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# MUNICH

## THE PRICE OF PEACE

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## Part I

### MUNICH: SEPTEMBER 1938

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#### CHAPTER I

##### *Invitation to the Quadrille*

###### *1*

On the morning of September 29, 1938, the leaders of the four major powers of Western Europe were converging on the lovely old city of Munich, in southern Bavaria. Two were coming together from the south by rail, and two separately from the west by air.

The host, Adolf Hitler, and his guest of honor, Benito Mussolini, had met on the old Austro-German border at Kiefersfelden, and were on their way to Munich in the Fuehrer's special train. Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister in Britain, and Edouard Daladier, Premier in France, were both airborne before nine o'clock, respectively from London and Paris. Lesser officials and journalists streamed into Munich from all directions, for the expected dénouement of a prolonged international crisis during which Europe had been teetering on the brink of war.

The borderlands of Bohemia and Moravia—the so-called Sudetenland—were the immediate cause of this confrontation of arms and wills. But that morning no one was coming to Munich from Czechoslovakia. Not until the afternoon, when the conference was well under way, was Prague permitted to send representatives, and then not to participate in the discussions but only to be informed of their country's fate.

Nor did anyone come from Moscow. Maxim Litvinov and other Soviet spokesmen rumbled ominously about Russia's exclusion from the meeting, but everyone knew that Hitler would never have agreed to give them a seat at the table. Indeed, it had been difficult enough to persuade the Fuehrer to hold any conference at all, and only a last-minute appeal from his friend and fellow-dictator Mussolini had deflected him from a military solution.

The idea of such a meeting had not, however, originated with the Duce. The

problem of the Sudetenland had been red hot since late May 1938, when reports of menacing German troop movements had led to a partial mobilization of the Czech Army. During the four months that had elapsed since then, resolution of the crisis by means of an international conference had been suggested by a wide variety of persons, including the United States Ambassador to France (William C. Bullitt), the French and British ambassadors to Germany (respectively André François-Poncet and Sir Neville Henderson), the German and Italian military attachés in Prague (Colonels Rudolf Toussaint and Count Valfre di Bonzo), and President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Adolf Hitler, however, had never shown any sign of interest in such a project. Furthermore, the several proponents were not of one mind concerning the number and identity of the participants. Anyone could propose a conference, but it was not so simple a matter to decide who should be seated at the table. Franklin Roosevelt had fudged the issue in his last-minute appeal to Hitler by proposing a "conference of all the nations directly interested in the present controversy." Which countries could fairly be described as "directly interested"?

On the face of the matter, surely, if any country could be so described it was Czechoslovakia. The Sudetenland lay within and along her borders, as drawn by the Treaty of Versailles. It was the demand for greater cultural and political autonomy on the part of its German-speaking inhabitants—the *Sudetendeutsche*—which was the ostensible and, in many minds, the actual cause of the crisis. Protracted negotiations between Sudeten German leaders and the Czech Government had been broken off in mid-September, and now the demand was for severance of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia and its annexation by Germany—by Adolf Hitler's Third Reich.

For several years the German Government had been giving the Sudeten leaders covert support, and in February 1938, Hitler, in a speech to the Reichstag, openly announced his determination to protect the rights of Germans in adjoining nations. From then on the tone of Nazi government and German press references to Czechoslovakia grew ever more bellicose. On September 12, at the annual Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg, Hitler proclaimed the right of the Sudeten Germans to "self-determination." This brought the issue to white heat, and set in train the events which led directly to the gathering in Munich at the end of the month. Germany, as precipitator of the international crisis, was thus the major power most "directly interested."

Both Germany and Czechoslovakia had allies, under varying degrees of obligation to render them assistance in the event of war. The nation most tightly bound by alliance was France. Poland and Czechoslovakia were the eastern bastions of her post-First World War system of European alliances, and in the case of Czechoslovakia, French obligations were embodied in the 1925 Treaty of Mutual Assistance, under which the two countries reciprocally agreed to lend "aid and assistance" in the event that either was attacked "without provocation."

Ten years later the Soviet Union became associated with this defensive alliance, but under more complicated and ambiguous treaty arrangements. On May 2, 1935, France and the Soviet Union signed a Treaty of Mutual Assistance

against unprovoked attacks upon either of them, but this, of course, did not apply in the event that France entered upon a war in fulfillment of her treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia.

That contingency was covered by the Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty signed two weeks later. This provided for a defensive alliance, but the reciprocal obligation was explicitly made conditional on France's having commenced to lend assistance to the attacked nation, whichever one it might be. What was not so clear was whether the duty to assist would then attach at once, or only after proceedings under Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, to obtain from the Council of the League a declaration that an act of aggression had occurred.

Britain too was bound by treaty (the Locarno Pact) to defend France against unprovoked aggression, but she had no commitments to Czechoslovakia beyond her general obligations under the League of Nations Covenant. The Anglo-French entente, however, was not limited to the letter of Locarno. Both countries had been bled white by Germany in the First World War, and under Britain's traditional balance-of-power strategy in Europe, the defeat of France by Germany could not be tolerated. As a practical matter, accordingly, France's obligations to Czechoslovakia were of great concern to Britain, and indeed the British Government had involved itself far more deeply than the French in seeking a peaceful solution of the Sudeten question.

Fascist Italy was tied to Nazi Germany by strong ideological affinity and strategic community of interest and purpose. But there was no formal military alliance. Protocols signed secretly in the fall of 1936 were concerned with issues (Ethiopia, Austria, and Spain) which by 1938 were obsolete, or only remotely related to the Czech crisis. In November 1937, Italy joined in the "Anti-Comintern Pact," which Germany and Japan had inaugurated a year earlier for the ostensible purpose of combatting communist activities. Thus Mussolini was under no treaty obligation to come to the aid of his fellow-dictator. But Duce and Fuehrer found it advantageous to accept a posture of fraternal solidarity under the name of the "Rome-Berlin Axis," and Mussolini had made it plain and public that, so far as the Sudeten issue was concerned, Italy was firmly aligned with Germany.

Totting up the immediate disputants and their allies, accordingly, there were six nations—Czechoslovakia, Germany, France, Russia, Britain, and Italy—that were "directly interested" under any reasonable interpretation of that phrase. In addition there were three Eastern European countries that were, in various ways, closely concerned. Like Czechoslovakia, Poland was linked in defensive alliance with France. On the other hand Poland, and Hungary too, nurtured territorial claims against Czechoslovakia because of the inclusion of Polish and Hungarian minorities within her Versailles-drawn borders. If German claims at the western end were to be satisfied, Polish and Hungarian claims at the eastern end would surely be pressed. Finally, Poland and Rumania lay between Russia and Czechoslovakia, and thus would at once be involved should the Russians seek to furnish the Czechs with direct military support.

However, there was nothing to be gained from an international conference

without German participation. With whom might the Fuehrer deign to sit down? Bolshevik Russians were almost interchangeable with Jews as the devils of Nazi dogma, and Hitler had often pointed to the Ukraine as a choice portion of the future German *Lebensraum*. A year later, announcement of the Nazi-Soviet pact would hit the world with stunning impact, but in the fall of 1938 it was widely assumed that Hitler would reject out of hand any proposal that the Soviet Union be seated at a conference on the Sudeten question.

Common sense would also suggest that Hitler was most unlikely to countenance a conference at which his "side" would be outnumbered. As a practical matter, this meant that, if France and Britain were both represented, Italy must also be. But what then of the Czechs themselves? Their inclusion would again put the Axis countries in the minority, and their physical presence must inevitably stiffen, with shame if nothing else, the spines of their French allies. Furthermore, Czechoslovakia was not a "great power," and her President, Eduard Beneš, was a continuing target of Nazi abuse. At the Nuremberg Party festivities the number-two Nazi, Hermann Goering, had derided the Czechs as a "miserable, pygmy race" and their country as a "petty segment of Europe." It was hardly to be expected that Adolf Hitler would tolerate them as equal participants at any conference graced with his own presence.

All of this strongly indicated that, if there were to be a conference with German participation, it would be a four-party meeting of Germany, France, Italy, and Britain. Satisfactory as this selection might be to the Axis dictators, it would put Britain and France, especially the latter, in an unlovely posture. Czechoslovakia was France's ally, and it was Czechoslovakia's territorial integrity and future as a nation that were threatened by Germany. How could France as ally and protector negotiate a settlement in a meeting from which her ally and protégé was excluded? How could England as mediator seek a fair solution in a forum open to only one of the litigants?

Opinion in most "neutral" countries, and especially in the United States, was strongly anti-German and pro-Czech. It is indeed ironic, therefore, that the idea of a four-party conference, from which Czechoslovakia would be excluded, was first broached, albeit privately, by the American Ambassador in Paris. In a personal letter to President Roosevelt, written at the time (May 20, 1938) of the Czech mobilization in reaction to rumored German troop movements, William Bullitt declared that it would be an unspeakable tragedy "if France, in support of Czechoslovakia, should attack" Germany. The continent of Europe would be "devastated," and therefore "we should attempt to find some way which will let the French out of their moral commitment." To accomplish this, Bullitt proposed that the President should:

Call to the White House the Ambassadors of England, France, Germany and Italy. Ask them to transmit to Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler, and Mussolini your urgent invitation to send representatives at once to The Hague to attempt to work out a peaceful settlement of the dispute between Germany and Czechoslovakia. Add that if the four Governments desire, a representative of the United States will sit with them. You should also make a personal appeal of the sort that you know best how to make referring to the fact

that we are the children of all the nations of Europe, that our civilization is a composite of all the civilizations of Europe, that just as we are grateful for Shakespeare so are we grateful for Beethoven, that just as we are grateful for Molière so are we grateful for Leonardo da Vinci et cetera, that we cannot stand by and watch the beginning of the end of European civilization without making one last effort to stop its destruction; that you are convinced that the only result of general European war today would be an Asiatic despotism established on fields of dead.

Wise or unwise in his recommendations, Bullitt was alive to the probable consequences, and ready to face them:

The conference at The Hague would probably have to recommend that a plebiscite be held in Czechoslovakia to determine the will of the different peoples of that country. If the Czechs should refuse to hold such a plebiscite the French would have an escape from their desperate moral dilemma and general European war would be avoided.

You would be accused, or the man sent to The Hague as your representative would be, of selling out a small nation in order to produce another Hitler triumph. I should not hesitate to take that brick on my head and I don't think you should either if thereby you could avoid a general European war.

