1937-1939 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1940), p. 3.

[77]William L. Shirer, Berlin Diary: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), p. 76.

[78]Arthur H. Furnia, The Diplomacy of Appeasement: Anglo-French Relations and the Prelude to World War II (Washington: The University Press of Washington, D.C., 1960), p. 255.

The British Prime Minister, although he distrusted Germany, believed that it was possible to make an agreement with Hitler's Reich. However, just as von Schuschnigg was fearful of aggravating Hitler with any overtures to England so, too, was Chamberlain fearful that any guarantee that the British might make at this time regarding Austrian independence would only serve to aggravate authorities in Berlin and make negotiations that much harder.

The foreign policy of Sir Neville Chamberlain differed from that of his Foreign Secretary, Sir Anthony Eden. As a realist in his view toward the dictators, Eden and his followers composed the second camp regarding British foreign policy at this time. He never suspected, as did Chamberlain, that the dictators were reasonable men. "Their conduct was not reasonable and they did not intend that it should be so."[79] Sir Anthony realized that they were fundamentally different from English statesmen and dealt with them accordingly.

While Chamberlain's foreign policy had been one of "separating the dictators",[80] the policy which Eden pursued was one of playing the dictators against each other. Eden

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[79]William Rees-Mogg, Sir Anthony Eden (London: Rockliff, 1956), p. 51.

[80]George, p. 176.

eventually hoped to isolate Germany and Italy into a common ground of contention, and then let the two dictators battle it out. Whereas Chamberlain had hoped to restore a balance of power to Europe through concessions to the twin dictators, Eden hoped to restore that same power balance by letting the dictators fight one another.

Sir Anthony Eden and Sir Neville Chamberlain did agree on several essential points of European appeasement. Both were working for a policy of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War. Both were concentrating on a somewhat conciliatory approach to Germany, and both had hopes for some reopening of the Stresa Front through which Britain, France and Italy might stand together in a kind of friendly warning to Hitler against any irresponsible move into Central Europe.[81]

Eden's divergence from Chamberlain's views came with the preparations for new negotiations with the Italian dictator. It had been the aim of Chamberlain's foreign policy to establish warm Anglo-Italian relations. Eden, however, was reluctant to discuss any fresh negotiations with Mussolini's government until Italy was ready to keep her promises to the British. The Italians had broken their pledges in regard to the withdrawal of troops from Spain, and they had broken the "Gentlemen's Agreement" with Great Britain for which Eden had worked so hard. Eden, therefore, hesitated

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[81]George, p. 176.

to conclude any new understandings with Mussolini until the Italian dictator would be willing to demonstrate his good faith by some positive compliance with British conditions, such as the withdrawal of troops from Spain.

Chamberlain was not willing to tolerate any interference by Anthony Eden in his proposed Italian policy. From the time he assumed office in May of 1937, Chamberlain set out to become not only Prime Minister, but his own Foreign Secretary as well. Chamberlain simply went around Eden and relied on his own sources to contact the Italian dictator. His channel of communications rested in the Italian Ambassador, Count Dino Grandi, and upon his sister-in-law, Lady Ivy Chamberlain, whose long-standing friendship with the Duce could be used to convince the Italians that the British were willing and eager to open discussions. This growing antipathy between Chamberlain and his Foreign Secretary over Italian negotiations would be one of the reasons for Eden's resignation in February of 1938.

If Chamberlain found his Foreign Secretary in sharp opposition to his Italian negotiations, he found his Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Robert Vansittart, to be just as sharp an opponent to Chamberlain's German policy. Hence, Lord Vansittart and his somewhat limited following comprised a third division of British foreign policy during this period.

In the 1930's Lord Vansittart was the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office. In his memoirs, Anthony Eden has described Sir Robert as:

> . . . a man of brilliant gifts with a capacity for friendship and a keen, active mind, sometimes obscured by his tortured language. Vansittart held decided views on international affairs and his instinct was usually right, but his sense of political methods that could be used was sometimes at fault. . . . Even about Germany, where he was abundantly right, he expressed himself with such repetitive fervour that all except those who agreed with him were liable to discount his views as too extreme.[82]

Vansittart's policy was one which detested the new Berlin Government, and perhaps Germany as a whole. Such a policy was strong enough to constitute a school of thought referred to as "Vansittartism." Lord Vansittart was obsessed with the danger which the new Berlin Government presented to European security. For this reason he had been a strong supporter of a policy of "pay almost any price"[83] to Mussolini to hold him to the Stresa Front in order to keep German ambitions in check in Central Europe.

Lord Vansittart, in his position in the Foreign Office from 1930-1938, had been influential in the formation of the policies of British Embassies on the Continent. He had been a staunch supporter of the Austrian cause and was remembered

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[82]Eden, Facing, pp. 270-71.

[83]Eden, Facing, pp. 271-72

by Chancellor von Schuschnigg as being a "true and understanding friend of our country and a specialist on Central European problems."[84] His anti-German and Austrian policies imposed a threat to the policy of the new Prime Minister, and Vansittart, like Eden, would have to be removed. When Vansittart was replaced by Alexander Cadogan on January 1, 1938, Chamberlain eliminated much opposition to his policies regarding Austria.

While British foreign policy toward the dictators was evolving into three trends under the new Prime Minister, Hitler was beginning to formulize his plans for European aggression. The first official record of such plans was in the Blomberg Directives of June 24, 1937. Among other directives for a European war, the Blomberg Plan provided for Special Case "Otto", which outlined a plan for the occupation of Austria. According to such a plan, Austria was to have been used as a base of operations against Czechoslovakia and subsequently would provide further inroads into Central and Eastern Europe.

The British Ambassador, Sir Neville Henderson, had an opportunity to discuss German plans toward Austria in September of 1937 when he attended Hitler's rally at Nuremberg.

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[84]Von Schuschnigg, Requiem, p. 128.

On the second day of the event the British Ambassador talked with Baron von Neurath, the German Foreign Minister. Henderson was interested in the immediate aims of German foreign policy. Von Neurath's reply was that "Austria is the first and last of our aims . . . ."[85]

After discussing German policy aims with Baron von Neurath, Sir Neville had an opportunity to talk to General Hermann Goering concerning the Anschluss question. Goering insisted "that it was inevitable."[86] The head of the Luftwaffe told Henderson that he had seen Guido Schmidt a few days earlier and "had bluntly told him that the sooner the Austrian Government accepted it as such, and without creating bad blood, the better it would be for all concerned."[87]

Thus by the fall of 1937 the inevitability of the Anschluss was apparent to many Europeans. Austria had been told by Goering, via Guido Schmidt, that Austria should prepare herself for the eventual union. Henderson and the British Embassy in Berlin were well aware of how the situation was developing, and in England the House of Commons discussed the interest that the British Government must take in the Austrian problem.

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[85]Henderson, p.72

[86]Henderson, p.73

[87]Henderson, p. 73.

On October 28, 1937 Mr. Geoffrey leM. Mander, a member of the British Labor Party, expressed the hope in Commons that the British would remain interested in the independent status of Austria in order to prevent any eventual entry into the Mediterranean. He furthermore expressed the hope that the British Government would do "all in their power to encourage the movement going on at present in the Danube Basin . . . ."[88] The question was shelved to be brought up another day. Each day that the problem was shoved aside, brought the Austrian people closer and closer to their destiny.

While Great Britain was considering whether or not she should interest herself in the Austrian problem, in Berlin Adolf Hitler was informed by Hermann Goering that Austria was needed in order to carry out the German plan of world expansion. In order to formulate plans for such a move, a secret conference was held in Berlin on November 5, 1937. This conference revealed Hitler's plans not only for Austria, but for the world.

The gathering at the conference was a select one. Attending were von Blomberg, the War Minister; Generals von Fritsch, Raeder and Goering, the commanders-in-chief of the Army, Navy and Air Force; and Hossbach, a general staff

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[88]Parliamentary Debates, CCCXXVIII, 365.

officer and Hitler's personal adjutant who reported the proceedings of the conference.[89]

The Conference of November 5, and the changes which followed from it, marked the turning point in Hitler's pre-war policy. The Führer insisted at the meeting that Germany must have more space in Europe. He concluded that the needed Lebensraum must be taken by force. Hitler calculated that the conquest of Czechoslovakia and Austria would constitute the conquest of food for from five to six million people, assuming that the comprehensive emigration of one million people from Austria could be carried out.[90]

The Hossbach notes of the Conference revealed that Austria and Czechoslovakia must be acquired in order to provide Germany with a better military position for future operations in Europe. The Führer, as he is quoted by Hossbach in the German Documents, said:

> The incorporation of these two states with Germany meant, from political-military point of view, a substantial advantage because it would mean shorter and better frontiers, the freeing of forces for other purposes, and the possibility of creating new units up to a level of about 12 divisions, that is, one new division per million inhabitants.[91]

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[89] Documents on German Foreign Policy, p. 29.

[90] Documents on German Foreign Policy, p. 36.

[91] Documents on German Foreign Policy, p. 36.

In the Hossbach Conference, Hitler announced his future intentions of annexing Austria at the first favorable opportunity. He expressed a belief that this could be accomplished without provoking Great Britain to war.[92]

By November of 1937, then, Hitler had formulated plans for his first aggressive action in Europe. The Führer was convinced that England would not go to war over Austria. Although Commons had briefly taken up the Austrian problem, the discussions had been postponed. If it were to come down to a decision on Austrian independence, Commons would undoubtedly support the view of the British Prime Minister. Lord Vansittart, the staunch supporter of Austria's independence, was on his way out in the late fall of 1937 as was Anthony Eden. With the departure of Eden and Vansittart, Chamberlain would be free to pursue his own course in respect to Austria.

Hitler was right in his assumption that aggression in Austria would provoke no British action. It was desirable, however, that he be able to feel out the English on the Central European question. Such an opportunity presented itself when General Goering invited Lord Halifax, the British Lord President, to attend the annual hunting exhibition in Berlin in

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[92]Documents on German Foreign Policy, p. 36.

