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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Manitoba as a partial requirement for a Master of Arts Degree in the Department of History

Elizabeth N. Beazley

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ANDRÉ FRANÇOIS-PONCET, AMBASSADOR OF FRANCE, AND FRANCO-ITALIAN RELATIONS, NOVEMBER 1938 - AUGUST 1939

BY

ELIZABETH N. BEAZLEY

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Abstract

This thesis fills a lacuna in interwar diplomatic history by examining Franco-Italian relations in 1938 and 1939 through the eyes of Ambassador André François-Poncet. The ambassador, previously stationed in Berlin, went to Rome with the intention of winning Italy to the side of the west or, at least, of enlisting Mussolini's moderating effect upon Hitler. Through this examination, the formulation of French foreign policy and the imperatives acting upon it become evident. By discarding the time-worn and ambiguous concept of appeasement and substituting for it the idea that conciliation based upon reasonable concessions must be a part of good diplomacy, a fresh view emerges of one aspect of interwar history. The use of newly published volumes of the Documents Diplomatiques Français also contributes to this new view.

The thesis includes two chapters of background material and four chapters on François-Poncet's embassy, using both a narrative and an interpretative methodology.

The study concludes that François-Poncet's insistence upon conciliation had mixed results. While Mussolini's declaration of non-belligerence in September 1939 was a positive consequence, Poncet's policy, undermined by other factors, failed to achieve a Franco-Italian agreement of any kind or to separate Mussolini from Hitler.

This thesis is dedicated to

my husband and my children,

my mother, and the memory of my father,

who never wanted me to be a nurse anyway.

Acknowledgements

A work of this nature is never an entirely individual effort. Many people, either directly or indirectly, have freely given me their support during the two years that it has taken me to complete this project. For continuing and cheerful encouragement and inspiration and ungrudging and excellent help, I am indebted to my adviser, Dr. Robert J. Young, of the University of Winnipeg. He has guided me through the intricacies of French diplomatic history with patience and expertise and has freely shared with me his resources and his knowledge. It is almost irrelevant to add that, without him, there would have been no thesis. Heartfelt thanks are also due to my sister-in-law, Judith Tyson, who processed my thesis so competently during many late nights and patiently tried to explain the mysteries of the word processor to me. For carefully tracing and obtaining various hard-to-get sources for me, I thank the staff of Inter-Library Loans at the University of Winnipeg. My good friend and fellow student, Frances Kozin, not only encouraged me but helped me with the translation of the Italian documents. Last, but not least, I am eternally grateful to my husband, Gary, and my children, Mary, Gordon, and Bruce, for enduring a harried wife and mother and late dinners for so long.