Bullitt wrote his letter a few days after a long talk with the French Foreign Minister, Georges Bonnet, who had expressed "with the greatest vehemence and emotion" his belief that "a French declaration of war on Germany today in order to protect Czechoslovakia would mean the defeat and dismemberment of France." Other diplomatic conversations had convinced Bullitt that "the Czechs prefer to see their nation succumb in a conflagration which will destroy all Europe rather than make the large concessions which alone would satisfy Hitler and the Sudeten." However one may assess the recommendations, there is no denying that Bullitt's letter was, in some respects, a remarkably prescient analysis, and it is fascinating to discover the four men of Munich named so far in advance of their meeting, even though Bullitt was wide of the future mark in specifying The Hague as the conference site.

There appears to be no record of Roosevelt's reply or other reaction to his ambassador's proposals, nor of any further efforts at that time by Bullitt to gain their acceptance. But the conference idea was simultaneously occurring to others. In May 1938 exaggerated reports of German troop movements had aroused the British Foreign Office to a livelier sense of the dangers in the situation, and an experienced counselor, William Strang, was dispatched to visit and exchange impressions with the British embassy staffs in Prague and Berlin. A week after Bullitt wrote his letter, Strang was in Prague canvassing various methods of resolving the German-Czech issues with the minister, Basil Newton, and two of his aides.

Several alternatives were discussed, and then the conferees contemplated the possibility that "no accommodation between the Sudeten Germans and the [Czech] Government is possible." In that event "there may be a case for calling an international conference on Czechoslovakia, attended by the powers

chiefly concerned, with a view to the despatch of an international commission, under the auspices of the conference, to recommend a solution." Which powers were "chiefly concerned" was left unspecified, perhaps because it was agreed that the German Government "would be unlikely to assent, and if they did not, the Italian government would probably take the same line."

Thus far the conference idea had been submerged in the private reflections of American and British diplomats. It was left to the French Ambassador to Germany, André François-Poncet, to bring the notion to the surface of international discussion. Early in June, while in Paris, François-Poncet obtained from his superiors at the Quai d'Orsay authority to propose to the Germans a tripartite conference of France, England, and Germany to reach a "fair solution" which would then be recommended to the Czech Government, with the inducement of a triple guarantee and a neutralization comparable to that of Switzerland.

In its disregard of the Italians, this was a characteristically French proposition. François-Poncet privately described his plan to Bullitt and to the British Ambassador in Paris, Sir Eric Phipps, neither of whom gave him any encouragement. The British Foreign Office registered strong distaste and instructed their ambassador in Berlin, Sir Neville Henderson, to try to talk François-Poncet out of his notion. When François-Poncet returned to Berlin, Henderson did his best; he told the Frenchman that the Germans would never agree, that Britain would not guarantee Czechoslovakia, and that the issue ought to be resolved directly by the Czech Government and the Sudeten German leaders.

Nothing daunted, François-Poncet obtained an interview (on June 23) with the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and opened the conversation by proposing a conference of the "Great Powers" from which there might emerge a Czechoslovakia "similar to Switzerland, so that there would be, as it were, two great poles of neutrality in Europe." Ribbentrop's reaction was uncompromisingly hostile: an international discussion was "the wrong course"; no "genuine pacification" could be effectuated that way; Czechoslovakia herself was a product of international consultation at Versailles, and that experience "should not be forgotten." The two men did not have a high personal regard for each other, and the meeting ended on a sour note.

For many weeks thereafter, the conference idea was relegated to the diplomatic attic, where it slumbered but stirred and muttered fitfully. Public attention was focused on the doings of Lord Runciman, whom the British sent to Prague as "investigator and mediator" of the Sudeten issues. Even before Runciman's arrival in Czechoslovakia, however, Sir Neville Henderson broached a four-party conference proposal to his superiors in London. He received no encouragement, but the notion continued to turn up in back-room meetings in London, Berlin, and Prague during late July and most of August.

Apparently the thought was also finding some favor in certain Axis military circles, according to reports from the British military attaché in Prague, Lieutenant Colonel H. C. T. Stronge. On August 17 his German opposite number, Colonel Rudolf Toussaint, in the course of a gloomy survey of the international outlook, told Stronge that the only hope of avoiding a European war lay in a

four-power ruling that the Sudeten region should be annexed to Germany. Five days later Stronge was treated to the same advice by the Italian military attaché, Colonel Count Valfre di Bonzo.

## 2

Came the annual Nazi Party Rally at Nuremberg, and with Hitler's speech on September 12 the international tension reached crisis pitch. The next day Edouard Daladier bestirred himself to the extent of endeavoring to telephone Chamberlain, in order to propose that the British and French governments invite Hitler to confer and work out a Sudeten settlement. It was the same proposal that François-Poncet had put to Ribbentrop in June, and was diplomatically unseaworthy because Hitler's bold, black ally Mussolini would be excluded, and Germany outnumbered at the green table. Perhaps not unaware of this drawback, Daladier sought to rationalize the tripartite feature on the theory that France would represent the Czechs, Germany the *Sudetendeutsche*, and Britain Lord Runciman. Surely only a Frenchman could have conceived such wonderful reverse logic; since Britain had sent Runciman to Prague, Runciman should now send Britain to the conference!

Daladier's effort to speak directly with Chamberlain was blocked by Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, who thought such a conversation would be "hopeless," and told Paris that any message from the French Premier must be sent through the British Ambassador, Sir Eric Phipps. Chamberlain had little French and Daladier less English, but the real difficulty was not linguistic. In June, François-Poncet's plan had fallen on deaf British ears because Chamberlain had already settled on the Runciman mission as his next move. On September 13 he was equally uninterested in any French proposals because he had already decided to go to Germany himself and seek a settlement by personal negotiation with Adolf Hitler. Odd numbers would not work, and Chamberlain preferred two to four. International the meeting would be, but a tête-à-tête could hardly be called a "conference" in the sense up to then envisaged.

Chamberlain's intended method was to ascertain Hitler's price for peace, return to London to secure French acceptance, and then, by joint Anglo-French pressure, impose the settlement on Czechoslovakia. When he met with Hitler at Berchtesgaden on September 15, the Fuehrer demanded cession to Germany of the preponderantly *Sudetendeutsch* districts of Czechoslovakia. The French agreed, the pressure was laid on Prague, and on September 21 the Czech Government agreed to the cession of German-majority districts, subject to final adjustment of the new frontiers by an international commission.

On the next day, well satisfied with these arrangements, Chamberlain flew to Germany for a second meeting with the Fuehrer, at Godesberg. To the Englishman's astonishment and chagrin, Hitler at once condemned these accomplishments as wholly inadequate. In the course of two days and as the outcome of two long conferences and an interchange of letters between the two leaders, Hitler embodied his new demands in a memorandum and map, pursuant to which marked areas would be occupied by German troops no later than October 1, and other areas would be subjected to a subsequent plebiscite. The discus-

sions were often acrimonious, and were concluded with nothing more than Chamberlain's undertaking to present the new demands to the Czech Government.

Chamberlain returned to London on September 24, to begin a round of gloomy deliberations with the Cabinet and, on the next two days, with the French Premier, Edouard Daladier, the Army Chief of Staff General Maurice Gamelin, and other French representatives. Hitler's Godesberg memorandum was put to Prague, and was categorically rejected on September 25. Mobilization of the Czech Army had been ordered during the Godesberg meeting, and along the borders of Bohemia and Moravia, German troops were deployed and ready to attack. French reserve units were dispatched to man the Maginot defenses, the British Navy was ordered mobilized, and slit trenches were dug in Hyde Park.

In the Berlin Sportspalast, Adolf Hitler roared denunciation of the Czechs and defiance of the world: at No. 10 Downing Street, Neville Chamberlain sat before a radio microphone and spoke wearily and desperately of the horrors of war, incredibly looming because of "a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing." On September 26, Franklin Roosevelt sent a public telegram to Hitler, Beneš, Chamberlain, and Daladier declaring that "the fabric of peace on the continent of Europe, if not throughout the rest of the world, is in immediate danger," and appealing "for the sake of humanity everywhere" that the recipients not "break off negotiations looking to a peaceful, fair, and constructive settlement of the questions at issue."

It was during this period of the greatest tension that the idea of settlement by means of an international conference, dead since Daladier's proposal of September 13, was reborn. Now the parent was none other than Neville Chamberlain, who had twice previously smothered the infant aborning. But the Runciman mission had come to nothing, personal diplomacy at Berchtesgaden and Godesberg had left Europe on the brink of war, and something—or anything—else had to be tried.

Apparently Chamberlain first broached the conference idea on the afternoon of September 25 to Jan Masaryk, the Czech Ambassador in London, when the latter came in with his government's rejection of the Germans' Godesberg demands. Assuming that Hitler could be persuaded to settle the Sudeten question peacefully "by means of an international conference attended by Germany, Czechoslovakia and other powers," would the Czech Government be willing "to take part in this new effort of saving the peace"? The inquiry elicited a qualified affirmative reply from Prague.

Before Chamberlain took occasion to act on this basis, however, Franklin Roosevelt spoke loudly from the sidelines. Ambassador Bullitt, the original proponent of the conference idea, had been agitating for it again with his chiefs in Washington, and now with greater success. On the evening of September 27, Roosevelt sent a second open message to Hitler, exhorting him to continue negotiations and avoid a resort to force, and adding the suggestion that the talks be widened into "a conference of all the nations directly interested in the present controversy" which should be "held immediately—in some neutral spot in Europe."

This was the first public espousal of a multiparty conference, and the President was at pains to give his message maximum exposure. But it was all pretty vague; Roosevelt rejected Bullitt's recommendation that the parties to the conference be named, and resorted to the ambiguity of "nations directly interested." Furthermore, the President was proposing a party at which he would be neither host nor guest: "The government of the United States has no political involvements in Europe, and will assume no obligations in the conduct of the present negotiations."

While the message was being drafted in Washington, in Paris Bullitt was routing Daladier out of bed to apprise him of its coming and get his reaction. The French Premier professed hearty approval of a conference to which "France would of course be glad to send a representative." Then, according to Bullitt:

I asked him what states should be included and he gave the list, France, England, Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. I asked him if he would object to the inclusion of Hungary. He said that he would object most emphatically because he had absolute information that the Poles, Germans, and Hungarians had agreed that Poland and Hungary should divide the whole of Slovakia. He would never permit this and would prefer to go to war rather than accept it . . .

Was Daladier serious, or building up a bargaining position, or pulling Bullitt's leg? It is scarcely conceivable that Daladier really thought that Hitler would allow himself to be found in such company, comprising, as it would have, the pillars of Versailles and the French postwar system of alliances. Again and in accordance with what was becoming an old French custom, the very existence of Italy was ignored.

Meanwhile discussions—calm but desperate on the British side, strident and well nigh hysterical on the German—had been held in Berlin between Hitler and Chamberlain's personal emissary, Sir Horace Wilson. In consequence of these, on September 27, Hitler dispatched a letter to Chamberlain which, while conceding nothing from the Godesberg terms, professed "regret" at "the idea of any attack on Czechoslovak territory" and closed with a backhanded suggestion that Chamberlain continue his efforts as a peacemaker.