November of 1937. Since Halifax was coming to Germany a meeting was to be arranged between Hitler and the Lord President of England. It would be at this meeting that Hitler hoped to find an answer to his own question as to what lengths the British were willing to go to preserve the peace of Europe.

CHAPTER IV

AUSTRIAN FATE SEALED AT TWO BERCHTESGADEN MEETINGS: NOVEMBER 19, 1937 - FEBRUARY 12, 1938

The last chapter of Austria's independence began when Lord Halifax journeyed to Berchtesgaden to meet with the German Chancellor on November 19, 1937. General Hermann Goering, the head of the German Air Force, had extended an invitation to Halifax earlier in the fall to attend the annual hunting exhibition in Berlin. The British Government thought that it would be an advantage for Halifax to travel to Germany under such a cover and urged the Lord President to accept the invitation and make some arrangements for a meeting with Hitler in Berlin.

It was Chamberlain's belief in the effectiveness of a personal visit to the dictator that prompted him to encourage Halifax's visit with Hitler. The Prime Minister had hoped that the British Lord President might be able to determine the nature of the Führer's demands in Central Europe. Chamberlain stressed in the House of Commons on November 12 and again on November 18 that the nature of Halifax's visit was "entirely

private and unofficial,"[93] and "not in the nature of negotiations."[94]

Although the British Prime Minister was in favor of the German trip, the Eden memoirs have given evidence that Sir Anthony Eden was far from elated about the Halifax expedition to Germany.[95] Eden had reluctantly agreed when the meeting had been originally planned for Berlin, but when Hitler insisted that the British representative visit him at his mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden, Eden's reaction was not at all favorable:

> It seemed to him that the Germans were trying to pretend that the whole initiative in this visit came from the English, and he thought it most undesirable that the British Government would appear so eager for a meeting as to give the impression of running after the dictator.[96]

Anthony Eden became even more disturbed about the Berlin visit when he learned that British newspapers had printed distorted accounts of the proposed trip to Berchtesgaden. The Foreign Secretary was concerned that wrong impressions would be given the Reich Chancellor regarding the Austrian and Czechoslovakian

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[93] Parliamentary Debates, CCCXXVIII, 2018.

[94] Parliamentary Debates, CCCXXIX, 567.

[95] While Neville Chamberlain and Lord Halifax were making plans for the proposed trip to Berchtesgaden, Sir Anthony Eden was in Brussels attending a nine-power conference to discuss problems in the Far East.

[96] Birkenhead, p. 365.

questions.

In light of this fear, the British Foreign Secretary cautioned Lord Halifax as to the course he should pursue in the German discussions. Eden has recorded in his memoirs:

> I have spoken to Lord Halifax and Sir Neville Henderson together. The former will listen and confine himself to a warning comment on Austria and Czechoslovakia. I have impressed on Sir Neville Henderson the need for doing all we can to discourage German intervention in these two states. It is all we can do until we are strong enough to talk to Germany.[97]

Despite the warning which Eden delivered to Lord Halifax and Sir Neville Henderson, on November 4, the British Ambassador in Berlin wrote to the Lord President and expressed a desire that the proposed visit should not be a disappointment to the Germans. He furthermore expressed a hope that the Prime Minister would go as far as he could in dealing with Hitler. The letter that Henderson wrote to Lord Halifax has been recorded by Lord Birkenhead:

> 'I believe that, if we are not too niggardly, Germany will keep her word, at any rate for a reasonable period. One cannot legislate for more. And particularly so, if we take it for granted that she will keep her word. The surest way of getting her to break it is to doubt. That is elementary.
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> 'Morally we cannot deny the right of Germans living in large blocks on the German frontier to decide their fate. If they were Hungarians or Croats everyone in England would be clamouring for it. We should, even if we don't like it, sympathize with German

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[97]Eden, Facing, p. 577.

> aspirations for unity, provided all changes be based on the clearly established principle of self-determination.'[98]

Five days later, Lord Halifax replied to the British Ambassador in Berlin:

> 'As to the main business, I entirely recognize the force of all you say in your letter as to the necessity of this country going as far as we possibly can to secure a general all-around settlement.'[99]

With the warning of Eden and the contrary advice of Sir Neville Henderson behind him, Lord Halifax departed for Germany. On November 19 he arrived at Hitler's mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden. After a few introductory remarks in which Halifax expressed hope for peace through European cooperation, the question of Austria was taken up. Paul Schmidt, Hitler's interpreter, has recorded in his memoirs that the German Chancellor told the British visitor that "a close union between Austria and the Reich was absolutely imperative, and had been urgently desired by the Austrian people ever since 1919."[100] In regard to the Führer's statement, Halifax observed that:

> England was interested to see that any alterations should come through the course of peaceful evolution and that methods should be avoided which might cause

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[98]Birkenhead, p. 366.

[99]Birkenhead, p. 366.

[100]Schmidt, p. 76.

> far-reaching disturbances, which neither the Chancellor nor other countries desired.[101]

According to Hitler's interpreter, the Führer became excited and told Halifax that the question of force was not applicable to Austria as "the wishes of the people were clearly evident."[102]

Following Hitler's outburst, the discussions centered on questions of disarmament, the League of Nations and the colonies. Then Halifax and Hitler again turned their attention to the question of Austria. At this time the German Chancellor assured his guest that a settlement could be reasonably reached as "the Agreement of July 11th had been made with Austria and it was to be hoped that it would lead to the removal of all difficulties."[103] After further conversations regarding Anglo-German relations, the Berchtesgaden meeting came to a close.

The Germans were fearful since no clear understanding had been reached at Berchtesgaden, that the British Lord President would return to his country with an unfavorable report for Sir Neville Chamberlain. For this reason, it was arranged that Halifax should meet with General Goering in Berlin the next day. Under orders from Hitler and after receiving reports from Paul Schmidt, Goering dealt with the same

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[101] Documents on German Foreign Policy, p. 62.

[102] Schmidt, p. 77.

[103] Documents on German Foreign Policy, p. 64.

questions that Hitler had been concerned with. Goering, however, dealt with such matters with more diplomacy than had been displayed by his Führer. Goering, according to the records of Hitler's interpreter:

> . . . remained quite calm, even about Austria, and treated matters as though the solutions sought by Germany were inevitable and unquestionable. 'Under no circumstances shall we use force,' he said reassuringly. On this matter, too, he seemed to have been given a hint by either Hitler or von Neurath, as he added: 'This would be completely unnecessary.'
>
> Everything could be settled quite well by negotiation. Later conversations showed me that this was in fact Goering's innermost conviction and it came out constantly in his conversations with Halifax.[104]

After his talks with Goering, Lord Halifax returned to England. On his trip back home on November 21, Halifax committed to writing some of his impressions regarding the visit with the German Chancellor. Lord Birkenhead, Halifax's biographer, has quoted from the Lord President's diary:

> 'As regards Austria and Czechoslovakia, I formed the impression that Germany believed time to be on her side, in the sense that the strong magnet will sooner or later attract the steel filings about within reach of its attraction, and intends to assist this process as far as possible . . . . I am sure Hitler was sincere when he said he did not want war: Goering, too!
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> 'But equally I have no doubt that they all feel that strong armaments are very valuable in making other people a good deal more reluctant to interfere with

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[104]Schmidt, p. 78.

> what they deem primarily their business. If we could get in some form of reassertion of respectable intentions from Germany -- as expressed in the present Austrian treaty -- and made applicable to Czechoslovakia if the German minority was properly treated, that is probably as far as we can hope to get Germany to go. The whole thing comes back to this. However much we may dislike the idea of Nazi beaver-like propaganda etc., in Central Europe, neither we nor the French are going to be able to stop it, and it would therefore seem short-sighted to forego the chance of German settlement by holding out for something we are almost certainly going to find ourselves powerless to secure.'[105]

The real importance of the Halifax mission to Berchtesgaden was the fearful revelation provided of the growing scale and quickening tempo of the Nazi ambitions in Central Europe, and for that matter, the rest of the world. The mission was also important because the message that Halifax relayed to the German Chancellor gave him the assurances that he needed that his policies in regard to Central Europe would go unopposed. The message that Halifax transmitted to Hitler was the essence of Chamberlain's appeasement policy -- England was willing to discuss the granting of overseas colonies and was willing to accept German changes in the European order if such changes were brought about by peaceful and evolutionary means. In effect, Lord Halifax, as Chamberlain's spokesman, had given Hitler a free hand in Central Europe.

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[105]Birkenhead, pp. 373-74.

Back in London, the result of Halifax's visit was viewed in political circles with mixed emotions. On November 24, Chamberlain was questioned in the House of Commons regarding the German talks. On this occasion the Prime Minister stated that although the nature of the conversations was confidential, he was satisfied that "the visit had been valuable in furthering the desire, which I believe to be generally felt in both countries, for the establishment of closer mutual understanding."[106]

When asked by Mr. Geoffrey leM. Mander, a member of the British Labor Party, if it were true that the British Government had given Germany a free hand in Austria and Czechoslovakia in exchange for no new demands on colonies for the next six years, the Prime Minister replied that "no pledges had been given."[107] In response to a question asked by Mr. Arthur Sinclair, another member of the British Labor Party, as to whether the French had been notified concerning the result of the discussions, Chamberlain replied that they would be. The conversations in Commons closed with Mr. Chamberlain's assurances to Mr. Clement Atlee of the Labor Party that no commitments of any kind would be made without

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[106]Parliamentary Debates, CCCXXIX, 1216.