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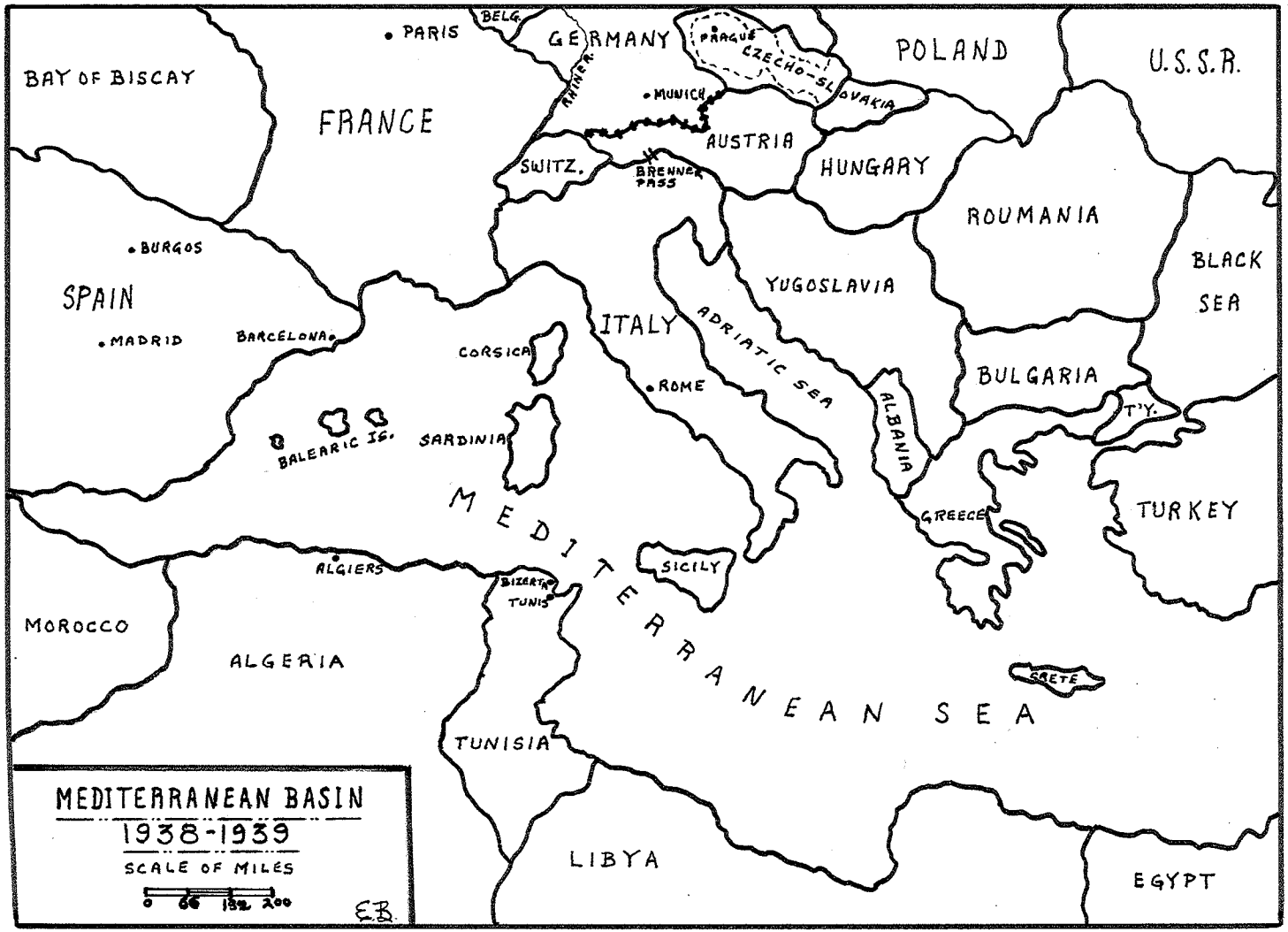
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