It was in response to this letter that Chamberlain, on the morning of September 28, finally made a formal proposal to Hitler for a settlement by international conference and treaty:

After reading your letter I feel certain that you can get all essentials without war and without delay.

I am ready to come to Berlin myself at once to discuss arrangements for transfer [of the Sudeten areas] with you and representatives of Czech Government, together with representatives of France and Italy if you desire.

Neville Henderson delivered the message to Hitler shortly after noon. The Fuehrer commented that it would probably be unnecessary for Chamberlain to come again to Germany, but excused himself from a definite reply on the ground that he was in the course of discussion with the Italian Government, and "no final answer can be given until he has concerted with them."

Benito Mussolini, up to this time, had had no direct contact with Hitler on the

Czech issue; indeed, early in September the Duce had complained to Galeazzo Ciano, his Foreign Minister and son-in-law, that "the Germans are letting us know almost nothing of their programs with regard to Czechoslovakia." By late September, however, a better liaison had been established, and the Italian dictator was supporting the German position in speeches, newspaper articles, and diplomatic press releases. He had not, however, given any sign of enthusiasm for Italian involvement in a military way.

On September 27 the British Ambassador in Rome, the Earl of Perth, requested and received authority from London to ask Mussolini to "use his influence to induce Herr Hitler" to accept Chamberlain's proposals. The following morning (September 28) the Earl waited upon Ciano with what amounted to an official British request that Mussolini intervene as a mediator. Ciano at once laid the request before his chief, who, nothing loath to assume the role of international peacemaker, telephoned the Italian Ambassador in Berlin, Bernardo Attolico, and instructed him to go to Hitler and ask that no military action be taken for another twenty-four hours, so that there might be further consideration of Chamberlain's proposition.

Attolico saw Hitler shortly before noon, and the latter, with only slight hesitation, agreed to stay his hand for the moment and consult further with Mussolini via Attolico. After receiving Henderson and hearing Chamberlain's offer to come to Berlin, Hitler told Attolico that he would "only talk to Chamberlain again provided not only that Italy was represented but that Italy was represented by Mussolini in person." The Duce at once agreed to come, and by midafternoon Hitler had decided to play the host to a four-party conference at Munich.

The Fuehrer's invitation was extended to Daladier by a telephone call from Goering to François-Poncet, who subsequently wrote in his memoirs:

I forwarded the invitation without comment; an hour later it was accepted. I immediately informed Goering. "*Gott sei Dank*, thank God!" he cried. "Bravo!"

Shortly after three o'clock, Neville Henderson received a message of similar purport from the Foreign Ministry, which he communicated by a telephone call to Sir Alexander Cadogan at the Foreign Office. Neville Chamberlain, at that moment, was at the dispatch box in the House of Commons (which had been in recess since the end of July), reporting on the crisis and the events of the last two months. Cadogan wrote the news on two sheets of paper and made all speed to the House, where the message was passed along the Government bench to Sir John Simon, who was seated next to Chamberlain.

The House was packed, tense, and hanging on the Prime Minister's every word and inflection; the Queen Mother and other royalty, and high clergy, ambassadors, and other notables filled the galleries. When the message from Berlin reached Simon, Chamberlain had brought the account nearly up to the present moment. He told the House of his conversation with Jan Masaryk, and of the Czech Government's agreement to join in a settlement conference. He read to

the House his letter to Hitler, proposing a five-party meeting, and his contemporaneous letter to Mussolini, requesting the Duce's support for that project. He reported that Mussolini had asked Hitler to postpone "action" for twenty-four hours, to assist in finding the way to a peaceful settlement.

At this point, and after several previous failures, Sir John Simon drew Chamberlain's attention to the contents of the message. "Shall I tell them now?" asked Chamberlain in a whisper. Simon replied affirmatively, whereupon Chamberlain turned back to the House with evident relief and joy, saying:

"That is not all. I have something further to say to the House yet. I have now been informed by Herr Hitler that he invites me to meet him at Munich to-morrow morning. He has also invited Signor Mussolini and M. Daladier. Signor Mussolini has accepted and I have no doubt M. Daladier will also accept. I need not say what my answer will be. [An Hon. Member: "Thank God for the Prime Minister!"] We are all patriots, and there can be no hon. Member of this House who did not feel his heart leap that the crisis has been once more postponed to give us once more an opportunity to try what reason and good will and discussion will do to settle a problem which is already within sight of settlement. Mr. Speaker, I cannot say any more. I am sure that the House will be ready to release me now to go and see what I can make of this last effort. Perhaps they may think it will be well, in view of this new development, that this Debate shall stand adjourned for a few days, when perhaps we may meet in happier circumstances."

The Prime Minister did not draw the attention of the House to the circumstance that he had asked for a five-party meeting but had been invited to a gathering of four, from which Czechoslovakia would be excluded. Instead, he treated it as taken for granted that the invitation should not only be accepted, but acclaimed by a leaping of the heart.

No one else in the House commented on the discrepancy between what had been asked and what received from Berlin. Instead, there was the cry of "Thank God for the Prime Minister!" and—with a few notable exceptions, including Anthony Eden and Harold Nicolson—the House rose in a body and engaged in a fervid demonstration of relief, approval, and praise.

### 3

If Neville Chamberlain was at first unaware that he had agreed to join a conference from which the nation primarily affected—and whose participation he had solicited less than a week before—was to be excluded, he did not long remain so. "The only discordant note," Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy informed Washington, "was that Masaryk riding back with me from Parliament said 'I hope this does not mean they are going to cut us up and sell us out.'" Soon after Parliament adjourned, Masaryk was at the Foreign Office, where he was told that public opinion would not tolerate a disruption of the conference over the issue of Czech representation.

Later that evening, Chamberlain wired his minister in Prague, directing him to assure President Beneš that "I shall have the interests of Czechoslovakia in

mind and I go . . . with the intention of trying to find accommodation between the position of German and Czechoslovak governments by which arrangement may be made for an orderly and equitable application of the principle of cession to which he has already agreed." But this message crossed an anguished plea from Beneš that "nothing may be done in Munich without Czechoslovakia being heard," and that provision should be made for a "representative of Czechoslovakia to be at hand to plead the Czech cause." In reply, that evening, Chamberlain could say only that he would "bear this point in mind."

The following morning the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, invited to his office the Soviet Ambassador Ivan Maisky, in order to explain that Russia's exclusion from the conference was not to be laid at Britain's door, but was necessary because: "We all had to face facts and one of those facts was, as he very well knew, that the heads of the German Government and of the Italian Government would not be willing in present circumstances to sit in conference with Soviet representatives." Maisky then pressed Halifax on the question of Czech representation at Munich, to which the Foreign Secretary replied "that this matter was one of those that the Prime Minister had very clearly before him, and in regard to which he would do his best."

It is altogether probable that Chamberlain was pleased by the exclusion of the Russians and Czechs. In February 1938, during the debate in the Commons on Anthony Eden's resignation as Foreign Secretary, Chamberlain had declared: "The peace of Europe must depend upon the attitude of the four major Powers—Germany, Italy, France, and ourselves." Later that day he had defended the exclusion of the Soviet Union from his listing by describing "Russia" as "partly European but partly Asiatic." As for Czechoslovakia, surely the Prime Minister was secretly, if not openly, relieved that the precise and articulate Beneš would not be there to raise sticky questions and make it more difficult to accommodate the outcome to Hitler's demands.

Even had he felt otherwise, there was nothing that Chamberlain could do. He had begged Hitler to be invited to Germany a third time, and had pleaded with Mussolini to intercede in his behalf to the same end. Having cast himself in the role of suppliant, Chamberlain was in no position to complain about his host's guest-list.

Given the idea of a conference settlement, the result was inevitable. Adolf Hitler was not disposed to join meetings called by others, to attend at places picked by others, or to sit at table on equal terms with the representatives of second-class powers like Czechoslovakia. Nor was he likely to grace an international gathering with his own presence unless he could control the agenda and ensure a favorable outcome. All this Hitler achieved when Chamberlain enabled him to play the magnanimous host.

And so it came about that the four-party idea, privately broached by Bullitt in May, became the pattern of Munich in September. The official press release from the Wilhelmstrasse informed the world that the Fuehrer had invited Mussolini, Chamberlain, and Daladier to Munich for a "conference." But little

of importance remained open for decision; the substance of the deal was already settled, and it was only a matter of packaging.

Despite the breaking-point tension of which it was the focus, the Munich meeting was essentially a ritual dance. Hitler had invited his guests not so much to a conference as to a quadrille.



## CHAPTER 2

*En Route*

## 1

At the time of Munich, Neville Chamberlain was in his seventieth year and looked every bit of that. Quite unaccustomed to flying, he had in the past two weeks made two round trips to Germany by air, at a time when aircraft were far slower and less comfortable than they are today, and he now faced the prospect of a third. Since his flight to Berchtesgaden, Chamberlain had presided over a series of continuous and sometimes agonizing conferences with his ministers, and with the French representatives. He had addressed his nation by radio, reported his doings to the House of Commons, and handled a multitude of diplomatic problems.

Furthermore, he faced an uncertain and perhaps unpleasant confrontation at Munich. Himself, he "didn't care two hoots whether the Sudetens were in the Reich, or out of it, according to their wishes," but he cared greatly about the appearance of things, and at Godesberg, Hitler had seemed bent on making them look their worst, and now there was this awkward business of excluding the Czechs. How would the Fuehrer behave at Munich? Would he seat the British and French leaders on the world stage only to humiliate them further?

All in all, Chamberlain had ample excuse for fatigue and apprehension, and might have been expected to put a grim face on things. But the old man was tough, and parliamentary and public reaction to his acceptance of Hitler's invitation had given him a great lift. The ovation on the floor and in the galleries of the House of Commons had been quite unprecedented and almost pathetically sincere. From across the Atlantic came a congratulatory and characteristic message from Franklin Roosevelt: "Good man" was all it said. That evening Downing Street was crowded with worshipful well-wishers shouting: "Good old Neville!" He came to the window and spoke as if to children excited and up past their bedtime: "I think you can all go to bed and sleep quietly tonight. It will be all right now."

Thus buoyed, Chamberlain was in a positively jaunty mood when he arrived at Heston Airport early in the morning, and found his cabinet assembled there to bid him Godspeed. Contrary to legend, on this occasion the Prime Minister was not carrying an umbrella, and he faced the cameras smiling and waving his black fedora, flanked by the diminutive Kingsley Wood and the towering Halifax, with Hore-Belisha's moonface beaming over his left shoulder.