[107]Parliamentary Debates, CCCXXIX, 1216.

discussions in the House.[108]

While Chamberlain gave assurances to Austria in the House of Commons, he recorded in his diary on November 26 another viewpoint:

> The German visit was from my point of view a great success, because it achieved its object, that of creating an atmosphere in which it is possible to discuss with Germany the practical questions involved in a European settlement . . . .Both Hitler and Goering said separately, and emphatically, that they had no desire or intention of making war, and I think we may take this as correct, at any rate at the present. Of course, they want to dominate Eastern Europe; they want as close a union with Austria as they can get without incorporating her in the Reich . . . .
>
> I don't see why we shouldn't say to Germany, 'give us satisfactory assurances that you won't use force to deal with the Austrians and Czechoslovakians and we will give you similar assurances that we won't use force to prevent the changes you want, if you can get them by peaceful means.[109]

Chamberlain had looked on the Berchtesgaden meeting as one of great success, but his Foreign Secretary, Sir Anthony Eden, was much more apprehensive about the outcome. Eden thought that, despite his warning before the Berchtesgaden meeting, Halifax had not gone far enough to inform the Germans of British interests in Central Europe:

> I wish that Halifax had warned Hitler more strongly against intervention in Central Europe. 'Alterations through the course of peaceful evolution' meant one

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[108] Parliamentary Debates, CCCXXIX, 1216.

[109] Feiling, pp. 332-33.

> thing to Halifax and probably something quite different to the Führer. Hitler was capable of taking this as giving him freedom to increase subversive Nazi activity in Austria, or to stir up the grievances of the Sudetan Germans.[110]

Shortly after Lord Halifax's return from Berchtesgaden, Sir Neville Chamberlain extended an invitation to the French Prime Minister, Camille Chautemps, and his Minister for Foreign Affairs, Yvon Delbos, to visit London on November 29 and 30. Through this meeting, the British Prime Minister hoped to allay any fears that the French might have that England was concluding an agreement with Germany. The Anglo-French conversations revolved around the colonial question, the German attitude toward the League of Nations, disarmament and the problems in Central and Eastern Europe. With respect to the Austrian question, it was intimated that the French would not act if the Germans were to annex Austria. Chamberlain found such a course of action very comforting.[111]

The Anglo-French talks, therefore, almost sealed the fate of Austria. At Berchtesgaden Halifax had more than intimated that Hitler could have Austria if he could find a peaceful way of incorporating that country into the German Reich. The British position was strengthened by similar

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[110]Eden, Facing, p.584.

[111]Furnia, p. 271.

French assurances at the November meetings. The Anglo-French conversations, furthermore:

> . . . strengthened the Entente but there could be no question as to the pattern which emerged from them. A policy of resistance, as expressed by Eden and Delbos, appeared to be doomed. While Chamberlain expressed his intention of progressing down the road of appeasement, Chautemps revealed himself to be as strong an advocate of the policy as was Chamberlain. Delbos emerged from the conversations apparently reconciled to the fact that he must carry through the policy of resistance alone, since Eden was definitely on his way out in favor of Halifax. Indeed, Mr. Chamberlain had good cause to be elated over the Halifax mission.[112]

As the Anglo-French talks were nearing their conclusion, Sir Anthony Eden met with the German and Italian Ministers, Dino Grandi and Baron von Ribbentrop, on December 2 to assure them that he had left the French in no doubt that the question of Austria was of much greater interest to Italy than it was to England. Furthermore, Eden reiterated the conclusions reached at Berchtesgaden when he informed the Ministers that "England and France agreed that in Central Europe (Austria and Czechoslovakia) certain changes could be made, provided, however, that the status quo was not changed by force."[113] By December 1937 Anthony Eden, too, was beginning to abandon the Austrian cause.

While Eden was contributing toward the isolation of

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[112]Furnia, p. 272.

[113]Documents on German Foreign Policy, p. 99.

Austria through his statement to the German and Italian Ministers, Baron von Ribbentrop -- the German Ambassador to London -- was taking particular pains to convince Hitler that England would not go to war over Austria. In the post-war era von Ribbentrop had been the head of a large business concern in Germany -- an occupation which had provided him with the opportunity to visit London frequently. His evidence of cosmopolitanism[114] plus his capability of repeating his Führer's ideas to make them appear as his own[115] had given the Baron a favorable position in Hitler's eyes. In October of 1936 the German Chancellor had appointed Ribbentrop as the German Ambassador to London.

In his London mission, von Ribbentrop revealed his policy as one of over-whelming belief in the primacy of Germany in all things and revealed also his exceptional endowments to do his motherland credit.[116] The new German Ambassador was well aware that the Austrian question was close to his Chancellor's heart. In order to please Hitler, von Ribbentrop worked for the completion of the Anschluss. In doing so, he convinced the Führer that London would not interfere in any

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[114]Eden, Facing, p. 79.

[115]Joachim von Ribbentrop, The Ribbentrop Memoirs, trans. Oliver Watson (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1953), p. xii.

[116]Simon, p. 198.

attempt that Germany might make to win the coveted Austrian prize:

> Over local problems in Central Europe, even if it were to add considerably to Germany's strength, England would in my opinion not risk a struggle for the survival of her empire. In such a case France would hardly have the nerve to storm the German fortification in the West alone without England.
>
> An unequivocal British concession regarding the Austrian-Czech question in accordance with our views would clear the political atmosphere in Europe. Judging from my previous experience, however, I consider such a turn unlikely and believe that at best only the force of circumstances could compel England some day to obliterate such a solution. My opinion that this problem cannot be solved by negotiations with England is strengthened by the fact that Chamberlain is enmeshed in a system of domestic as well as foreign policy (together with France) that makes important decisions exceedingly difficult.[117]

Such assurances given by von Ribbentrop to Hitler helped to strengthen Germany's move for the Anschluss. Hence German activity began to increase in Austria by the beginning of the new year.

By January of 1938 it had become apparent that Nazi intrigue was reaching new heights in Austria. News of the revived terror reached the Western world through Captain Josef Leopold of the Austrian Nazi Party, who confided the information to a Lieutenant Spranklin, a member of Oswald Mosely's British Fascist Movement. Captain Leopold had told

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[117] Documents on German Foreign Policy, p. 164.

Spranklin, in a meeting in Vienna, that an armed coup against Austria would be staged by his group in the spring of 1938. The proposed coup, according to Leopold, was to have had support from the Reich. On January 20, 1938 Spranklin told his story to Mr. St. Clair Gainer, the British Consul General in Munich. The British diplomat then informed his Embassy in Berlin. Shortly thereafter Sir Neville Henderson, the British Ambassador in Berlin, journeyed to London to inform his government of some sort of immediate action in Austria.

This report might have been written off as one of the rumors circulating in the troubled Europe at this time, had it not been for the proof that Captain Leopold was not boasting of lying. Rumors of an imminent Nazi Putsch or some sort of ultimatum from Germany became so insistent towards the beginning of 1938 that the Austrian Government felt bound to investigate.

On January 25 the office of Dr. Leo Tavs, the man in charge of the Austrian Nazi offices at their headquarters in the Teinfaltstrasse in Vienna, was arrested. In his absence the Nazi offices were searched and a memorandum on the present situation in Austria and a plan of the National Socialists for the future of Austria fell into the hands of the investigating officers.

The Tavs Document, the name given to the plan found

in the Vienna raid, revealed that the Austrian Nazis were seemingly dissatisfied with their abandonment by Germany and contemplated extremely radical measures to regain the initiative. They were to find some pretext to provoke unrest among the Austrian Nazis and compel the Vienna Government to use strong measures against them. This action, they had hoped, would force German intervention. The German Government, after informing Italy, was to have served an ultimatum to Austria demanding the inclusion of Austrian Nazis into their cabinet and the withdrawal of government forces. It was impossible to tell whether or not the Führer was behind, or even aware, of the Tavs Plan for Austria.

In January of 1938 Hitler had begun to contemplate some move into Austria as provided for by the Hossbach Conference of the previous year, but the German Chancellor was unsure of the course of action such a move would take. If Hitler had been aware of the Tavs Memorandum, the plan would have provided an excellent method for entry into von Schuschnigg's country. Some authors, such as Martin Fuchs in his work Showdown of Vienna: The Death of Austria (1939), contend that Hitler was well aware of the Tavs Memorandum and was planning to use it.[118] Other sources, such as Gordon

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[118]Fuchs, p. 164.

Brook-Shepherd's The Anschluss (1963), maintain that the German Chancellor was not aware of the existance of the document.[119] The Documents on German Foreign Policy (1949) do not adequately answer the question.

The contention as to whether Hitler was or was not aware of the Tavs Plan does not alter the fact that the document did exist. The National Socialist Party in Austria was cognizant of the British position with respect to Austria, and the Tavs Plan bore this position out as it stated that the British Government could be relied on to keep herself quiet and calm the French through assurances that the German army had invaded Austria to preserve the peace of Europe. "Mr. Chamberlain's Government might make a formal protest, but as it would not dare to attempt serious action it would try to put a good face on the defeat and accept the assurances that the people of Austria desired the move."[120] If trouble arose, a plebiscite could be arranged to satisfy France and England.

The Tavs Memorandum presented Kurt von Schuschnigg with a weapon with which he might have saved his country. The Austrian Chancellor could have presented the Tavs plan to London and Paris and pressed for a joint warning to Hitler

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[119]Shepherd, Anschluss, p. 18.

[120]Gedye, p. 220.

in line with Stresa obligations. Von Schuschnigg, however, was not yet ready to irritate the German Chancellor. The Austrian press was given instructions to publish nothing regarding the raid on the Teinfaltstrasse and the discovery of the Tavs Plan. The Austrian Chancellor feared that any publicity might be taken as an attack on Germany or on the Treaty of 1936.

The press releases that reached the Western Powers, however, did contain some information on the arrest of Dr. Tavs. A correspondent for The Times reported to his paper on January 27 and referred to the Tavs Document as "incriminating material" which formed the basis for Dr. Tavs interrogation. According to The Times, Dr. Tavs was arrested because of an interview in which "he accused the Austrian Government of being largely responsible for the trouble of July, 1934 . . . ."[121]

Two days later The Times correspondent reported to his London paper on the completion of Dr. Tavs' interrogation. The correspondent called the documents taken at the raid as "outlines of the terroristic acts which were to have been undertaken by the Austrian Nazis during 1938."[122] However,

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[121]The Times (London), January 27, 1938, p. 11.

