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We were pleased to see *The Chamberlain-Hitler Collusion* reviewed for the H-France Review of Books, but we believe that Professor William Irvine, who says that our writing "is both clear and vigorous," missed the central thesis of the book and much of the evidence that the book provides for this thesis.

Professor Irvine claims that we argue "the key--and the only key--to British, and to a lesser extent, French appeasement in the 1930s, is anti-Communism." In fact, we argue strongly against the notion that British governments from 1933 to 1939 intended to "appease" Hitler by letting him have bits and pieces of territory in eastern Europe where German-speaking groups could be found. Instead, we note, they worked assiduously to inform Hitler that he had a "free hand" in the east, signed the Naval Agreement in 1935 in recognition of the free hand, and finally, in three meetings in September 1938, produced an "Anglo- German understanding" which confirmed the terms of the "free hand". Hitler could do what he wished in the east in return for guarantees to leave both the west and the British Empire alone. *The Chamberlain-Hitler Collusion* details the actions taken by the British Cabinet and Foreign Office from Hitler's accession to power until the fall of the Chamberlain government. It does not, as Professor Irvine's review suggests implicitly, deal exclusively or mainly with the events of September 1938. These events are central to the book's arguments, but they are presented in the context of the diplomacy of the entire period. The discussions leading to the establishment of the Anglo-German Naval Accord of 1935, for example, are presented in detail. Most countries, including Germany and France, regarded the accord at the time it was passed as constituting a British agreement to a 'free hand' for Germany in central and eastern Europe. Of course, British politicians, recognizing the unpopularity of the Nazi regime with the British public, denied that it represented anything of the sort. But Sir Robert Vansittart, the permanent undersecretary for foreign affairs, had heard all the discussions leading to the treaty and wrote to King George V about his concerns regarding the policy of a "free hand". Vansittart, like Winston Churchill, regarded a rearmed Germany as a potential threat to the British Empire. But only a small section of the political elite took seriously warnings from either Vansittart or Churchill that an alliance with Germany against the Soviet Union was a dangerous course to consider for the preservation of the Empire.

Professor Irvine discusses another letter to a British king that we do, as he suggests, emphasize: the letter Neville Chamberlain sent to George VI before leaving for the first of his three meetings with Hitler in September 1938. But Professor Irvine mentions only the phrase about Nazi Germany and Imperial Britain being "the two pillars of European peace and buttresses against communism," perhaps because, as he mentions, we repeat the phrase several times. But, there are two more important points

about the letter. The first is that Chamberlain makes clear to the king that there is not much he can do for the Czechs because Hitler is determined to have his way regarding his territorial demands on Czechoslovakia, by peace or by war. The second is that he makes clear that his real purpose in meeting with Hitler is to achieve an in-depth "Anglo-German understanding" on world affairs.

This statement of Chamberlain's motives as he heads for Berchtesgaden for the first of the three Chamberlain-Hitler meetings is crucial because it colours his later observations about these meetings. Professor Irvine not only misses the issue of Chamberlain's motives but then goes on to accuse us of claiming that a deal was made at Godesberg, a deal for which he thinks we provide scant evidence, particularly from Chamberlain's writings and addresses. What we claim instead is that the three meetings together--Berchtesgaden, Godesberg, and Munich--resulted in a deal, at least in Chamberlain's mind (as we are careful to state several times, Hitler liked the idea of such a deal, but was sceptical of the ability of the leader of a democracy to live up to it, mainly because he could be overthrown at any time by a parliamentary coup favouring Churchill or Anthony Eden). The deal was embodied not in Hitler's late-night words at Godesberg but in the Friendship Pact signed by Chamberlain and Hitler immediately after the Munich Pact, which gave Hitler what he wanted from Czechoslovakia. [ok?]