With homely whimsey, Chamberlain remarked the repetitious feature of his aerial departures to Germany: "When I was a boy, I used to repeat 'if at first you don't succeed, try, try, try, again.' That is what I am doing." And he added, seeking a higher literary level: "When I come back, I hope I may be able to say, as Hotspur says in Henry IV, 'Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.'" The quotation was an apt reflection of his own state of mind but, alas, the nettle long survived the flower.

Lord Halifax had not accompanied his chief either to Berchtesgaden or Godesberg, and now once more he was left behind to watch the home front. In the plane with the Prime Minister went six other men, of whom the most senior was Sir Horace Wilson, nominally Chief Industrial Adviser to the government but actually the Prime Minister's closest consultant and agent. Wilson had just spent two highly unpleasant days in Berlin desperately trying to convey Chamberlain's messages to a Fuehrer whose torrent of invective made it hard to get a word in edgewise. The five others were Sir William Malkin, Legal Adviser to the Foreign Office; William Strang, head of the Central European Department of the Foreign Office; Frank Ashton-Gwatkin, a Foreign Office counselor who had been a member of Lord Runciman's mission; the Prime Minister's parliamentary private secretary Lord Dunglass, better known in later years as Sir Alec Douglas-Home, Foreign Minister and Prime Minister during the early sixties; and Chamberlain's personal secretary, Oscar S. Cleverly.

Perhaps before or during this trip to Munich the Prime Minister conferred with his chosen advisers in order to develop a plan for the incipient negotiations, but if so, no record has come to light. There was no consultation between London and Paris. In flight, Chamberlain told Lord Dunglass that the trip was "a last throw," but that "he could not see how it could pay Hitler to push things to the point of war."

At about noon the British Airways plane carrying the delegation settled on the Munich airport. A guard of honor was drawn up, and Joachim von Ribbentrop was on hand to receive the visitors. Chamberlain was the last of the principals to arrive, and he and his companions were taken by car to the Fuehrerbau on the Königsplatz, where the conference was to be held.

## 2

Edouard Daladier had none of Chamberlain's grounds for self-congratulation, and rather more for self-doubt. It was not Britain but France that was Czechoslovakia's ally, bound to give aid against attack. It was not Britain but France that could put a hundred divisions into the field, and would bear the brunt of the fighting, should war come. In terms of both responsibility and military power, the center of gravity was in Paris, not London.

Despite all this, Daladier had allowed Chamberlain to take the initiative and call every turn. The Runciman mission, Berchtesgaden, Godesberg—all were made in London; France had been pulled along in the British wake, and plainly, if things came to scratch at Munich, the French would be in Chamberlain's hands.

Furthermore, in London Chamberlain ruled the roost, as Daladier did not in

Paris. French premiers rarely dominate their governments, and Daladier, for all his sobriquet "Bull of Vacluse," had plenty of trouble with a cabinet that comprised a spectrum from the peace-at-any-price Foreign Minister, Georges Bonnet, to the intransigent Minister of the Colonies, Georges Mandel.

Finally, there was the matter of conscience and individual responsibility. At no point does Neville Chamberlain appear to have doubted the wisdom of his own course, while Edouard Daladier was a chronic victim of the pangs of ambivalence. If Hitler were once again to get his way, where would it all end? Would not the *tricolore* be forever stained if the pledge to Prague were not redeemed? On the other hand, should the flower of young France be sacrificed, and Paris laid in ruins by the Luftwaffe, just on account of those obstinate Czechs? Was not Bonnet right that war with Germany would be suicide for France?

These agonies of doubt may have been temporarily assuaged by the almost hysterical demonstrations of relief that greeted the announcement of the Munich meeting. Paris rejoiced no less than London: "The feeling of relief in Paris tonight," Bullitt cabled to the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, "is comparable to the feeling of relief when the news came that the armistice had been signed." With few exceptions, politicians and press vied with each other in exultation. "Hope is reborn!" cried Georges Bidault in *L'Aube*, while in *Le Populaire* the former Socialist Premier, Léon Blum, wrote that:

The announcement of the Munich meeting has raised a great wave of faith and hope. It would have been a crime against humanity to break off negotiations or render them impossible. The Munich conference is an armful of wood thrown on the sacred hearth at the moment when the flame fell and was about to die out.

Daladier had previously scheduled a radio address to the nation for the evening of September 28, and now his task was greatly eased:

I had announced that I would speak to the country this evening on the international situation; but at the beginning of the afternoon I was told of a German invitation to meet Chancellor Hitler, Mr. Chamberlain, and Signor Mussolini at Munich tomorrow. I have accepted this invitation.

You will understand that the day before such important negotiations it is my duty to postpone the explanations that I wanted to give you. But before I depart I should like to thank the French people for their attitude, an attitude filled with courage and dignity.

Above all I wish to thank the Frenchmen who have been recalled to the colours for the fresh proof of calm and resolve that they have given.

My task is hard. Since the beginning of the difficulties that we are now experiencing I have never for a single day ceased to work with all my strength to safeguard peace and France's vital interests. Tomorrow I shall continue this effort with the thought that I am in full agreement with the nation in its entirety.

No more than Chamberlain did Daladier draw attention to the exclusion of the Czechs from the gathering. No more than the English did the French take note of the omission. On what point was the entire nation in "full agreement"?

The Premier did not say, but between the lines one could read the words "Peace! At any—or almost any—price!"

General Gamelin, according to his own account, was not prepared to bid so high. At a conference with Daladier on the morning of September 28, the Premier had asked the general what was most essential to be preserved, in the event that a transfer of territory could not be avoided. Gamelin replied that, unless the fortifications remained in Czech hands, their country would no longer have any "effective military value."

This was sound military advice, but events had long since outstripped such ideas, inasmuch as the territorial cessions which the Czechs had already been forced to accept included most of the fortifications. It is interesting to speculate on the consequences had Daladier appeared at Munich with Gamelin at his side, but no such notion seems to have crossed the mind of either the general or the Premier. Furthermore, later that day General Vuillemin, Chief of the Air Staff, told Daladier that the French Air Force was in no condition for war.

Who would accompany the Premier to Munich? According to Bonnet, it was known in Paris that the two Axis foreign ministers, Ribbentrop and Ciano, would be present. Bonnet had uniformly accompanied Daladier to the Anglo-French discussions in London, but on this occasion: "I let it be known that I would prefer to remain in Paris, and I asked M. Léger to take my place."

Alexis Léger, the senior civil servant, with the title of Secretary-General at the Quai d'Orsay, gives a very different account. Hitler, says Léger, did not want the foreign ministers (except for Galeazzo Ciano, who was the Duce's son-in-law) present, so that the four chiefs could settle the matter summarily. This cut across the French tradition of *collective* cabinet responsibility, pursuant to which the Foreign Minister generally was present with the Premier at important diplomatic conferences. But this time the Cabinet decided to yield to Hitler's preference, and Léger, despite his objections, was instructed to accompany Daladier.

Léger, as a nonpolitical official, then asked for Cabinet instructions regarding the positions he should take on the issues likely to arise at Munich. Bonnet told him that the Cabinet had made no such decisions,\* whereupon Léger procured a memorandum from the General Staff advising that the new Czech borders should lie outside the Czech fortifications, and should cause no disruption of the country's east-west communications or narrowing of the "waist" between Moravia and Slovakia. These instructions were in line with what Gamelin had told Daladier that morning, and were similarly beyond hope of realization in view of concessions already made by the Prague government.

It was foggy but not too thick for a take-off when the French delegation arrived at Le Bourget the following morning. Léger was accompanied by Charles Rochat, an experienced diplomat and chief of the Foreign Ministry's European

\* However, Bonnet subsequently wrote that he provided Léger with a memorandum stating that only territories "predominantly German" should be ceded, and that the new frontiers should be guaranteed by the four powers. Furthermore, the Munich conference should be enlarged so as to include the United States, the Soviet Union, Poland, and the other Balkan states, and proceed to study and dispose of all the controversial European problems.

section, and Daladier brought along his faithful *chef de cabinet* and fellow *Vauclusien*, Marcel Clapier.

Daladier's departure drew a large crowd of officialdom; in addition to most of the Cabinet there were prefects, air transport bigwigs, press, and many diplomats prominent among whom were the British Ambassador, Sir Eric Phipps, and the German *chargé d'affaires*, Dr. Curt Braeuer.

Waiting to carry the Premier and his party was a silver twin-engined aircraft, the *Poitou*. It took off shortly before nine o'clock, and reached Munich at quarter-past eleven. Ribbentrop was at the airport; he escorted Daladier past a guard of honor and to an automobile for the drive to the famous Vier Jahreszeiten (Four Seasons) Hotel, where the French were to be accommodated. As the cortège of cars approached the center of Munich, the crowds thickened, and loudly acclaimed the French Premier.

Despite the honorific and enthusiastic reception, Daladier seemed ill at ease: "Broad-backed, sunburned, his head buried deep between his shoulders, his brow deeply furrowed with wrinkles, Daladier appeared gloomy and preoccupied. Léger seemed even more so." Such was the impression made on Ambassador François-Poncet, who had come from Berlin by the overnight train and was on hand at the airport to greet his chief.

Arrived at the Four Seasons, Daladier assembled his party in his suite and listened to a briefing by François-Poncet. The Premier himself then said a few words, of which one sentence in particular stuck in the mind of Captain Paul Stehlin, the assistant air attaché, who had come from Berlin with the ambassador. "Everything depends on the English," said Daladier, "we can do nothing but follow them."

Stehlin heard this with surprise, but in fact there was little cause for astonishment. The *Poitou* was a French aircraft, but Daladier had been carried, or sucked, to Munich in the wake of British initiative, and now he had no cards of his own to play.

The telephone rang. Stehlin picked up the receiver and reported that Hermann Goering was waiting on Edouard Daladier, to escort him to the Fuehrerbau.

## 3

Of the four principals making their ways to Munich, beyond doubt the happiest was Benito Mussolini. The Duce was, about to take the center of the stage, a prospect naturally gratifying, and especially so because he had been chafing under a growing awareness that the Germans were prone to relegate him to the wings.

Earlier that year, during the events leading up to the German annexation of Austria, Mussolini had been exceedingly irritated by Hitler's failure to give any notice of what was being planned. *Anschluss* itself, much as Mussolini tried to put a good face on it, had been a real blow, in that Italy's Central European policy, since the First World War, had been based on the preservation of Austrian independence. Then, no sooner had Austria been absorbed than the Germans in the Italian Tyrol raised a clamor for annexation of part of that troubled

area to the German Fatherland. In April, Mussolini had been incensed by an article in a Leipzig publication "in which the South Tyrol question is agitated again, and offensive language is used about the Italian mountain population." The indignant Duce confided to Galeazzo Ciano that "these Germans will compel me to swallow the bitterest pill of my life; I mean the French pill." And Ciano, for his part, was worried lest "imprudent" German behavior in the South Tyrol might "blow the Axis sky high."