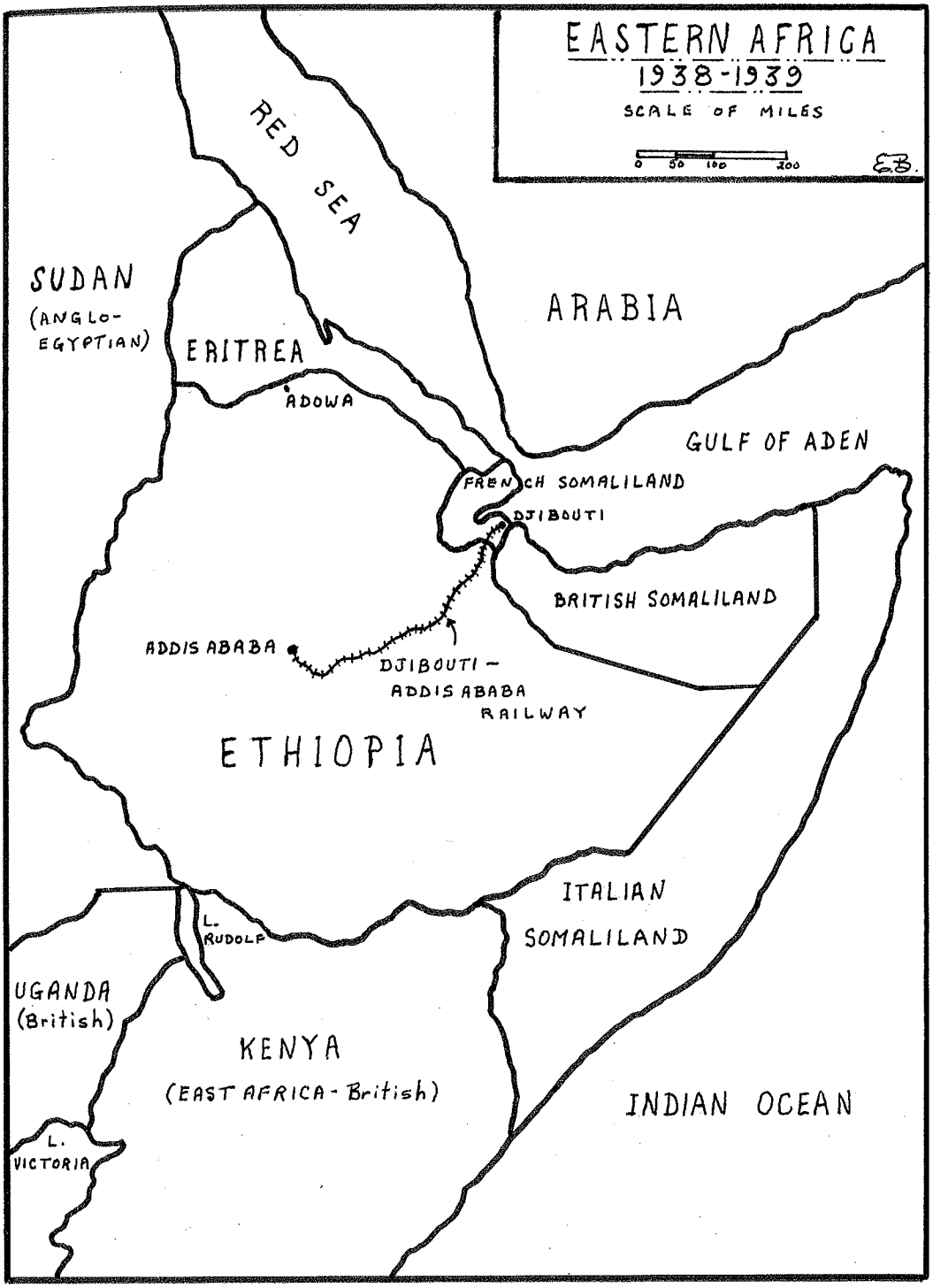
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Introduction