[122]The Times (London), January 29, 1938, p. 11.

in keeping with von Schuschnigg's press instructions, The Times correspondent stressed that the plans were those of Dr. Tavs alone and "further discussion of the incident is deprecated."[123] England should have been aware, regardless of press releases and Embassy announcements, that something was brewing in Austria. These thoughts would be confirmed when news reached Great Britain that Hitler had purged his ranks of opposition to his command.

While the Tavs incident was occupying Austrian attention, Adolf Hitler was occupied with his own problems in Germany. In December 1937 Dr. Schacht resigned as Hitler's Minister of Economics. Schacht had been the Führer's most severe critic. From 1935 to 1937 he had warned Hitler that the demands that Goering and the Chancellor were making on German economy in the name of rearmament were greater than the economy could withstand. Hitler shrank from revealing the breach with this top Minister, and he tried to keep Schacht's resignation a secret for the moment.

Since Schacht's resignation, Hitler had searched for a way out of the dilemma. The German Chancellor found an escape from the problem in an incident created in January 1938 when General Blomberg, the German War Minister, was married with Hitler and Goering acting as witnesses. Immediately

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[123]The Times (London), January 29, 1938, p. 11.

following the marriage, the head of the Nazi Secret Service -- Heinrich Himmler -- gave Hitler evidence that Blomberg's bride was a "former prostitute with a police record."[124] Hitler was indignant at being involved with such a questionable marriage. The German Chancellor and his generals were insistent that Blomberg be dismissed. At the same time, General Fritsch, the commander-in-chief of the army, was falsely accused by Himmler of being a homosexual.

Blomberg was dismissed as was the unjustly accused Fritsch. Baron von Neurath, the German Foreign Minister, was replaced by the German Ambassador to Great Britain, Baron von Ribbentrop. Other Ambassadors were also to be dismissed. The resignation of Schacht could now be brought to light. Through this purge, Hitler had rid himself of much opposition to his proposed policies, and he could now pursue National Socialist aims in regard to Austria and Central Europe.

Following the Blomberg incident, Hitler could devote his time to plans for the Anschluss. He began to feel that the time was right for such a move. By the end of January 1938, the Führer was worried about the growing strength of

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[124]A.J.P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War (New York: Atheneum, 1962), p. 141.

England and the close cooperation developing between London and Paris. The German Chancellor was also becoming aware that any zeal von Schuschnigg might have had to defend Austrian independence in 1936 was rapidly disappearing. Hitler, furthermore, could rely on von Schuschnigg not to appeal to the Western Powers if she was threatened by Germany. This was evidenced by von Schuschnigg's failure to use the Tavs Document to incriminate the National Socialist Party.

The Berchtesgaden meeting of November of 1937 between Halifax and Hitler, left Hitler with the strong impression that England would not interfere in any attempt to occupy Austria providing that force was not used. Hitler was also convinced, as a result of the Anglo-French November talks and Eden's subsequent assurances to the German and Italian Ministers in December, that England would dissuade France from going to the aid of Austria. And lastly, the Führer needed something to cover up the impact that the Blomberg scandal had made in German political circles. The German Chancellor hoped that some move toward Austria might obliterate the Blomberg incident from German minds.

The British Ambassador to Berlin, Sir Neville Henderson, was becoming aware of the shift in Hitler's policy. On February 4, 1938 at the request of the British Government, Henderson met with Hitler at the Reichschancery. At this

meeting Henderson insisted that England sought a peaceful solution of the Austrian problem. Hitler replied that Nothing could be done until the press campaign against him in England had ceased. Nor was the Chancellor going to tolerate the interference of third parties in Central Europe:

> 'Injustice was being done to millions of Germans, and self-determination and democratic rights must be applied to Germans as well as others. Only 15 percent of the Austrian population supported the von Schuschnigg regime; if Britain opposed a just settlement, Germany would have to fight. If Germans were suppressed there, he must and would intervene; and if he did intervene he would act like lightning. Austria must be allowed to vote . . . .'[125]

Henderson asked for a clarification of what Hitler meant by a plebiscite. Hitler answered that 'the just interest of the German Austrian should be secured and an end made to oppression by a process of peaceful evolution.'[126] Hitler did not intend, as he proved later, to tolerate a plebiscite unless it was held under his direct auspices.

On the same day that Hitler was meeting with Sir Neville Henderson in Berlin, the circle of the Blomberg dismissals reached the German Ambassador in Vienna, Franz von Papen. On February 4, von Papen was told that his mission in Vienna had been terminated. It appeared that the German Chancellor was going to change his mind regarding the peaceful

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[125]Henderson, pp. 114-15.

[126]Henderson, p. 116.

evolution of Austrian union. Von Papen immediately went to meet Hitler, who by February 5 had returned to Berchgesgaden, to try to salvage the Austrian situation.

Von Papen informed Hitler that since the discovery of the Tavs Document, Dr. von Schuschnigg had wanted to meet with the Führer and discuss Austro-German problems. The German Minister, furthermore, intimated that a visit with the Austrian Chancellor might provide Hitler with a cloak with which to cover up the subject of Schacht's awkward protests and the controversy created by the Blomberg incident.[127] Von Papen was ordered by the German Chancellor to return to Vienna and prepare for a meeting between himself and von Schuschnigg on February 12.

It was not difficult for the German Minister to arrange for a meeting between Hitler and the Austrian Chancellor. By 1938 the situation in Austria was so bad that von Schuschnigg looked for an opportunity to meet with Germany's leader to discuss misunderstandings that had arisen from the time that the Gentlemen's Agreement had been concluded in 1936. Kurt von Schuschnigg did not need much urging, then, to meet with Hitler at his mountain retreat. The only conditions that von Schuschnigg demanded were that he be informed of

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[127]Franz von Papen, Memoirs, trans. Brian Connell (London: Andre Deutsch, 1954), p. 408.

the precise agenda of the conference; that the Agreement of July 1936 be maintained, and that the visit should be kept secret. Although von Papen agreed to all of these conditions, none of them were kept by the German Government.[128]

Several days before the proposed meeting von Schuschnigg worked out a series of 'maximum concessions' to be taken up during his February visit. This ten-point program was subsequently taken to Hitler by Dr. Arthur von Seyss-Inquart and Wilhelm Keppler, the Commissioner for Austrian Affairs in Berlin. These ten points would serve as the basis for Hitler's dealings with the Austrian Chancellor. Once Hitler was aware of how far Austria was prepared to submit to German authority, the German Chancellor knew to what extent he could push the small Central European country.

Kurt von Schuschnigg arrived at Berchtesgaden the morning of February 12. He was accompanied by Guido Schmidt, his Foreign Minister, and by von Papen, the German Ambassador. Hitler had invited to the meeting General Keitel, the chief of the Wermacht High Command; General von Richenau, the commander-in-chief of the Fourth German Army Group at Leipzig; General Sperrle of the Air Force. The summoning of the three generals to what had been planned as a private political

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[128]von Schuschnigg, Requiem, p. 30.

discussion was a breach of faith and an omen of things to come. Von Schuschnigg was not only to be intimidated by the presence of these generals, but was to be subjected to the ravings of the German Chancellor concerning Austria:

> How have you dared all these years to oppress and torture my people -- my German people in Austria. Now your hour has come . . . . You have played your last card, Herr Schuschnigg, and you will accept and sign here at once before you leave this house the terms I have prepared for you, or I give the order to march into Austria immediately . . . . My people in Austria are starving, Herr Schuschnigg. I am going to march in -- my people call me. There is not one country which will lift a finger to save you, and I have three divisions ready to march.[129]

The document that the German Chancellor forced von Schuschnigg to sign contained concessions similar to those that von Schuschnigg had been prepared to make. The first clause bound Austria to 'consult from time to time with the government of the Reich on foreign policy issues of mutual interest.'[130] The next clause bound the Austrian Government to recognize that:

> 'National Socialism is compatible with . . . allegiance to the Fatherland Front, provided that National Socialists recognize and respect the Austrian Constitution in carrying out their ideas. The Austrian Government will therefore take no steps which would have the effect of outlawing the National Socialist movement within the above context.'[131]

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[129]Gedye, p. 217.

[130]Documents on German Foreign Policy, pp. 515-16.

[131]Documents on German Foreign Policy, pp. 515-16.

Another point demanded 'a general amnesty for all persons punished . . . for their National Socialist Activities.'[132] Another clause required the removal of von Schuschnigg's propaganda chiefs, Minister Ludwig and Colonel Adam. The next clause named Glaise-Horstenau, an Austrian Nazi, as the Austrian Minister of Defense, and called for the exchange of 100 officers as part of a 'systematic cultivation of comradely relations.'[133] To finish off the demands, Hitler ordered the appointment of Seyss-Inquart as Austrian Minister of the Interior 'with authority over all security.'[134] All these measures were to be carried out by February 15.

After Hitler had presented his demands to the Austrian Chancellor, he summoned General Keitel into his room and dismissed his Austrian guest. Both von Schuschnigg and Guido Schmidt thought they would be arrested at any moment, but neither of them realized that Hitler had called the German General in as a bluff. The Führer's main objective in forcing the pause was to allow some forty-five minutes to tick away in a menacing atmosphere that would bring the Austrian Chancellor to a decision.

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[132] Documents on German Foreign Policy, pp. 515-16.

[133] Documents on German Foreign Policy, pp. 515-16.

[134] Documents on German Foreign Policy, pp. 515-16.

Under the pressure imposed by Hitler and his generals, Kurt von Schuschnigg had no alternative but to sign the Berchtesgaden Agreement. His signature, however, could not serve as a recognition of Hitler's ten points, but merely as a promise to submit the agreement to the Austrian President, Wilhelm Miklas. Dr. von Schuschnigg did promise to carry out the agreement if the Austrian President should accept it. In return for that promise, Hitler gave the Austrian Chancellor three days in which to carry out the provisions of the agreement, or preparations for invasion would begin.