Came September, and it was the same story all over again. A crisis was developing, and Mussolini was exasperated by the lack of news from Berlin. What was Hitler's program? Did he expect any help from Italy? Consultation there was none, and urgent requests for information produced only vague rejoinders. Nuremberg, Berchtesgaden, and Godesberg came and passed, with no direct word from Hitler until September 25, when he finally vouchsafed to his Italian allies the information, already known to them through other channels, that, if the Czechs had not yielded by October 1, Germany would attack.

But three days later, things were much brighter in Rome. The ambassadors of Britain, France, and the United States were stumbling over each other's heels in haste to reach the Duce and beg him to intervene with Hitler to save the peace of the world. It was Mussolini's telephone message to Hitler that clinched the postponement of hostilities and led Hitler to propose the conference in Munich, on condition that the Duce be present in person. For once, the voice of Rome counted for something in the German counsels! And now Benito Mussolini could go to Munich as the Great Peacemaker, and cut the leading figure! Furthermore, it was a role in which Mussolini was confident he could excel. His experience and temper were cosmopolitan, and he was by far the best linguist of the four. Hitler spoke nothing but German; Daladier had a bit of Italian and Chamberlain a touch of French; Mussolini was thoroughly at home in French, and competent if not altogether fluent in both English and German.

Talking to Ciano, just before their departure, Mussolini pretended to be only "moderately happy" at the way things were turning out, because "though perhaps at a heavy price, we could have liquidated France and Great Britain forever; we now have overwhelming proof of this." The "proof," presumably, was the weakness suggested by British and French anxiety for peace.

However that may be, Mussolini's boast was nothing but the play-acting in which he indulged even with his closest associates. Comfortably ensconced in his private train, the Duce was in fine humor, and at dinner regaled Ciano "with great vivacity on every subject":

He criticizes Britain and British policy severely. "In a country where animals are adored to the point of making cemeteries and hospitals and houses for them, and legacies are bequeathed to parrots, you can be sure that decadence has set in. Besides, other reasons apart, it is also a consequence of the composition of the English people. Four million surplus women. Four million sexually unsatisfied women, artificially creating a host of problems in order to excite or appease their senses. Not being able to embrace one man, they embrace humanity."

Having thus delivered himself, the Duce retired, while Ciano stayed up to play the Great Man to the newspapermen and government aides who were making the trip. Early next morning the travelers reached the old Austro-German border, where they found Adolf Hitler in his more sumptuous train. Mussolini and Ciano finished the journey to Munich in the Fuehrer's carriage, while the other Italians followed in their own train.

## 4

Munich was Adolf Hitler's meeting, and it was in Berlin that the only purposeful work in preparation for the conference had been done. Basically, this consisted of drafting a rather sketchy agenda and a statement of the German demands.

The work was done by a somewhat oddly assorted trio; Hermann Goering, Baron Constantin von Neurath, and Ernst von Weizsaecker. During the hurly-burly on the morning of September 28, with François-Poncet and Nevile Henderson pressing new concessions on Hitler, and Attolico, the Italian Ambassador, rushing in and out of the Chancellery with messages from Mussolini, Goering had weighed in heavily with arguments for a settlement by conference. In this he had been strongly supported by Ribbentrop's predecessor as Foreign Minister, Neurath, who had been relegated to virtual retirement six months earlier, but now made a brief reappearance in the Fuehrer's councils. Between them, and with the aid of Mussolini's intervention, Goering and Neurath succeeded in overriding the influence of Ribbentrop, who was catering to Hitler's itch for military conquest.

Soon after Hitler decided in favor of the conference, Goering and Neurath got together with Ernst von Weizsaecker, the number-two man in the Foreign Office, who shared their views on the matter in hand. With Weizsaecker doing most of the drafting, a scenario for the conference was speedily blocked out in a short memorandum.

Their program envisaged a three-step meeting. First the four principals would agree on the answers to a number of basic questions: What parts of the Sudetenland would be ceded to Germany outright? What parts would be dealt with by plebiscite? When would German military occupation begin, and when be completed? How would the new frontier be formally determined? After these matters were resolved, a protocol embodying the results would be prepared by a drafting committee. Then, as the third and final step, the four principals would sign the documents and set up the necessary commissions to carry out their provisions. Together with this agenda was a specification of the German demands, which called for an initial occupation of four border districts between October 1 and 7 and for the subsequent cession of other areas and the holding of plebiscites in accordance with an attached map.

By-passing Ribbentrop, for whom he had little use, Goering took the draft directly to Hitler, who examined it rather cursorily but indicated that it was acceptable. Weizsaecker then buttonholed the Foreign Ministry interpreter, Paul Otto Schmidt, to have a translation prepared for the Italian Ambassador, who spoke no German. Knowing that Schmidt was not competent in Italian, Weiz-

saecker asked him to put it into French, a language which Attolico could handle.

Attolico at once had had the memorandum repeated by telephone to Rome for the benefit of Mussolini and Ciano. In this there appears to have been no "force-feeding"; the Duce did not like to improvise, and had previously asked the Germans for a statement of Hitler's position.

And so, as Mussolini and Ciano journeyed northward, they were fortified by the knowledge that these terms would be acceptable to Hitler. Nor was there much cause for concern about British and French acquiescence; had not Chamberlain already assured Hitler that he could "get all the essentials without war and without delay"? There would be some dickerings to save face, some drafting to be done, and a pageant to be performed of which the Duce, if all went well, would be the hero . . .

## 5

Lawyers and psychologists especially have long been aware of the fallibility of human perception and recollection, particularly under stress. In the sudden confrontation of alarming circumstances, men see and hear what never happened and are blind to salient features of the actual situation. But there was nothing in Hitler's reception of Mussolini to affright the onlooker, and it was certainly not an unexpected event.

Thus, it is more than a little surprising that the four recorded accounts of the meeting by professed eyewitnesses differ sharply about the circumstances of the encounter. Paul Otto Schmidt, official interpreter for the Foreign Ministry and Hitler's personal interpreter, tells us that he and Hitler drove by automobile from Munich to Kufstein and boarded Mussolini's train for the journey to Munich. Galeazzo Ciano's diary entry for September 29 also specifies Kufstein as the meeting place but states that he and Mussolini moved into Hitler's railway carriage, where maps of the Sudetenland and Germany's western fortifications were spread on a table. Ciano's *chef de cabinet*, Filippo Anfuso, on the other hand, declares that the meeting took place not at Kufstein but some twenty-five miles into Bavaria and closer to Munich, at Rosenheim.

These discrepancies, intrinsically unimportant, are valuable reminders that the reader should not credit everything that he finds in the memoirs. And the contradictions are rendered much more understandable by realization that Schmidt's "eyewitness" account is wholly, and Anfuso's partly, fabricated.

For Schmidt was not competent in Italian, and it would have made little sense to send him to meet Mussolini's party when his excellent command of English and French would be much more useful for the arrival of Chamberlain and Daladier in Munich. Furthermore, his story of Hitler driving to Munich and climbing with a roll of maps into the Duce's railway carriage is inherently incredible; what sort of hospitality would that have been? Finally, and fortunately for historical accuracy, there was another and more reliable recording witness, who states that Schmidt did indeed leave the train from Berlin at Munich.

Lieutenant Colonel Peterpaul von Donat, of the Luftwaffe General Staff, was fluent in Italian and, from time to time, was asked by Hitler, Goering, or other bigwigs to act as an interpreter. Late in the afternoon of the twenty-eighth he

had been ordered to board the Fuehrer's special train in Berlin, in order to serve in this capacity at the meeting with Mussolini. His account of what transpired is more complete and plausible than any of the others.

At Munich (according to Donat) Goering, Ribbentrop, and Schmidt de-trained in order to receive the British and French delegations coming by air from London and Paris. Hitler, with the Chief of the High Command, General Wilhelm Keitel, and a number of lesser lights including Donat, went on to Kiefersfelden, the last railway stop on the German side of the former border, opposite Kufstein in Austria, by now the Ostmark. A few moments after their arrival, Mussolini's train pulled in and, after a short greeting on the platform, the Duce and Ciano climbed into Hitler's private car, leaving Anfuso and the rest of the Italian delegation in their own train.\*

Hitler, who appeared serene and determined, declared it very fortunate that "we two revolutionaries" were changing the face of Europe and restoring their two nations to positions of power and respect. He then asked Keitel to present the military situation, and the general displayed on a map of Czechoslovakia the locations of the planned German attacks from Austria, Bavaria, Saxony, and Silesia. Mussolini could follow the discourse in German, but Ciano, though fluent in English and French, had to rely on Donat's whispered translation. Mussolini occasionally interjected questions, especially about the strength of the Czech fortifications.

Hitler then made a clean breast of the fact that the western front was "completely exposed" (*völlig entblösst*). There had been some fortification between the Rhine and the Moselle, but only weak forces were deployed there. On the Belgian and Dutch frontiers there was virtually nothing, and the situation on the Upper Rhine was "not much better."†

Mussolini reacted with a thoughtful countenance, and Hitler hastened to reassure him that the Czechs would be overrun in a three-to-four-day *Blitzkrieg*, before the west could mobilize. England and France were not well armed and would not face the risk of war. General Vuillemin, Chief of Staff of the French Air Force, had just been given an impressive picture of the Luftwaffe's strength.‡ The appearance of Chamberlain and Daladier in Munich was the best evidence that they would shun any danger of war.

\* In view of Mussolini's sensitivity about the German annexation of Austria, it was more tactful for Hitler to receive him on historically German soil at Kiefersfelden than at Kufstein. Although Donat's account was not published until June 1971 (*Deutsches Adelsblatt*, Nr. 6, p. 126), he states that it was written directly after the occasion. I am indebted to David Irving for bringing it to my attention. Donat was aware of Anfuso's published account (1950) and its inconsistency with his own.

† Completely to the contrary, Anfuso wrote that Hitler described the western fortifications as "finished and perfected," and declared that he would launch an attack near Aachen that would defeat "the democracies" before they had mobilized. It is possible that Donat was mistaken in stating that Anfuso was in the Italian train. But Anfuso is a garrulous and unreliable witness (he erroneously wrote that Ribbentrop was present), and the statements Anfuso attributes to Hitler are militarily preposterous. It seems probable that Anfuso has given us an embellished version of what he was told by Ciano.

‡ At this point in his account Donat inserted a comment that he himself had been part of Vuillemin's escort during the French general's visit to Germany, and that the guest had been deluded by "Potemkin masterpieces" contrived by flying German aircraft from one field to another ahead of the French party's arrivals, so that in fact they unknowingly saw the same planes several times.