Simply put, at Berchtesgaden Hitler indicated that, from Germany's point of view, the Naval Agreement, which limited Germany's naval armament to 35 percent of Britain's, made sense only if Britain and Germany agreed that they would never make war on one another. He wanted Chamberlain to make such a commitment or he would tear up the Naval Agreement. Chamberlain, though anxious for an "Anglo-German understanding", wanted Hitler to be less vague. He clumsily but clearly put forth the offer of the "free hand" in the east, assuring Hitler, who had not directly broached the issue, that Britain would pressure Czechoslovakia not to respond if Hitler attacked the Soviet Union. In other words, not only would Britain not oppose German belligerence against the Soviets, but it would also attempt to dissuade others from opposing German aims in the east. But Hitler would not offer the assurance that the Nazis' expansionist aims were limited to the east.

Late in their second meeting at Godesberg, Hitler did offer the assurance that Chamberlain wanted. Professor Irvine, noting Dr. Paul Schmidt's statement of Hitler's offer, argues: "It certainly suggests that Hitler was dangling some seductive bait before Chamberlain." But then he says that there is "not one whit of evidence in Schmidt" that Chamberlain had bitten. It would be rather surprising if the German translator of the Chamberlain-Hitler discussions could record such evidence, since he did not accompany Chamberlain back to Britain. Our evidence is that Chamberlain returned to Britain quite enthusiastic about his second meeting with Hitler. This

surprised members of his Cabinet who were aware that, at mid-day in his meetings, Chamberlain was still complaining that Hitler had given him nothing. While they may have interpreted his frustrations to be mainly concerned with Czechoslovakia, it is clear that Hitler did not budge on the Czech issue for the rest of the day. But he did budge on the issue of the limits of Germany's expansionist aims.

Chamberlain told the Cabinet that he had established "influence" over Hitler. True, as Professor Irvine suggests, he did not outline his "deal" with Hitler, and, in truth, before the Friendship Pact was signed, the deal was purely oral. We do not suggest that his unwillingness to spell out the deal was evidence that such a deal existed. Rather, as we point out, public anger about Germany's bullying of Czechoslovakia caused much of the Cabinet to forget its decisions almost a year earlier not to intervene no matter what Hitler did in Czechoslovakia. This made it difficult for Chamberlain, who had won no concessions regarding the Czechs, to be very clear about why he thought he now had "influence" over Hitler.

But what he told Cabinet indicated clearly that he believed he had won his "Anglo-German understanding". As we note, citing the diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, Vansittart's successor, Chamberlain told Cabinet that Hitler was "extremely anxious to secure the friendship of Great Britain... it would be a great tragedy if we lost an opportunity of reaching an understanding with Germany." The official Cabinet minutes add: "He thought he had established some degree of personal influence over Herr Hitler.... Herr Hitler had said that if we got this question [Czechoslovakia] out of the way without conflict, it would be a turning point in Anglo-German relations. That to the Prime Minister, was the big thing of the present issue. He was also satisfied that Herr Hitler would not go back on his word once he gave it." Having offered Hitler *carte blanche* in the east and having heard Hitler promise that he would, in return, leave the west and the British Empire alone, Chamberlain dissembled to Cabinet. "Did Hitler mean to go further? The Prime Minister was satisfied that Herr Hitler was speaking the truth when he said that he regarded this as a racial question." If, as Professor Irvine suggests, Chamberlain did not go for the bait that Hitler offered at Godesberg, why was he failing to tell his Cabinet that what Hitler had clearly talked about at Godesberg was a free hand in the east? He certainly did not misunderstand that Hitler wanted a free hand in the east. He told the Cabinet meeting of May 3, 1939, that the issue had arisen in talks with Hitler, and that he believed it had first arisen at Berchtesgaden. He neglected, unsurprisingly, to point out that he had been the first to raise the issue at Berchtesgaden.

There is other evidence between Godesberg and Munich that Chamberlain believed he was in the process of achieving the broader international policy deal with Hitler which had been his real purpose in going to Germany in the first place. He opened up secret contacts with Hitler which by-passed the Foreign Office. The character of the

messages he sent made clear his view that he and Hitler were co-conspirators. Such contacts would continue for many months.