The meeting at Berchtesgaden had stripped away any illusion as to who held the power in Austria. By surrendering to Hitler, von Schuschnigg had made it apparent that he could only govern with Hitler's consent. Von Schuschnigg had not disputed Hitler's broad picture of the unified destiny of the two peoples. The Austrian Chancellor did not bring up the Tavs Document nor did he mention the German failure to adhere to the Gentlemen's Agreement of the summer of 1936. Von Schuschnigg had not even hinted to the German Chancellor that the Austrians might, in desperation, fight to defend their own country. And finally, von Schuschnigg did not even challenge Hitler's assumption that nobody else in Europe would come to Austria's aid.

It was at Berchtesgaden in February of 1938 that Chancellor von Schuschnigg yielded once again to the demands of the German head of state. In doing so, he confirmed the death warrant that Austria had signed in July of 1936. Von Schuschnigg, in Austrian Requiem (1946), stated that his meeting with the German Chancellor at Berchtesgaden would remain forever as one of the darkest and most fateful days in the annals of Austria.[135] Von Schuschnigg had set out for Berchtesgaden a free Chancellor of the Austrian Government in name, but not in spirit. The Austrian Chancellor returned to his country with considerably less of either liberty. By this time von Schuschnigg was quite convinced that there was no room for hope for him or the independence of his country.[136] He might be able to carry on the facade of independence for a short while, but he must have been convinced by this time that Austria could not exist much longer as an independent state.

Von Schuschnigg's visit to the mountin retreat had been the second such visit in less than three months. In November the British Lord President, Halifax, had represented his country at Berchtesgaden. At that time he had made the

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[135]Von Schuschnigg, Requiem, p. 3.

[136]Von Schuschnigg, Requiem, p. 27.

British position quite clear -- if Germany could find some way to take Austria by peaceful means, His Majesty's Government would not be likely to interfere.

Less than three months after Halifax's visit, Hitler began his move for the Anschluss when he called the Austrian Chancellor to Berchtesgaden. The February visit would tell the death knell for the independence of Austria. Perhaps aware that Hitler's ravings concerning the British were all too true and perhaps because he was also well aware of the inevitability of the Anschluss, the Austrian Chancellor sold out his country as he once more compromised away what little independence Austria had retained after the 1936 agreement.

It appeared by February 12, 1938, then, that all was lost for the Austrian Chancellor and his Central European country. Perhaps von Schuschnigg might have been able to survive the blow or at least have temporarily strengthened his own position had he made some appeal to the Western Powers. The manner in which von Schuschnigg would accept the February meeting and its consequences, and the manner in which the leaders of Great Britain would accept the Berchtesgaden Agreement, would mark the last act of the Austrian tragedy.

CHAPTER V

HITLER TERMINATES AUSTRIAN INDEPENDENCE: FEBRUARY - MARCH 1938

The Austrian Chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg, had kept silent concerning his February meeting with Hitler at Berchtesgaden. His silence resulted from a fear that if his countrymen knew the real facts they might panic. The Chancellor's silence ultimately rested on the assumption that had dominated his foreign policy since the July Agreement. He desired to avoid anything which would provoke the wrath of the Führer. In such a way he hoped to play for time until a rapprochement might be reached with the Stresa Powers, which would restrict Hitler's actions in Central Europe.

In keeping with von Schuschnigg's policy of silence, the Austrian Government took steps to keep its own missions in all the key capitals of Europe ignorant of the truth of Berchtesgaden until February 15th. The facts that were ultimately given to the Ministers at the foreign capitals were distorted. The Austrian Ministers in European countries were told that an agreement had been reached after many hours of

discussion and that the German Chancellor had promised to carry out certain domestic measures in a spirit of conciliation. The envoys were instructed to place the main emphasis of their talks on the affirmation of the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1936 and on the "unshaken" position of the Austrian Government.[137]

> Throughout Europe, Austria's envoys were left more in the dark than many of their foreign colleagues about the supreme crisis of their country's history; and all this at a time when the Foreign Offices of the continent were bombarding them anxiously for the truth and even offering sympathies, which, on instruction, had to be declined.[138]

The behavior of the Austrian Chancellor and his Government perhaps can be explained by a notation that Sir Anthony Eden made in his memoirs:

> The reason for this playing down of the odious truth is obscure. No overt military preparations had yet been made by the Germans and possibly von Schuschnigg and his Ministers thought that to give Britain the brutal facts so soon would only result in a protest, which would intensify Hitler's rancour against the Austrian Government.[139]

On February 15, 1938 von Schuschnigg accepted the Berchtesgaden Agreement. According to the American Ambassador in France, Bullitt, "Schuschnigg believed that the actions

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[137]Shepherd, Anschluss, p. 74.

[138]Shepherd, Anschluss, p. 75.

[139]Anthony Eden, The Reckoning: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), p. 7.

which he was about to take would produce a temporary breathing period, but in the end would prove just as unsatisfactory to Hitler as his actions which followed the accord of July, 1936."[140]

On the same day that von Schuschnigg accepted the Berchtesgaden Agreement, Guido Schmidt, the Austrian Foreign Minister, instructed Austrian Ministers to be discreet and to reassure the Western Powers as much as possible. Von Schuschnigg was still fearful lest any move calculated to bring a protest from the Western Powers would cause Hitler to take new action in respect to Austria.

Following the instructions of Schmidt, Baron von Franckenstein, the Austrian Minister to London, visited Sir Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office on February 16. The Austrian Minister summed up the agreement made on February 12 and stated that it had been based on the need to establish peacefulness and tranquility at home and abroad. Von Franckenstein emphasized two things in his discussion with the Foreign Secretary:

> . . . that it was essential to bring about a general political tranquilization; and secondly, that Austria firmly hopes that her relations with Germany as clarified in the Berchtesgaden conversations will

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[140]United States, Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1938, I (1955), 399.

> now develop along normal lines. All other interpretations and conjectures are not true to fact and should be rejected.[141]

Shortly after his meeting with Baron von Franckenstein, Sir Anthony Eden was present at the House of Commons and found himself under considerable pressure due to his refusal to commit himself to any active policy in respect to Austria. Mr. F.J. Bellenger, a member of the British Labor Party, asked Eden whether or not he had any special information concerning the Berchtesgaden conversations. Eden was bound by the instructions that Baron von Franckenstein had issued to him on behalf of the Austrian Government. Hence, Eden informed the members of Commons that he was not in a position to make any statement until the agreement was published.[142] When asked by Mr. Arthur Henderson, another Laborite, if the British Government would stand behind the Stresa Front to preserve Austrian integrity and independence, Mr. Eden replied that "Italy has not, as yet, consulted with the British Government on the matter."[143] Eden, furthermore, replied to another question proposed by Mr. Bellenger that "His Majesty's Government desired in Central Europe, as elsewhere, peace and good understanding. That is certainly

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[142] Parliamentary Debates, CCCXXXI, 1862.

[143] Parliamentary Debates, CCCXXXI, 1862.

our policy."[144]

The Austrian Foreign Office sent a second message to Anthony Eden on February 17 denying the existance of any "'Berchtesgaden Agreement or bilateral treaty instrument of any kind. . . .'"[145] Such a statement left Eden officially gagged by the Austrian Government. The Austrian message instructed Eden to tell the House of Commons the following tale:

> According to information in my possession, Austria has succeeded at Berchtesgaden in clarifying her relations with the German Reich in what we may hope is a favourable and durable fashion, through direct and detailed talks between the two heads of Government and without the slightest disturbance.[146]

Austria, in effect, was officially requesting England to declare even less than the minimum support agreed on at the Stresa Conference.

On the same day that Anthony Eden received his second message from Vienna, he appeared in Commons and was again pressed for news on the Austrian situation. In reply to questions posed by Sir Winston Churchill, a member of the British Conservative Party, and Mr. Clement Atlee, a member of the Labor Party, on the British obligations under the Stresa

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[144]Parliamentary Debates, CCCXXXI, 1862.

[145]Shepherd, Anschluss, p. 91.

[146]Shepherd, Anschluss, p. 91.

Agreement, Eden replied that "We are willing to act with others as provided for in that declaration but we do not think it lies with us to take the initiative."[147] When asked by Mr. Bellenger if he were in contact with the other Stresa signatories, Eden answered that he was consulting with the French.[148]

The question of Austria at this time was intricately involved with the problem of Anglo-Italian negotiations. On February 4, 1938 Eden had been told by Sir Neville Chamberlain to prepare for a meeting with Dino Grandi, the Italian Ambassador to London. Grandi had hoped to convince England to begin formal conversations in Rome in order to discuss the Anglo-Italian problem. In Rome, Count Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, had told Lord Perth, the British Ambassador stationed there, that he, Ciano, had instructed Grandi to press for an early start for conversations in London in view of 'possible future happenings.'[149] Hitler was due to visit Rome in May, and Mussolini hoped to face the German leader with a big bargaining counter in the shape of an Anglo-Italian Agreement.[150] Thus it became necessary to push for

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[147] Parliamentary Debates, CCCXXXI, 2074.

[148] Parliamentary Debates, CCCXXXI, 2075.

[149] John Connell, The 'Office: The Story of the British Foreign Office, 1919-1951 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1958), p. 265.

[150] Connell, p. 267.

talks with Chamberlain before events in Central Europe would become worse.

Anthony Eden was reluctant to open conversations in Rome, because he had learned from one of his secret sources that Hitler was planning to seize Austria in the near future and he suspected that Mussolini might have acquiesced:

> It would be humiliating for us to be talking there when Hitler marched into Vienna, and while Mussolini was reinforcing his troops in Spain and asking for recognition of his Abyssinian Empire.[151]

From the beginning of the push for talks with Italy, Eden and Chamberlain had been in disagreement as to the nature the proposed conversations would take. Chamberlain still hoped to establish warm Anglo-Italian relations and "was determined to go ahead with discussions, even accepting that Austria was irretrievably lost."[152] Count Grandi was anxious to avoid any discussion on the Austrian issue. Chamberlain was more than willing to follow the lead of the Italian Ambassador.