In response to Mussolini's inquiry, he was then shown an ethnographic map of Czechoslovakia, and Hitler pointed out the areas to be ceded, adding that they laid no claim to any Czech-populated districts. But what he had marked for cession he was determined to get.

According to Donat, the two dictators made no plans for the negotiations in which they were about to engage, and no reference was made to the German settlement memorandum which had been transmitted to Mussolini: "During the whole time, except for Keitel's presentation and the questions by Mussolini, only Hitler spoke: he was the giver, the others were the receivers. Ciano did not get into the discussion."

Whatever Mussolini may have thought of all the Hitlerian bellicosity, Ciano sensed it as *ignis fatuus*. An "atmosphere of agreement" surrounded the occasion: "Even the people waving as the train passes make one realize their joy at the event which is in the air."

At about eleven o'clock the train pulled into the Munich station, where the dictators were greeted by Goering, General Franz Ritter von Epp (the *Reichsstatthalter* of Bavaria), and other Nazi dignitaries. The children had been let out of school for the great day, and through cheering crowds Mussolini and Ciano were driven to their guest rooms in the Prince Charles Palace on the Königinstrasse.

## 6

Other special trains to Munich were also on the move. Hermann Goering, having made a strong pitch for peace in Berlin, was determined to be part of the Munich circle: "I asked the Fuehrer, or rather, I told him, that under all circumstances I would go along," Goering related in his testimony at the Nuremberg trials: "He agreed. Then I suggested that I could also take Herr von Neurath with me in my train. He agreed to that also."

Still another special train from Berlin was laid on for Foreign Ministry officials and diplomatic representatives of the three powers. The passengers included Weizsaecker and Erich Kordt (Ribbentrop's *chef de cabinet*) from the Foreign Ministry; Neville Henderson and his first secretary, Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick; François-Poncet and two junior colleagues, Jean Leroy and the air attaché, Captain Paul Stehlin; the Italian Ambassador, Dr. Bernardo Attolico. The last was escorted to the station by his attractive and linguistically gifted wife, who embraced François-Poncet and tearfully begged him to "save the peace for us other Italians who love France."

Meanwhile, journalists and others observers were converging on Munich from all over Europe. Since the conference had been called on less than twenty-four hours' notice, there was a great pushing and clawing for transportation, accommodations, and communications facilities. William L. Shirer, then representing the Columbia radio network in Berlin, finished his evening broadcast and dashed for the train to Munich. If the morrow promised interest, the upshot did not appear uncertain to Shirer, who forecast in his diary that "Mussolini, Chamberlain, and Daladier . . . will rescue Hitler from his limb and he will get his Sudetenland without war, if a couple of days later than he boasted."

There was no special train from Prague.

## CHAPTER 3

*Ring Around the Table in Munich*

## 1

According to Baedeker, the Königsplatz in Munich is a "masterly creation of neo-classic architecture." Masterly or not, it is assuredly neoclassic and, like many other of the city's buildings and monuments, is largely the product of the dreams of King Ludwig I and the designs of his favorite architect, Leo von Klenze.

The square is bisected east-west by the Briennerstrasse, and at the western entrance stands the Propyläen, adapted by Klenze from the famous ruin on the Acropolis, and erected by Ludwig in honor of his son Otto, the first King of Greece in modern times. The Propyläen's dates are not auspicious, for it was commenced in 1848, the year in which Ludwig thought it wise to abdicate because of unpopularity largely aroused by his relations with the dancer Lola Montez, and was completed in 1862, just as Otto himself was driven from the throne of Greece.

On the north side of the square stands Klenze's Greek-style Glyptothek (sculpture gallery), and on the south side another neoclassic structure of similar vintage by Ziebland, the State Gallery of Modern Art. The east side is bounded by the Arcisstrasse, crossed by the Briennerstrasse. As one stands in the Königsplatz looking eastward along the Briennerstrasse, a quarter of a mile distant at the Karolinenplatz rises the shaft of a bronze obelisk, again the work of Ludwig I and Klenze. The Briennerstrasse takes its name from Brienne-le-Château, a town in northeastern France where Bavarians fought with the allies against Napoleon in 1814. With fine impartiality, Ludwig dedicated the obelisk to the thousands of Bavarians who perished in Russia while fighting for Napoleon in 1812.

It was among these relics of the royal Wittelsbachs that Adolf Hitler, nearly a century later, established the national headquarters of the Nazi Party.\* At first blush the architectural atmosphere may not appear congenial to a professedly revolutionary movement, and it is probable that his decision owed much to chance. In 1930, before the Nazi seizure of power and when Hitler still had to watch his pennies, the Party had managed to acquire an 1828 Biedermeier-style building called the "Barlow-Palais," on the Briennerstrasse just east of the

\* Officially called the National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei (National Socialist German Workers Party), or NSDAP.

Königsplatz. It was altered for use as the main Party headquarters, and in 1931 Hitler named it the Brown House.

A few years later he was Chancellor and Chief of State, and the NSDAP was the only political party in Germany. There was no lack of funds, and the Party headquarters needed more office space. In 1935 construction was begun on two huge buildings on the Arcisstrasse, one on either side of the Briennerstrasse, facing the Königsplatz. The Fuehrer, artist *manqué* that he was, lavished much personal attention on the two-year project, which was carried out by the official Party *Baumeister*, Paul Ludwig Troost.

Whatever one's feelings about the neoclassic style, it would be hard to deny that Ludwig I and Klenze builded better than Hitler and Troost. A hundred yards long, fifty deep, and only three stories high, with evenly spaced window rows, the identical buildings look like a pair of casernes to which a few heavy porticos have been glued. Between them, opposite the Propyläen, two "temples of honor" were erected in memory of the sixteen Nazis who were killed in the 1923 "Beer Hall Putsch."

Today nothing remains of the temples or the Brown House, but the two big buildings on the Arcisstrasse still stand. The northern edifice, used now by the Amerikahaus and the Bavarian State Archives, was built as the working quarters for the Fuehrer and his personal Party staff, and was called the Fuehrerbau.

It was to the Fuehrerbau that the participants in the Munich conference were brought shortly after noon on September 29, 1938, and it was in Hitler's private office—his *Arbeitszimmer*—that the principals conferred.

## 2

Of the guests, Neville Chamberlain and his party were the first to arrive at the Fuehrerbau. Over the portico was a large bronze eagle, and inside they passed through a grandiose central hall and up a stone staircase to a lobby or salon, where a buffet lunch was served by liveried footmen. Inside and out were swarms of black-uniformed SS men, every one the image of stiff, heel-clicking punctilio.

Daladier and François-Poncet, meanwhile, were en route in an open automobile with Goering, resplendent in a white uniform which, the Premier thought, "accentuated his curves." *Unser Hermann* was exuberantly hospitable, oozing charm at every one of his many pores in his anxiety to please the Frenchman. At first Daladier sniffed suspiciously at his gargantuan and effusive escort, but the cheers of the crowds lining the streets through which they passed soon drove the clouds from his brow. As they approached the Fuehrerbau, host and guest were waving and smiling like the politicians they both were.

Goering swept the Frenchmen inside and up the stairs; François-Poncet thought the interior resembled "some modern mammoth hotel furnished by a professional interior decorator." In the salon they encountered Chamberlain, Wilson, and Strang, all clad in black. François-Poncet did not find the Prime Minister very appetizing: "Chamberlain, grizzled, bowed, with bushy eyebrows and prominent teeth, his face blotchy, his hands reddened by rheumatism."

Whatever his faults, Benito Mussolini was not one to be caught standing

## WHO WAS WHO AT MUNICH

*Participants in the Opening Conference in Hitler's Office*

- |                        |                            |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Adolf Hitler        | 2. Joachim von Ribbentrop* |
| 3. Neville Chamberlain | 4. Sir Horace Wilson       |
| 5. Benito Mussolini    | 6. Galeazzo Ciano          |
| 7. Edouard Daladier    | 8. Alexis Léger            |
|                        | 9. Paul Otto Schmidt       |

**Later Participants and Extras***German*

- |                            |                            |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 10. Hermann Goering        | 11. Ernst von Weizsaecker  |
| 12. Constantin von Neurath | 13. Otto Abetz             |
| 14. Erich Kordt            | 15. Heinrich Himmler       |
| 16. Fritz Wiedemann        | 17. Rudolf Hess            |
| 18. Hans von Mackensen     | 19. General Wilhelm Keitel |
|                            | 20. Major Rudolf Schmudt   |

*British*

- |                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 21. Sir Nevile Henderson  | 22. William Strang       |
| 23. Sir William Malkin    | 24. Frank Ashton-Gwatkin |
| 25. Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick | 26. Lord Dunglass        |

*Italian*

- |                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 27. Bernardo Attolico | 28. Filippo Anfuso |
|                       | 29. Dino Alfieri   |

*French*

- |                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 30. André François-Poncet | 31. Charles Rochat       |
| 32. Jean Leroy            | 33. Marcel Clapier       |
|                           | 34. Captain Paul Stehlin |

*Czechoslovakian†*

- |                    |                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 35. Hubert Masařík | 36. Vojtech Mastny |
|--------------------|--------------------|

\*As described in the text, the participation of Ribbentrop in the opening meeting is questioned but probable; Weizsaecker is listed by Wilson as present at the first meeting, but this is improbable.

† The Czech representatives were required to remain in their hotel rooms throughout the discussions at the Fuehrerbau, and only after the agreement was signed were they officially informed of its contents.

## WHO WAS WHO AT MUNICH

**Identity of the Participants**

1. Fuehrer and Reichskanzler
2. Foreign Minister
3. Prime Minister
4. Chief Industrial Adviser, and Chamberlain's personal consultant
5. Duce and Prime Minister
6. Foreign Minister
7. Premier
8. Secretary-General of the French Foreign Ministry
9. Official Interpreter for the German Foreign Ministry
10. Second man in the Third Reich, Luftwaffe Commander
11. State Secretary of the German Foreign Ministry
12. Former Foreign Minister
13. Ribbentrop's personal representative in Paris
14. Ribbentrop's *chef de cabinet*
15. Leader of the SS (*Schutzstaffel*)
16. Hitler's civilian aide
17. Third man in the Third Reich and Deputy Fuehrer
18. Ambassador to Italy
19. Chief of the Armed Forces High Command
20. Hitler's military aide
21. Ambassador to Germany
22. Chief, Central European Department, Foreign Office
23. Legal Adviser to the Foreign Office
24. Counselor, Foreign Office
25. First Secretary of the British Embassy in Berlin
26. Chamberlain's personal parliamentary secretary
27. Italian Ambassador to Germany
28. Ciano's *chef de cabinet*
29. Minister of Propaganda
30. French Ambassador to Germany
31. Chief, European Section, Foreign Ministry
32. On François-Poncet's staff, at Munich handling encoded messages
33. Daladier's *chef de cabinet*
34. Assistant Air Attaché, Berlin
35. Counselor, Foreign Ministry
36. Czech Minister to Germany



around and waiting for anyone else, and he knew how to make an entrance. So, too, trains can carry more people than can planes, and now the Duce and Ciano entered the Fuehrerbau at the head of a troupe of followers, all in black-shirt uniform and covered with braid and medals. Hitler emerged from wherever he had been awaiting the moment, and went down the grand staircase to greet him. After such special treatment Mussolini knew better than to be seen fraternizing with the enemy. He vouchsafed brief handshakes to Chamberlain and Daladier, and went to a corner of the salon where he and a number of the Germans staged a friendly reunion.