The Friendship Declaration signed after Munich was, in Chamberlain's mind, the formal "Anglo-German understanding" which he sought. It stated in part: "We regard the agreement signed last night and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again." Though Chamberlain penned these words, they simply replicated Hitler's thoughts at Berchtesgaden. The Godesberg promise from Hitler had encouraged Chamberlain, who now felt the two countries could sign a mutual friendship pact which signalled their agreement on international issues.

In the period following Munich, Chamberlain gave ample evidence of his view that he had a deal with Hitler, rather than an empty Friendship Declaration. "I've got it," he said, patting his breast-pocket, as he sat down to lunch with Foreign Affairs officials after signing the Friendship Declaration. He sent envoys to Germany whose purpose was to show Hitler what accommodations on Germany's part were necessary to insure that Chamberlain remained in office. He took comfort from bullying speeches by Hitler which mixed pledges of friendship to France and the British Empire with otherwise bellicose language. Should this evidence convince us that Chamberlain believed he had a deal with Hitler? Professor Irvine thinks not. We hope that other readers of *The Chamberlain-Hitler Collusion* may think otherwise after seeing the full extent of such evidence.

Even if one is not convinced that such a deal existed, Professor Irvine exaggerates our reliance on the deal to explain various phenomena. This is particularly the case with regards to Chamberlain's reaction to the German decision to hand Ruthenia over to Hungary on March 17, 1939. He notes correctly that we indicate Chamberlain's turnaround regarding the invasion of Prague was the result of the prime minister's view that the invasion of Ruthenia signalled German intentions to strike in the west (Ruthenia was seen as the spearhead for a German invasion of the east, and its abandonment suggested that Hitler intended to attack in the west). "It is an interesting theory and certainly not inherently implausible," he writes. But, then, avoiding any discussion of our evidence, he states quite wrongly: "it is a theory that depends on the unproven thesis of an explicit Hitler- Chamberlain deal." With all due respect, Professor Irvine, this is illogical. There did not have to be an "explicit" deal for Chamberlain to have the view that Germany was looking mainly eastward; nor did he have to be thinking in terms of Hitler breaking promises to him when he faced the evidence that, as the Secret Service had been telling him for several months, Hitler might have warlike intentions towards the west. We argue that Chamberlain believed that he had a deal with Hitler; but his view on this point is of far less importance in March 1939 than his changing view of Hitler's military intentions.

Ruthenia was seen far and wide as the key to Nazi intentions to move into Soviet and Polish territory. As we note (pp. 194-5), Robert Coulondre, French ambassador to Germany, wrote Georges Bonnet, the French foreign minister, on 15 December 1938 that he believed Germany would attempt to seize control of central and eastern Europe by creating an armed movement for a puppet Ukrainian state. "Ruthenia would be the focus of the movement." The British press in the following weeks featured articles on German intrigues in Ruthenia which were meant to lead towards the creation of a German puppet state in Ukraine (p. 203). Was Neville Chamberlain out of the loop on all of this? Certainly not. His sympathetic biographer, Keith Feiling, notes that on March 2, Chamberlain was disturbed by "signs that Hitler was preparing to go back on his previous award; in lieu of which he would throw Ruthenia to Hungary, abandon the project of a Ukrainian State, and seek larger compensation at the expense of Poland and Russia."

It was perfectly reasonable for Chamberlain to fear that the abandonment of Ruthenia might signal a German turn against the west. As his letters to his sisters and others in the weeks following the Ruthenia decision make clear, his former confidence that Germany would not assault British interests was badly shaken. The Germans had the same view of what they were doing as Chamberlain. As they wooed the Soviets, they stressed the same view of the handover of Ruthenia as Chamberlain did. So, for example, J. K. Schnurre, in the German Foreign Office, noting his conversation with G. A. Astakhov, the Soviet charge d'affaires in Berlin, wrote: "the solution of the Carpo-Ukrainian question had shown that here we did not aim at anything that would endanger Soviet interests." (*Documents on German Foreign Policy*, July 27, 1939)