Eden, on the other hand, was unwilling to begin Anglo-Italian conversations without some sort of recognition of faith between the two countries. He insisted that the matter of Austria was indeed necessary to the establishment of good

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[151]Eden, Facing, p. 657.

[152]William Rees-Mogg, Sir Anthony Eden (London: Rockliff, 1956), p. 75.

relations between Italy and England. Eden desired to discover Mussolini's reaction to any proposed Austrian action. He wished to postpone any talks with the Italian Ambassador until this position was clarified.

On February 18, 1938 Chamberlain and his Foreign Secretary opened talks with Dino Grandi in London. In the course of the conversations, Chamberlain broached the question of Austria to Grandi. The latter brushed off the Austrian problem as being irrelevant to the question of Ciano's proposed Anglo-Italian conversations. Eden observed that Italy had never denounced Stresa. Grandi answered 'that between Stresa and the event in Austria today there had intervened exactly three years, during which some event had taken place of considerable national importance. . . .'[153] If England could not reach an agreement with Italy regarding the conquest of Abyssinia, the 'Duce would definitely have to direct Italian policy in a spirit of frank, open, unshakable hostility toward the Western Powers.'[154]

Eden insisted that the matter of Austria must be discussed as an urgent matter and also insisted that the Spanish question must be settled before Anglo-Italian relations could be improved. Eden pressed for some sort of

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[153]Bardens, p. 190.

[154]Bardens, p. 190.

recognition of good will from the Italian delegate, but Chamberlain insisted that concessions could be made to the Italians and then England could move on to the problems that had arisen between the two countries.

The antipathy that had begun to develop between Eden and Chamberlain in May of 1937 was reaching its conclusion in the Anglo-Italian negotiations in February of 1938. Anthony Eden had realized that he no longer could:

> . . . agree with the foreign policy which Mr. Neville Chamberlain and his colleagues wished to pursue. The opinions, especially of the senior among them, had become increasingly at odds with my own, and these were the colleagues with whom I had to deal. Every detail became a negotiation in the cabinet before it could be a factor in our foreign policy. This was an impossible situation.[155]

The matter of Austria became the last straw for Eden in his dealings with the British Prime Minister. On February 19, Eden appeared before the British Cabinet in an effort to convince them of his own position. He told the Cabinet that Italy's silence in the Austrian matter must be taken to mean that they had already given Hitler assurances regarding Austria in return for German assurances of Italian plans in the Mediterranean. The Cabinet, however, elected to follow the Prime Minister's policy, and Anthony Eden resigned.

Eden's resignation had not been due solely to the

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[155]Eden, Reckoning, p. 3.

failure to reach an understanding with Chamberlain over the proposed Anglo-Italian discussions. His resignation was also due to a disagreement that had arisen between the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary over an offer made by the President of the United States in January of 1938. Franklin D. Roosevelt had made a secret approach to Chamberlain which was to have led to a conference between America, Great Britain and Russia to discuss the position and the demands of the European dictators. Chamberlain had been fearful that such a move would interfere with his intentions to come to terms with Hitler and Mussolini at this time.

Anthony Eden had been absent from the Foreign Office and vacationing in France at the time of the proposal. Chamberlain had used this opportunity to turn down the approach of the American President in the interest of dealing with Hitler and Mussolini directly.[156] Because this was a secret proposal and exposure of such might have harmed future Anglo-American relations, Eden did not publicly resign over this issue. The Austrian problem and Anglo-Italian negotiations provided a good opportunity for Eden's farewell.

Eden's resignation from the British Cabinet over the Anglo-Italian conversations was of great significance to the

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[156]Rowse, p. 67.

development of British foreign policy.[157] The immediate issues were whether to join France or not in warning Germany of Anglo-French interests in Austria and whether to open conversations with Italy before the latter had evidenced her good faith by withdrawing troops from Spain and conforming to her professed policy of non-intervention. British foreign policy was set by Neville Chamberlain. He would satisfy the German and Italian grievances to the extent that he and his circle of advisers thought them legitimate.

The impact of Eden's resignation drew away from the attention that Hitler's Reichstag speech of February 20 might have attracted in London. At Berchtesgaden the German Chancellor had promised his Austrian counterpart that he would make the Austrian situation known to the German people.[158] When Hitler delivered his speech, however, the three hour talk devoted only five minutes to the question of Austria.

According to Hitler's Reichstag speech, the hard ten hour struggle for the preservation of Austria's freedom had been a kind of peaceful week-end chat, in the course of which a grave disaster was averted thanks to the attitude of the German Chancellor. Not a word did Hitler mention regarding

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[157]Reynolds, p. 135.

[158]Von Schuschnigg, Requiem, p. 32.

Austrian concessions or German guarantees.

In the Reichstag speech Hitler did bring into the open his theory that Germany would protect the ten million Germans living outside the Reich borders -- meaning the seven millions in Austria and the three millions in the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia:

> There must be no doubt about one thing. Political separation from the Reich may not lead to deprivation of rights -- that is, the general rights of self-determination. In the long run it is unbearable for a world power to know there are racial comrades at its side who are constantly being afflicted with the severest suffering for their sympathy or unity with the whole nation, its destiny, and its Weltanschauung. To the interests of the German Reich belong the protection of those German peoples who are not in a position to secure along our frontiers their political and spiritual freedom by their own efforts.[159]

If the Austrian situation looked bad after Hitler's Reichstag speech, it appeared even worse when Neville Chamberlain spoke to Count Grandi in London on February 21, 1938 and explained to the Italian 'that the British Government looked upon Austria as a lost cause and had no intention of making proposals or suggestions to other states in relation to the Austrian situation.'[160] Furthermore, the British had been advising von Schuschnigg to stall for time until an

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[159]Shirer, Berlin Diary, p. 93.

[160]Ian Colvin, None So Blind: A British Diplomatic View of the Origins of World War II (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1965), p. 194.

Anglo-Italian agreement for the defense of Austria could be made.[161]

By the end of February, then, it had become apparent to von Schuschnigg that little, if any, help was forthcoming from the British. The failure of the British to reach an agreement with Italy, and the failure of the British to participate in a proposed demarche to Berlin regarding the Austrian question, made it evident to Kurt von Schuschnigg that the British Government had now made it quite clear that they would do nothing to prevent the absorption of Austria by Germany.

Von Schuschnigg was not only cognizant of the position that Britain undoubtedly would take, but he was also well aware that the German Government had only compromised at the Berchtesgaden talks in order to consolidate its position. After Hitler's Reichstag speech on February 20, it was apparent that the aims of National Socialist Germany had not changed. The Austrian Chancellor decided to force the issue by calling for a plebiscite -- a direct appeal to the Austrian people. He hoped that Hitler would not dare act against the declared will of the Austrian people if they decided against union with Germany. The question which was to have been proposed

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[161]Gedye, p. 237.

to the Austrian populace on March 13 was: 'Are you for an independent and social, a Christian, German and united Austria?'[162]

Von Schuschnigg announced his plebiscite on Wednesday, March 9, and within hours Hitler had been informed of the change in Austria by the Commissioner for Austrian Foreign Affairs in Berlin, Wilhelm Keppler. Hitler immediately dispatched Keppler to Vienna to have the plebiscite called off, and if this could not be done to put the question of Anschluss on the plebiscite.

After Keppler had departed for Vienna, Hitler called Edmund Glaise-Horstenau, the pan-German Minister without portfolio in von Schuschnigg's new cabinet, to Berlin for consultation. Hitler also gathered several of his generals around him for discussions on the Austrian situation, but no direct operational moves against the Central European State were prepared at this time.

The announcement of the plebiscite had brought on the moment of conflict between German nationalism and Austrian independence. Hitler was determined not to allow the plebiscite to take place. When Keppler failed in his attempt to have the Sunday vote called off, Hitler made his move in the

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[162]Nazi Conspiracy, I, 486.

form of an ultimatum to the Austrian Chancellor. The plebiscite, said the terms of the German ultimatum, was to be postponed for two weeks to give time for a legal poll to be organized like the one conducted in the Saar region in 1935. If the Chancellor refused, both Arthur Seyss-Inquart and Edmund Glaise-Horstenau were to resign. It was intimated that Nazi violence would heighten and a threat of German military intervention might be forthcoming.[163]

Without aid from the Western Powers, Kurt von Schuschnigg was helpless in the face of the new German demands. Von Schuschnigg cancelled the plebiscite, hoping that this action would appease the Führer's newest threat. Despite the cancellation of the Sunday poll, Hitler presented the Austrian Chancellor with still another ultimatum. Hitler informed von Schuschnigg that the Austrian situation could only be saved "when Schuschnigg resigns as the Chancellor of Austria within two hours and Seyss-Inquart is appointed the new Chief of the Austrian Government."[164]

Although the Austrian President, Wilhelm Miklas, accepted the forced resignation of his Chancellor, he refused to appoint Dr. Seyss-Inquart to the vacated position. Miklas finally relented, and in the waning hours of March 11, he

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[163]Shepherd, Anschluss, pp. 139-40.

[164]Nazi Conspiracy, I, 490.

appointed Seyss-Inquart to the position of Federal Chancellor in compliance with Hitler's demands. Earlier that same evening von Schuschnigg had made a farewell address to the Austrian people and had informed them of the tense situation:

> 'I declare before the whole world that the German Government today handed to President Miklas an ultimatum with a time limit attached, ordering him to nominate as Chancellor the person designated by the German Government, who would appoint the Government satisfactory to them otherwise German troops would invade Austria . . . . The president asks me to tell the people of Austria that he has yielded to force. Since we were not prepared, even in this terrible situation, to shed blood, we decided to offer no resistance.'[165]

Von Schuschnigg's broadcast to the Austrian people had been an attempt to avoid the bloodshed that he thought was impending and inevitable. It was in this broadcast that the Austrian Chancellor announced that his country was capitulating to the Germans.