A step behind the Duce came the Fuehrer, apparently ill at ease, and seeming rather to cling to his fellow-dictator for moral support against this alien invasion of the Nazi sanctum sanctorum. He saluted Chamberlain mechanically and Daladier, whom he had never met, rather less so. The Frenchman's first impression of Hitler at this, their only encounter, was mixed:

Now, behind all these gaudy visitors, Hitler, pale and tense, came in alone. I remarked his brown hair, with a heavy lock falling over his forehead. His dull blue eyes, shifting rapidly during the brief greetings, gave him a hard and remote expression.

He was dressed very simply, like a man of the people, in a khaki jacket, with a swastika armband on the right sleeve,\* and long trousers falling on scuffed black shoes. Such was the way this man appeared to me—the man who by trick, force, and violence had made himself supreme dictator of Germany.

I had said, and repeated in London, that his aim was to dominate Europe. Seeing him now, I thought that I had not been mistaken.

The tiny British and French delegations, in sober mufti, were lost in a swirl of Nazi and Fascist uniforms; there were linguistic difficulties and the atmosphere was uneasy. Kirkpatrick managed brief conversations with the Italian and French parties, some of whom he knew from his earlier postings to Paris and Rome. Chamberlain moved over to thank Mussolini for making the occasion possible. Seeking to relax the atmosphere with small talk, the Prime Minister, an incorrigible Izaak Walton, asked Mussolini whether he liked angling. But the Duce was not to be drawn; a blank stare rebuffed the fishing ploy, and the conversation petered out.

Hitler had no personal use for the buffet and was impatient to get going. There was a slight delay because Daladier had lost track of Léger and Hitler tried to get the Premier to go it alone. But Daladier was quite unwilling: "I can't begin without him. Léger knows all the details, I know nothing." Léger, in turn, had to hunt for a lady secretary who had all the papers. Finally the French got organized, and shortly before one o'clock the principals proceeded to Hitler's office.

Who were they? It is certain that at least eight persons were present from the outset: Hitler and Paul Otto Schmidt, the senior German Foreign Ministry interpreter; Chamberlain and Sir Horace Wilson; Daladier and Léger; Mussolini and Ciano.

\* In fact, as pictures show, the armband was on the left sleeve.

Beyond these eight, the testimony of eyewitnesses—just as in connection with the Hitler-Mussolini meeting at Kiefersfelden—is in conflict. Léger, interrogated on the point thirty years later, insisted that no one else was there; that Hitler was initially accompanied by no one but Schmidt, whose responsibilities were limited to interpretation, and that Ribbentrop was excluded, in line with Hitler's desire to keep the foreign ministers out. The Frenchman's recollection is corroborated by Sir Alec Douglas-Home (then Lord Dunglass), who recalled seeing Ribbentrop in the corridors during most of the opening conference. Sir Horace Wilson, however, insists that Ribbentrop was present from the beginning, and his contemporaneous notes also list Ribbentrop's deputy, Ernst von Weizsaecker, as one of the initial conferees. Schmidt agrees that Ribbentrop was present, but recalls Weizsaecker as coming to only the later sessions. Ciano and Schmidt both report Ribbentrop's, but not Weizsaecker's, attendance.

These discrepancies are less surprising considering that there were three distinct sessions of the conference, and that during the second and third the principals were no longer *in camera*, but rather the focus of an increasing group of secondary participants and kibitzers. It was easy to remember mistakenly someone as present at the outset who, in fact, appeared only at the later sessions. Despite Léger's firm belief, it is difficult to conceive that Hitler would have excluded Ribbentrop from a meeting to which the much junior Ciano was admitted. It is also unlikely that he would have outnumbered the others by bringing in Weizsaecker, who probably joined the group only after the first sitting.

Whether eight, nine, or ten in number, Hitler led the chosen into his office and the doors were closed. The conferees found themselves in a large rectangular room with a fireplace at one end, a heavy chandelier, and a large desk near the fireplace. Over the mantel hung one of the painter Lenbach's many portraits of Bismarck, and on the other walls were the works of several German artists—Böcklin, Feuerbach, Menzel.

None of the usual trappings of summit conferences was at hand; no long green table, only a small round one; no name cards, pads, or freshly sharpened pencils were provided, whether because of haste, oversight, or Hitler's desire thus to manifest the summary nature of the anticipated proceedings. The orderly British civil servants were shocked: Strang recalls Munich as a "bugger-mugger\* affair," and Sir Horace Wilson primly noted that "the organization of the conference was very imperfect, and there appeared to be no arrangements for the taking of notes."

The seating arrangements were completely impromptu. Nobody took the chair; there was no agenda; the conversation followed no fixed plan but jumped back and forth from one subject to another. According to Daladier, Hitler ensconced himself in an armchair at the left of the entrance, with Schmidt on his right, and left it to the others to seat themselves—Chamberlain and Wilson next to Schmidt, Mussolini and Ciano on a sofa in the center, and the two Frenchmen completing the ring around the central table.

\* A word of obscure, probably Celtic origin, used by Strang in his memoirs as denoting a state of utter confusion.



The files of the German Foreign Ministry contain an unsigned memorandum purporting to have been prepared in Munich at seven in the evening of September 29, and presumably dictated by Paul Otto Schmidt from the notes he made as interpreter in the course of the discussion. The memorandum covers only part of the first meeting, which lasted a bit over two hours, until about three in the afternoon. This document is the most complete and objective record of the opening session that we possess, but it is flat and neutral and undertakes no expression of the tone and temper of the proceedings.

Upon his return to London, Horace Wilson dictated a brief memoir on the conference, "written from memory." Outside of the Schmidt and Wilson accounts, the participants have left us only a few scraps of recollection: a passage in Chamberlain's letter written three days later to his sister Hilda; a couple of paragraphs in Ciano's diary; Daladier's oral account to Ambassador Bullitt on October 3, and his articles on Munich written for a French newspaper (*Candida*) many years later, in 1961. Neither Hitler nor Mussolini, nor any of the other participants in the first meeting, left any useful record of what transpired.

From these sources, primarily from Schmidt's memorandum, the course of discussion, in outline, emerges clearly enough:

- (1) Hitler opened the meeting with a statement the gist of which was that German occupation of the Sudetenland must commence without delay, and the ultimate boundaries be settled by plebiscite;
- (2) During or following the comments in reply by Chamberlain and Daladier, Mussolini produced the draft of German demands which had been telephoned to him from Berlin the previous day, and put them forward as his own proposed settlement;
- (3) Daladier and Chamberlain at once accepted the draft as the basis of discussion;
- (4) Chamberlain expressed unwillingness to guarantee fulfillment of the German demands without their prior acceptance by the Czech Government;
- (5) Chamberlain's point led to a prolonged dispute with Hitler, in the course of which the Prime Minister unsuccessfully urged that a Czech representative attend the conference;
- (6) On Chamberlain's suggestion, the meeting was adjourned temporarily so that the "Mussolini" proposal might be distributed and studied.

But what did all this really look and sound like? Consider Horace Wilson's cool and compendious description of the discussion leading up to Mussolini's production of the draft: "This meeting . . . began by a brief statement by Herr Hitler thanking those present for their acceptances of his invitation and pointing out the need for speedy decisions. Mr. Chamberlain replied suitably, as did M. Daladier and Signor Mussolini. Towards the close of his remarks Signor Mussolini said that he thought the best way of making progress was for someone to produce a basis for discussion, and he therefore read the Memorandum. . . ." In like vein, Chamberlain wrote to his sister that Hitler's "opening

sentences, when we gathered around for our conference, were so moderate and reasonable that I felt instant relief."

Daladier's version of the same colloquy is almost totally dissimilar. Hitler opened the meeting, he told Bullitt, with a "tremendous discourse," to which Daladier responded by observing that "all four countries represented were prepared to make war at once; the question was whether Czechoslovakia was to be attacked and invaded and destroyed, or whether there was to be a reasonable settlement." Whereupon, the Premier declared, Hitler "calmed down," and an orderly discussion ensued.

Twenty-three years later, Daladier painted the picture in <sup>equally</sup> vivid colors and greater detail:

Hitler arose and delivered a diatribe against the Czechs. It was a real explosion. Spreading his arms or clenching his fists, he accused the Czechs of a frightful tyranny over the [Sudeten] Germans, with torture, and the expulsion of thousands in panic-stricken herds.

Daladier claims that he then asked whether it was Hitler's intention to destroy Czechoslovakia and annex it to Germany. If so, there was nothing for him to do but return to France. Greatly agitated, Mussolini cried that it was all a misunderstanding, and Hitler then, in calmer tones, assured Daladier that he had no wish to annex any Czechs, and only wanted to bring all the Germans into a common national community. Mussolini then pulled a sheet of paper from the outer pocket of his tunic, and said it was a sketch of a compromise proposal. Daladier asked that the text be made available for study, and the conference adjourned for that purpose.

So was borne the "French" version of how the conference began, in which Daladier looms large. It is also to be found in the memoirs of François-Poncet and Stehlin, who, since they were not present, must have relied on what Daladier told them. In view of how things soon turned out, this chest-thumping is more than a little pathetic, and very little of what Daladier says he said appears in Schmidt's notes of the discussion. But if the Frenchman's imagination was working to assuage his conscience, equally the British were straining out of their memories the unseemly moments. The settlement would soon have to be sold to Parliament and the people, and the more reasonable Hitler could be made to appear, the easier that would be.