Of course, it is sometimes argued that Hitler's invasion of Prague, which put an end to the Munich Pact, unnerved Chamberlain and made him see that Hitler could not be relied upon. But, goes the argument, Chamberlain's peace-at-all-costs instincts prevailed for 48 hours after the invasion until he realised the enormity of what Hitler had done. Our evidence demonstrates that this view is unfounded. Chamberlain had reliable information several weeks before the invasion that it was imminent, and was in good spirits except for his distress about Ruthenia. He had written off Czechoslovakia well before hearing such reports. Although he had promised Czechoslovakia that Britain and France would guarantee the territorial integrity of the rump that remained after Munich, no such guarantee was ever given. Britain took the almost comical position in discussions of a guarantee that it could only be effective if Germany and Italy joined Britain and France in providing it, as if some fifth power were the likely invader of Czechoslovakia.

Professor Irvine suggests that our treatment of French foreign policy in this period is "uncertain". We disagree. Again, we think that Professor Irvine's notion that the world divided between "appeasers" and "anti-appeasers" causes him to miss the major

political divide of the time. This was the divide between those in France, as in Britain, who conceded the east to Hitler as the anti-communist Messiah, and those who rejected such a concession either because they were anti-Nazi or because they recognized that it contained implicit dangers for the security of France and Britain and their empires. The anti-Nazi forces in French politics were of greater weight than their counterparts in Britain if only because the threat of German invasion seemed more real to France than to Britain. But calls for military opposition to the Nazis stumbled for one major reason: the widespread belief that France required Britain as an ally in standing up to Germany. The anti-Nazi forces in French political life, both before and after the period of the Popular Front, found themselves unable to win the support of centrist forces against pro-Hitler politicians because it was clear to everyone that Britain would not oppose Hitler's eastern ambitions. So, for example, Yvon Delbos, who was the foreign minister for most of the Popular Front period, lamented to William Bullitt, American Ambassador to France in early 1938, that his foreign policy was in ruins. He had tried in vain to convince Britain that France and Britain together must spell out to Hitler the dire consequences should Germany continue its furious rearmament and bullying of other nations. But, as Bullitt reported Delbos' conclusion: "The fact was that England had embarked on a policy of turning over central and eastern Europe to Germany in spite of her obligations under the League of Nations."

The British government was delighted to see the fall of the Popular Front a few weeks later (April 1938) with Blum and Delbos both gone and replaced by a more conservative government led by Edouard Daladier and Georges Bonnet. Daladier, however, while somewhat more "uncertain", to use Professor Irvine's word, about what direction to follow in foreign policy, was reluctant to abandon Czechoslovakia, with whom France had a defensive alliance. Pulled in both directions by opposing forces in France, Daladier eventually threw in his lot with the appeasers because his meetings with the British leaders, as reported in *The Chamberlain-Hitler Collusion*, left no doubt that Britain was determined to give Germany a free hand in the east.

A smaller point: Professor Irvine says we are fond of referring to the elites in Britain and France as the "rich idle classes." It is not our phrase. Its author, as we note, is Oliver Harvey, secretary to Lord Halifax. Commenting on a meeting he had had with William Strang, a Foreign Office official who was growing uncomfortable with the direction of his government's foreign policy, Harvey wrote that "Strang and I agree that the real opposition to rearming comes from the rich classes in the Party... any war, whether we win or not, would destroy the rich idle classes and so they are for peace at any price" (p. 45).

We understand that *The Chamberlain-Hitler Collusion* presents a radical and even rather upsetting thesis. It suggests that the leaders of Britain, and, to some extent, France in the 1930s, while governing democracies, were not themselves democrats. It

accuses them not of being blind to what Hitler was planning on account of their anti-communism but indeed of being wide-eyed in admiration for the services he might render elites paranoid about what they deemed to be rising support for social revolution. We hope nonetheless that most objective readers will find the argument of the book more convincing than does Professor Irvine.

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