While von Schuschnigg was making his farewell broadcast to the Austrian people, General Hermann Goering was in Berlin trying to persuade the German Chancellor to invade Austria. Goering convinced Hitler that German troops could successfully march into the Central European Country on the pretext that they were restoring order to the Austrian Government which was in the midst of a cabinet crisis. Hitler,

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[165] Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 17-18.

following the suggestion of the head of the Luftwaffe, ordered the German army to cross the Austrian border at daybreak on March 12. Hitler issued to the German and the Austrian people an announcement which purported to justify the invasion.[166] The German Government and the Austrian National Socialists quickly secured a hold on Austria.

While von Schuschnigg was battling with Hitler from the time he announced his plebiscite on March 9 to the invasion of his country on March 12, the British Government also had been occupying itself with the Austrian question. On March 9 Baron von Ribbentrop, the German Ambassador who had been appointed as the new Foreign Minister, arrived in London to say his farewells to the British. Von Ribbentrop stated in his memoirs that he was surprised to hear upon his arrival in the British capital that the attitude of the Austrian Chancellor had changed so much since he had met him barely a month before at Berchtesgaden.[167] The proposed plebiscite became the topic of von Ribbentrop's visit with Lord Halifax, Eden's replacement at the Foreign Office.

In their meeting at the Foreign Office, Halifax was informed that von Ribbentrop branded the proposed plebiscite

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[166]Nazi Conspiracy, VIII, 398.

[167]Von Ribbentrop, p. 85.

as a "'fraud and a swindle'"[168] and appealed to England to get Vienna to call it off. Lord Halifax replied to the German Ambassador that "it seems a tall order to say that the Head of Government cannot have a plebiscite if he wants to."[169]

Lord Halifax went on to tell von Ribbentrop that he attached the utmost importance to the Austrian poll being carried out "without interference or intimidation." The situation in Vienna was "highly charged with ugly possibilities" and he warned the German against "anything that might lead to or encourage violent action, for, if an explosion should occur at any time, it was quite impossible for any man to tell what might be the limit of the end."[170] Von Ribbentrop replied to the new British Foreign Secretary that:

> . . .some solution of the Austrian problem would have to be found now, and that a friendly compact would also be best for the sake of Anglo-German relations. I reminded Lord Halifax of his remark in 1937, and he accepted the situation calmly and with composure, adding that I would of course have an opportunity to discuss this matter with the Prime Minister.[171]

In his report to the German Chancellor concerning the meeting with Lord Halifax, von Ribbentrop made no mention of any warning on the part of Halifax regarding interference in

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[168]Shepherd, Anschluss, p. 129.

[169]Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 5.

[170]Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 6.

[171]Von Ribbentrop, p. 85.

the proposed plebiscite. He gave the impression that Britain had expressed disinterestedness in the Austrian question. He continued in his report that he thought Great Britain was trying to improve her relations with Rome and Berlin in order to give her the needed time to continue her rearmament program. Von Ribbentrop told Hitler that he was convinced that England of her own accord would do nothing at present in regard to the Austrian issue,[172] however, a prerequisite for such an action was a very rapid settlement of the problem in Austria. 'If a solution by force should be prolonged for any length of time, there would be danger of complications.[173] Such assurances to Hitler by the German Ambassador had been influential in the formation of Hitler's decision to issue an ultimatum to the Austrian Chancellor on March 11.

On the day that Hitler had issued his ultimatum to the Austrian Chancellor, von Ribbentrop and his wife had been invited to No. 10 Downing Street for a farewell luncheon with Lord Halifax and Sir Neville Chamberlain. At this luncheon, Chamberlain gave von Ribbentrop a farewell message to take to his Führer:

'It had always been his desire to clear up German-

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[172]William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p. 165.

[173]Documents on German Foreign Policy, pp. 623-629.

> British relations. He had now made up his mind to realize this aim. He requested me to tell the Führer that this was his sincere wish and firm determination.[174]

Von Ribbentrop replied that Hitler likewise had good intentions, but before the luncheon was over it was discovered that Hitler's good intention was to invade Austria over von Schuschnigg's proposed plebiscite.

As von Ribbentrop was preparing to leave for his own Embassy, two telegrams regarding the crisis in Austria were delivered from the British Foreign Office. The first reported the German demands for the abandonment of the plebiscite and von Schuschnigg's immediate refusal. The telegram described how the Chancellor had been forced to abandon his proposed poll and was now confronted with another ultimatum which demanded his resignation.[175]

Chamberlain, after having read the telegrams, called von Ribbentrop away from the other guests to read the messages to him. He demanded an explanation from the German Ambassador. Von Ribbentrop insisted that the reports from Vienna were a mystery to him. He even hinted that they might even be the inventions of von Schuschnigg's Government. The Prime Minister:

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[174]Eden, Reckoning, p. 7.

[175]Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 21.

> . . . urged Herr von Ribbentrop to lose no time in repeating to Herr Hitler how serious a view we took of these latest developments and of the deplorable effect that they must exercise on the future tenor of Anglo-German relations.[176]

Von Ribbentrop promised to get in touch with his Government and meet with Lord Halifax later on in the afternoon to discuss the newest action on the part of the German Government. In the afternoon, however, the German Ambassador had little more information to give the British Foreign Secretary.

While von Ribbentrop was returning to the German Embassy for more information on the Austrian situation, the British Prime Minister received a communication from the Austrian Government. The message was a request by Kurt von Schuschnigg for advice from the British Government. Von Schuschnigg had asked for no help after the Berchtesgaden meeting, probably because he thought it would do no good, and because he feared that it would aggravate the German Chancellor. But now he was in a difficult position. He had been handed an ultimatum by the German Government -- an ultimatum which would result in the death of an independent Austria. Von Schuschnigg sought British advice on whether the Stresa obligations still bound the Western Powers. Without

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[176]Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 21.

aid from the West von Schuschnigg would be forced to abandon the Austrian cause. Halifax replied to von Schuschnigg that:

> His Majesty's Government cannot take the responsibility of advising the Chancellor to take any course of action which might expose his country to danger against which His Majesty's Government are unable to guarantee protection.[177]

The telegram that Halifax sent to the Austrian Chancellor, although the Chancellor was not aware of the implications, was a stalling method of the British Government while they put into effect attempts to sound out reaction in Paris and Rome.[178] Von Schuschnigg, thinking he had been abandoned by the Western Powers, and most specifically by the British, was forced to give up the struggle and surrender to German demands while British negotiations with the French and Italians were being carried on.

Both the French and the British Governments, in line with Stresa obligations, tried to prod Mussolini into action, but their efforts ended in failure.[179] Italy was still smarting under the imposition of sanctions and lack of recognition for her Abyssinian Empire. She could not really be expected to aid the other signatories of the Stresa Pact.

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[177] Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 13.

[178] Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 13.

[179] Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 13.

Contrary to the situation in 1934, the Italian dictator had little to fear if Germany were to gain a position on the Brenner.

France was in the midst of a cabinet crisis and could not be expected to take any action. France, at any rate, would not have taken military action without the support of the British Government. Great Britain was not willing to take any action in Austria outside of protests presented to the German Government. Chamberlain was still pursuing a policy of establishing good relations with both Italy and Germany, and to have interfered in Central European developments at this juncture would have set back relations with the twin dictators a great deal.

So Austria had to be content with the only action that the British were willing to provide -- a protest to the Berlin Government. Such a protest was delivered by Sir Neville Henderson to Baron von Neurath on the evening of March 11, while Hitler was consulting with his generals as to the feasibility of military intervention in Austria. The protest that Henderson delivered stated that:

> His Majesty's Government feel bound to register protest in strongest terms against such use of coercion, backed by force, against an independent state, in order to create a situation incompatible with its national independence.
>
> As I have already pointed out to the German Minister

> for Foreign Affairs here, such action is bound to produce gravest reactions of which it is impossible to foretell the issue.[180]

The force of Henderson's protest, however, was softened the following day, March 12, when the British Ambassador met with General Goering to discuss the Austrian situation. At this meeting Sir Neville Henderson told Goering that he "reluctantly agreed that Dr. von Schuschnigg had acted with precipitate folly."[181] Henderson was sharply rebuked by his Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, who ordered him to keep his views to himself or in line with His Lordship's own policies.[182]

Regardless of how much the impact of the protest had been softened by Henderson's personal opinion, the truth of the matter was that the protest had been placed too late to be of any value. According to Ambassador Wilson, the United States Minister in Berlin during the Austrian crisis:

> . . . from a practical point of view the British and French protests were valueless, but that he quite understood this action was animated by a desire 'to keep the record straight' especially in view of

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[180] Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 18-19.

[181] Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 24.

[182] Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 29.

legislative interpellations.[183]

Baron von Neurath, the German Foreign Minister, wrote to Sir Neville Henderson on March 13 in reply to the British protest of March 11. The German Minister informed Henderson that the British Government had no right to claim the role as protector of the independence of Austria. He went on to say that the relations between the Reich and Austria could only be considered as an affair of the German people.[184]

In his letter, the German Foreign Minister went on to describe the nature of the Berchtesgaden talks and how von Schuschnigg had broken his word to Germany by calling for a plebiscite. Von Neurath insisted that those in the Austrian Government not in agreement with von Schuschnigg had resigned causing a cabinet crisis. He denied that any forcible pressure was put on the Austrian Chancellor nor did Germany issue an ultimatum to the Austrian Government. He maintained that German troops were called in by Ministers of the new Austrian Government to restore order to the country.[185] Baron von Neurath concluded that:

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[183]Foreign Relations of the United States, p. 436.

[184]Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 30.

[185]Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 31.