All things considered, it is likely that Ciano captured the opening scene most accurately in recording that "The Fuehrer . . . speaks calmly, but from time to time he gets excited and then he raises his voice and beats his fist against the palm of his other hand." Daladier's version of what he himself said may have been wishful thinking, but his description of Hitler's opening statements is apparently far more accurate than those of Chamberlain and Wilson. Such is the conclusion compelled by Schmidt's contemporaneous notes, which would not be expected to contain any derogatory comments on Hitler's behavior, and which show quite clearly that Hitler spoke at considerable length, and in words heavy with menace:

The existence of Czechoslovakia in her present form threatened the peace of Europe. . . . Germany could no longer contemplate the distress and misery of the Sudeten German population. Reports of the destruction of property were coming in in increasing numbers. The population was exposed to a barbaric persecution. Since he, the Fuehrer, had last spoken to Mr. Chamberlain, the number of refugees had risen to 240,000 and there seemed to be no end to the flood. . . . This tension made it necessary to settle the problem in a few days as it was no longer possible to wait weeks. At the wish of Mussolini he, the Fuehrer, had declared himself ready to postpone mobilization\* in Germany for 24 hours. Further delay would be a crime. . . . However, in order to ascertain exactly what territory was involved, it could not be left to a commission to decide. It was much rather a plebiscite that was necessary, especially as for 20 years no free election had taken place in Czechoslovakia. He had declared in his speech in the Sportspalast that he would in any case march in on October 1. He had received the answer that this action would have the character of an act of violence. Hence the task arose to absolve this action from such a character. Action must, however, be taken at once. . . . From the military aspect the occupation represented no problem, for the depths on all fronts were comparatively small. With a little good will it must consequently be possible to evacuate the territory in 10 days; indeed, he was convinced, from 6 to 7 days. . . . The conditions governing the transfer could be discussed, but action must soon be taken. . . .

All this amounted to nothing more pacific than an indication that, if the British and French could ensure that the Czechs would evacuate the lands Hitler wanted, there need be no hostilities; the action would thus be "absolved" of violence. The brutal cynicism of such an absolution was lost upon the British if not the French, and, when Mussolini pulled out the draft, this was precisely the solution which was presented. The first clause stipulated that evacuation begin October 1, and the second that "the guarantor Powers, England, France, and Italy, will guarantee to Germany that the evacuation will be completed by 10th October, without any existing installations having been destroyed."

Mussolini's production of the Weizsaecker-Neurath-Goering memorandum, which had been put into Italian since its transmittal to Rome the previous afternoon, caused Herr Schmidt a moment of uneasiness, since he knew no Italian. As it was read, however, the interpreter soon recognized it for what it was, and remembered the French text he had made twenty-four hours earlier well enough to translate the Italian text back into the other languages.

The British and French were, of course, ignorant of the document's provenance, but it is doubtful that they would have reacted differently had they known. As they listened, Chamberlain and Wilson found it a "reasonable restatement of much that had been discussed" previously, and were ready to accept it as a basis for discussion. They were worried that the French might be less receptive, but "to our relief" (as Wilson noted) Daladier "at once said he was prepared to adopt Signor Mussolini's document as a basis for discussion."

Chamberlain then agreed outright to the first clause, specifying October 1 for

\* In fact the German forces were already deployed for war, though no formal mobilization order had been issued. It was the attack itself, as well as open mobilization, which Hitler had agreed to postpone.

commencement of the evacuation, but said that "he wanted to discuss carefully Clause 2." Apparently Chamberlain saw in the provision for a guarantee that the Czechs would complete the evacuation by October 10, without destruction of "existing installations," an opportunity to raise the matter which was most troubling to him: the exclusion of Czechoslovakia from the conference. How, Chamberlain asked, could Britain give such a guarantee when "there had been no opportunity to ascertain how far, if at all, the Czech government were or would be disposed to consent"?

The Prime Minister's *démarche* was not at all to Hitler's liking, and led to the first angry outburst—Wilson described it as a "tirade"—from the Fuehrer. He was not interested in assurances from the Czechs; they were already "carrying out demolition work" in the areas to be ceded. He had been asked to stay his hand; if those who had done the asking were not prepared to take the responsibility for Czechoslovakia's compliance, then perhaps he had best resume his previous methods!

Chamberlain and Daladier both hastened to reassure Hitler that they fully agreed with his demand for an immediate settlement, and the Fuehrer appeared to be measurably "soothed," as Wilson put it. But the problem was not so easily settled. Chamberlain asserted that the word "guarantee" meant a great deal in the English language, and that before he would set his name to such a document "he must know whether he could honor it." He did not insist that a Czech representative participate in the discussions, but reiterated his desire for "the presence of a Prague representative in the next room, in order that assurances could be obtained from him."

Hitler replied that no Czech representative was in fact "available," and that "if the Czech government's consent had first to be sought on every detail, a solution could not be expected before a fortnight had passed." Meanwhile the Czechs busily were destroying bridges and buildings. Under the Duce's proposal, details of the transfer would be handled by an International Commission on which Czechoslovakia would be represented. What he wanted was that the great powers would "throw their authority into the scales and accept the responsibility for correct completion of the transfer."

So the argument swayed back and forth among the four leaders. Mussolini agreed with Hitler that it was "not possible to await a Czech representative" and that "the great Powers must undertake moral guarantees as regards evacuation and prevention of destruction." Daladier at first supported Chamberlain's insistence on the presence of a Czech representative, and then backed water: "If the inclusion of a Prague representative would cause difficulties he was ready to forego this, for it was important that the question should be settled speedily."

Chamberlain did not explicitly withdraw his request for a Czech presence, but turned the discussion to points of detail. As Wilson recorded: "The conclusion was reached that the heads of the four Powers must accept responsibility for deciding—in the circumstances—how the situation should be dealt with." The ritual dance would remain a quadrille.

At the conclusion of this discussion, on Chamberlain's suggestion, the meeting was temporarily adjourned so that the draft produced by Mussolini could be

studied and amendments prepared. The suspension turned into a luncheon recess, and shortly after three o'clock the delegations left the Fuehrerbau, the British and French for their respective hotels, and Mussolini, as honored guest, to Hitler's private dwelling.

## 4

While the principals had been conferring, the others were enduring that most nerve-racking of occupations in critical circumstances: waiting. Some of the British and French, such as Strang and Dunglass, remained in the rooms assigned to the visiting delegations, while others roamed the corridors and anterooms, where Goering, Keitel, and other German bigwigs, the Italian visitors, and black-uniformed SS officers were much in evidence. There was abundant rumor, and desultory gossip; Donat interpreted a conversation between Hitler's personal physician (Dr. Theodor Morell) and his Italian opposite number, in which the former disclosed the Fuehrer's chronic insomnia and dependence on medications, and the latter boasted of the Duce's iron constitution: "*mens sana in corpore sano.*"

When the meeting adjourned, Hitler's appearance strongly suggested that he had not been enjoying himself. The whole idea of a conference at which his was not automatically the last word was alien and irksome to him, and as he left the scene he appeared, to Kirkpatrick, in a very dark mood: "Hitler accompanies Mussolini. I can see him now walking along the gallery on the first floor. He is talking very fast to Mussolini. The Duce's face is impassive, but Hitler's is black as thunder and he is emphasizing his remarks with short, angry movements of his hands."

A French journalist in the crowd gathered outside the Fuehrerbau saw Hitler emerge from the building and "plunge directly into his car." He was followed by Chamberlain and then by Daladier, shambling absent-mindedly toward Mussolini's vehicle: "A black guard pointed out his mistake, and the French Premier, with an imperceptible shrug, moved aside for Mussolini." Lighting a cigarette, Daladier entered his own vehicle, closely followed by Goering, who viewed the little contretemps as a huge joke and was laughing heartily: "The crowd was amused and clapped loudly. No doubt the fact that the marshal and the French Premier were sitting side by side appeared as a good omen."

Hitler and Mussolini lunched together in the former's private apartment on the Prinzregentenstrasse. Ciano, who (as well as Himmler) was of their company, was surprised to find the Fuehrer living in "a modest apartment in a large building full of other residents," but was impressed by the "many very valuable pictures" on the walls. Here Donat took over the interpretation duties, and he has left us a detailed account of the Hitlerian monologue, broken by occasional questions from Mussolini, which accompanied the meal. "In contrast to his serenity that morning," Donat writes, "Hitler now was aroused and full of rage, to which he gave free rein, at Chamberlain." Then, quoting the Fuehrer:

Daladier is a lawyer,\* who understands the particulars and consequences;

\* No lawyer, Daladier had a fine academic background in classics and history.

with him one can negotiate clearly and satisfactorily. But this Chamberlain is like a baggling shop-keeper who wrangles over every village and small detail; he's worse than the Czechs themselves. What has he lost in Bohemia? Nothing at all!

The Fuehrer went on to discuss the Godesberg encounter, where Chamberlain had impressed him as an "insignificant" man whose dearest wish was to go fishing on a weekend: "I know no weekends and I don't fish!" It was high time for England to stop playing the role of "Governess of Europe." Repeating his morning description of himself and the Duce as "revolutionaries," he spoke of a future struggle against England which would give "men in their time of full strength their years at the summit."

Hitler then asked Mussolini whether the Italian royal house was not an obstacle to his objectives, and whether it was true that the royal family remained "pro-English." Mussolini replied that during the Italo-Ethiopian War, Crown Prince Umberto had spoken "wrongly." Thereupon Mussolini had told him that the House of Savoy had survived only thanks to the Duce, and that Fascism was so firmly anchored in Italy that the monarchy must cleave to it through thick and thin. The Crown Prince had then promised to conduct himself loyally.

Mussolini turned the issue back on Hitler, asking about Germany's internal security. Hitler answered that he had the entire working class behind him, and the only opposition came from reactionaries in clerical circles and among the landowning nobility. The Duce shrewdly inquired whether domestic tranquillity might suffer from a pardon for Pastor Niemöller\*; "everywhere one had heard his name, and after so long an imprisonment might not his release be a good thing?" But Hitler was "all iron": "No! The man is too dangerous. . . . He has great freedom in the concentration camp and is well treated, but he won't be let out!" And the Fuehrer called on Himmler to confirm the pastor's good circumstances.

After these edifying interchanges, late in the afternoon Hitler, still irritable and impatient with the whole scene, escorted his guest back to the Fuehrerbau.

## 5

The Fuehrer was not the only one displeased by the course of events. Back in his suite at the Four Seasons, Daladier was calling Hitler's demands "inacceptable" and growling about returning to Paris. Goering, who seemed bound to dance attendance at every possible moment, telephoned to suggest that they lunch together, but Stehlin, still handling the telephone for the French, was instructed to decline: "Tell Goering I must work with my colleagues." Stehlin phrased the refusal as best he could, but Goering's disappointment was manifest, and he held Stehlin on the phone for a bit of psychological warfare: "What did Daladier need to discuss? Had the conference changed things?"

\* The Reverend Martin Niemöller, a submarine commander in the First World War who became a prominent Protestant clergyman in Berlin, and at first supported the Nazis. Disillusioned and opposed to Hitler's efforts to dominate the church, he was arrested in 1937 and was held in "protective custody" in the concentration camps Sachsenhausen and Dachau until freed by Allied troops in 1945.