> 'Such being the case it is completely inconceivable that the conduct of the German Government, as is stated in your letter, could lead to unforeseeable consequences. A general review of the political situation is given in the Proclamation which the Chancellor of the German Reich addressed at noon today to the German people. In this situation dangerous consequences could only come to play if an attempt should be made by any third party, in contradiction to the peaceful and legitimate aims of the Reich, to exercise on the development of the situation in Austria an influence inconsistent with the right of the German people to self-determination.'[186]

Baron von Neurath's letter to Henderson and the events surrounding the Anschluss became the topic of conversation in the House of Commons on March 14. Chamberlain read the German letter to the House and commented that Austria was, indeed, a British concern. As a signatory of the treaties of Versailles and St. Germain, as well as a signatory of the Stresa Pact, Britain had a right to intervene in Central European affairs. Quite aside from the treaty obligations, the events in Central Europe had a bearing on the solidarity of Europe as a whole and for this reason England had expressed an interest in Austria.

Chamberlain then went into a detailed description of events of March 11 and the British reaction to the German move of aggression. He assured Commons that Great Britain had fully discharged her pledges under the obligations imposed

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[186]Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 31-32.

by Stresa. He summed up the British position by the following:

> It is quite untrue to suggest that we have ever given Germany our assent or our encouragement to the effective absorption of Austria into the German Reich. We had, indeed, never refused to recognize the special interest that Germany had in the development of relations between Austria and herself, having regard to the close affinities existing between the two countries. But on every occasion on which any representation of His Majesty's Government has had an opportunity to discuss these matters with Representatives of the German Government, it has always been made plain that His Majesty's Government would strongly disapprove of the application to the solution of the problems by violent methods. It must have, as I have constantly pointed out to the House, a damaging influence on the confidence of Europe.
>
> In appraising recent events it is necessary to face facts, however we may judge them, however we may anticipate that they will react upon the initial position as it exists today. The hard fact is -- and of its truth every honorable Member can judge for himself -- that nothing could have arrested this action by Germany unless we and others with us had been prepared to use force to prevent it.[187]

The day following Chamberlain's address in Commons, Hitler spoke from Vienna and proclaimed the incorporation of Austria into the German Reich. He could not even wait for the plebiscite that he himself had scheduled for April 10. Regarding Hitler's action, Lord Halifax told the House of Lords on March 16:

> 'His Majesty's Government are therefore bound to recognize that the Austrian State has now been abolished as an international entity and is in the process

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[187] Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, I, 47-48.

> of being completely absorbed into the German Reich. They do so indeed without waiting for the plebiscite, the result of which, in view of the circumstances in which it is going to be held, is a foregone conclusion.[188]

With Hitler's speech of March 15 in Vienna and the subsequent acknowledgement by the British Government, the independence of Austria was recognized to be at an end. The plebiscite that Hitler had ordered for April 10 would be carried out, but the results were already known -- the Anschluss had finally been implemented by Hitler in violation of existing treaties and assurances. After five years of struggle, the German Chancellor had finally defeated his Austrian counterpart. The only question left to be answered was who was responsible for terminating the independence of the Austrian State.

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[188] Foreign Relations of the United States, p. 449.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Many Austrians had hoped that the Western Powers would come to their aid in 1938 to save Austria from the grasp of Adolf Hitler. In the years after the First World War, the Western Powers had signed the treaties of Versailles and St. Germain, which obligated them to preserve Austrian independence. The joint statement of France, Great Britain and Italy made at Stresa in 1935 appeared to have given a further assurance to Austria's independence.

When Hitler was ready to make his move in March 1938, the time for assurances, however, was past. By this date there was nowhere that Austria could turn for help. Hitler had not expected war over the annexation of the Central European State, and the resulting lack of action on the part of the Western Powers proved his expectations to be correct.

Benito Mussolini, the defender of Austrian independence in 1934, was on a skiing trip and couldn't be reached by Chancellor von Schuschnigg on March 11, 1938. France was in the midst of a cabinet crisis and was unable to respond to

von Schuschnigg's plea for help with much more than a promise to join with England in prodding Italy concerning Stresa obligations. London, at this time, was concerned with laying a firm foundation for Anglo-Italian and Anglo-German relations. To have pressed the Austrian issue at this juncture would have set back considerably negotiations with the twin dictators.

Hitler was well aware of the Western position, especially that of England, and he was able to step into Austria on March 12 without any fear of Western intervention. The failure to preserve the independence of Austria in 1938 was not, however, the result of the action or the policy of any one individual. The guilt for the implementation of the Anschluss lies primarily with the National Socialist movement and its plan for aggressive action in Central Europe. Responsibility for the Anschluss lies secondarily with the policy of the British Government which prevented any forceful action against Hitler, and with Chancellor von Schuschnigg's policy which prevented him from appealing to the West out of fear of the German dictator.

It had always been Hitler's aim to consummate the Anschluss. This had been a dominant theme of his policy since he had assumed office in January of 1933. The inclusion of Austria into Germany was a necessary step toward the establishment of a Greater German Reich as Austria would have

provided agricultural and natural resources and a base of military operations to allow the German army to move further into Central Europe. Hitler had deliberately planned to break the treaties in order to incorporate Austria into his Reich. His aggressive action has been substantiated by the Blomberg Directives of June 1937 and by the Hossbach Conference of November of the same year.

In seizing Austria, Hitler broke the treaties of St. Germain and Versailles. He brushed aside the undertakings of the Western Powers in regards to Austrian independence, and he ignored the agreement he made with Mussolini in the Rome Protocols of 1934. Hitler, furthermore, broke his own declaration of May 21, 1936 when he stated that 'Germany never intends nor wishes to interfere in the internal policies of Austria, to annex Austria or to conclude an Anschluss.'[189] Above all, Hitler broke the pledge which he had himself given to Austria on June 11, 1936 in the Gentlemen's Agreement. Such an agreement, although it pledged Germany to maintain Austrian independence, was only a method through which Hitler could stall for time until the opportunities were right for the invasion of Austria.

While Hitler must bear the primary responsibility for

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[189]Nazi Conspiracy, VIII, 369.

the death of Austrian independence through his violation of the relevant treaties and pledges, the policies of Chamberlain's Government in England and von Schuschnigg's Government in Austria must bear a secondary responsibility for the Austrian demise.

As early as the close of the First World War, Great Britain had abandoned Austria to the inevitability of the Anschluss. Great Britain's interest in Austria had originally stemmed from British sympathy with French interest in Central Europe. For this reason Great Britain had signed the treaties of Versailles and St. Germain and had bound herself to preserve Austrian independence. She had reinforced this position through the Stresa Pact in 1935. The position of Great Britain by 1938 was not, however, considered to be essential to British security. Many Englishmen viewed the Austrian State in much the same light as they did the Rhineland. They saw Austria as a creation of the Versailles Peace Settlement and could not blame the German dictator for wanting to unite with those of his own race outside the immediate boundaries of the Reich.

The only strong supporter of Austrian independence in the British Government had been Lord Robert Vansittart. Vansittart was indeed aware of Central European problems and appreciated the fact that the loss of Austria would be

detrimental to European security. When Lord Vansittart was eliminated from British politics, the British Prime Minister, Sir Neville Chamberlain, was free to pursue his own course with regard to Central Europe.

An essential part of the Prime Minister's foreign policy was a stall for time to sufficiently rearm Great Britain to meet the threat of the Nazi dictator. Chamberlain was fearful of interfering in Austrian affairs, lest he would obstruct the establishment of good Anglo-German relations. The only way Austria could have been saved in 1938 was if Great Britain were to take the initiative and urge the Stresa signatories to join with her in using force against the demands of Hitler. Great Britain was not willing to use force at this time. Force was the thing that Hitler would have understood, but Great Britain was not sufficiently rearmed to permit her to engage in another war at this time. Austria, therefore, had to settle for British protests made to Berlin. This was as far as England was prepared to go in 1938.

While Neville Chamberlain was playing for time to rearm his country to meet the Nazi threat and the Nazi dictator was stalling for time to invade Austria, the Austrian Chancellor was also biding his time. Kurt von Schuschnigg adopted a conciliatory attitude toward the German Chancellor after

the Agreement of 1936 in hopes that Great Britain would be strong enough to help her meet the German threat. Von Schuschnigg's attitude was an understandable one. He was fearful for the position of his country and his people. He felt that he had been abandoned by the Western Powers and by 1937 he didn't know where to turn for help. Von Schuschnigg feared that any appeal to Great Britain would bring just enough interference to arouse the wrath of Adolf Hitler, but not enough British interference to be of any benefit to the maintenance of Austrian independence.

By the end of 1937 von Schuschnigg was cognizant of Hitler's intentions to incorporate Austria into the Reich. The Austrian Chancellor was also aware that Great Britain would do little, if anything, to interfere in Austro-German affairs. Von Schuschnigg, however, continued to cling to his policy of silence. He had an opportunity to confront Hitler and to appeal to the Western Powers through discoveries made in raids on the Helfersdorferstrasse and the Teinfaltstrasse. Von Schuschnigg, however, passed up this opportunity, as well as the humiliation he had received at Berchtesgaden, and continued to yield to Hitler and compromise away his country's independence. By the time the Austrian Chancellor was ready to challenge the German leader with his proposed plebiscite in March of 1938, it was too late. Hitler had made up his

mind that the time was right to move into Austria, and England abandoned Austria to her fate.

With the help of Neville Chamberlain, whose concern was first and foremost for the security of the British Isles, and with the aid of Kurt von Schuschnigg, whole silence was prompted by fear of the Nazi dictator and by his abandonment by the Western Powers, Adolf Hitler was able to win his battle for Austria. With the destruction of Austrian independence, Hitler's self-confidence was greatly increased and with it increased his contempt for the statesmen of other countries.

Hitler was aware of the weakness of Great Britain in being able to deal with the German dictator. He realized that Great Britain could be lulled with promises that Germany would go no further. With the implementation of the Anschluss, Hitler became readier to speed up his negotiations for the rest of Central Europe. The balance of power that Neville Chamberlain had been working to achieve through friendly relations with the dictators, was upset by the very fact that Hitler knew that England was not yet ready to cope with the situation through the use of force. The uneasy balance of power in Europe was beginning to tilt toward war. Hitler was now ready to carry out the second phase of European aggression as outlined in the Hossbach Conference. The invasion of Czechoslovakia was to be next on Hitler's agenda for European aggression.

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