André François-Poncet's arrival in Rome in November 1938, to fill the post of ambassador of France, symbolized the hopes of French leaders for a new and more amiable era in Franco-Italian relations. Since October 1936 and the retirement of the previous ambassador, the post had been left vacant as a French protest to the Italian conquest of Ethiopia and as an indication of France's refusal to recognize the Italian Empire. The appointment of a new ambassador signalled France's decision to recognize the Empire and to normalize diplomatic relations between the two countries.

André François-Poncet served some seven years in Berlin as an ambassador of France, not to mention the many important positions which he filled both before and after his term in the French diplomatic service. Very little, however, has been written specifically about this man who, in the prewar years, was considered to be the dean of French ambassadors. Only one study, a doctoral dissertation by Roselyn Solo,[1] deals expressly with Poncet, and it follows his embassy in Berlin only until 1936 and the Rhineland crisis. Until now, the balance of his diplomatic career, especially his years

in Rome, had to be pieced together from generally cursory references in many secondary studies.

Coincidentally, Franco-Italian relations in 1938 and 1939 constitute another lacuna in Poncet's era of prewar Europe. Numerous studies, of course, have been devoted to the events and processes immediately preceding World War II. Unfortunately Franco-Italian relations generally have been overshadowed by crises such as that of Czechoslovakia and the Munich Conference, or the German seizure of Prague, and by the processes of Anglo-French or Italo-German relations. As yet, no major work on Franco-Italian relations has appeared, and certainly there is nothing which looks at the matter through the eyes of François-Poncet. Moreover, most works which do deal with the period in question treat the subject briefly. Nor do these relations occupy a particularly prominent position in studies of French or Italian foreign policy. But Franco-Italian relations deserve more attention from historians, for, had their course been different, the Rome-Berlin Axis might have been weakened enough to force Hitler to adopt a more conciliatory route.

This study, then, will attempt to fill these substantial lacunae in diplomatic history by viewing Franco-Italian relations from the vantage point of André

François-Poncet's embassy in Rome. Although the Italian prospect will not be ignored, the discussion will focus predominantly on the French view. Poncet's diplomatic reports and opinions and the effects that these had, or did not have, upon those to whom they were addressed should illustrate: the formulation of French foreign policy, especially toward Italy; the influence upon that policy of the French foreign ministry and the French cabinet; and the state of communications between the ministry and the French embassy in Rome. Finally, the diverse factors of military and strategical planning, of economic and cultural influences, and of psychological and emotional attitudes, which may have swayed decision-making, will be examined.

* * *

As with the majority of diplomatic studies of the thirties, the question necessarily arises regarding André François-Poncet's stance. Historians frequently have placed the political leaders and others of the prewar era into either of two camps--appeaser or non-appeaser. In many cases, of course, there seems to be little disagreement about where the more influential men belonged; Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister, for instance, is generally placed in the appeaser category. Other, perhaps less eminent,

figures have generated a certain amount of controversy. André François-Poncet falls into this group. Two eminent historians have placed him in the appeasement camp. Franklin Ford states that "nothing about Nazism so repelled him as to inhibit his efforts to arrange an understanding between the French government and French industry, on the one hand, and Hitler's Reich, on the other."[2] Anthony Adamthwaite claims that Poncet was a leading advocate of Franco-German rapprochement and that he played a more decisive role in the French decision to abandon Czechoslovakia than he cared to admit in his memoirs.[3] Two factors militate against taking these opinions at full face value. One factor pertains to the sources that each historian used. Ford relied mainly upon German, British and American published documents while Adamthwaite depended chiefly upon British documents. The other factor concerns the tendency of Ford and Adamthwaite to put rather more emphasis upon those of Poncet's actions which leaned toward appeasement than upon those which did not. There is no doubt that Poncet favoured a Franco-German agreement of some kind; he admitted as much after the war.[4] As he declared at the same time, however, he also continually warned his government about the growing German menace.[5] Against Ford and Adamthwaite may be set Maurice Vaïsse

and John C. Cairns. Vaïsse uses Poncet as an outstanding example of firmness toward Germany,[6] while Cairns claims that Volume I of the Documents Diplomatiques Français (Second Series, 1936-1939) demonstrates clearly that Poncet was not an appeaser.[7] This is the crux of the issue. Ford and Adamthwaite relied upon the opinions of Poncet's colleagues, particularly those of Nevile Henderson, the British ambassador in Berlin and a fairly well known advocate of appeasement. Cairns and Vaïsse, however, have analyzed Poncet's own thoughts through the use of French documents.

The controversy over François-Poncet's position, whether he was an appeaser or not, raises a problem in semantics. What, precisely, is appeasement? Unfortunately, definitions vary with the attitudes of historians and the situations with which they are dealing. In the diplomatic sense, the Random House Dictionary* defines the verb "to appease" in two ways, first, "to bring to a state of peace, quiet, ease, or contentment; pacify; soothe," and second as "to yield or concede to the belligerent demands of (a nation, group, person, etc.) in a conciliatory effort, sometimes at the

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*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language (New York: Random House, 1966, 1967).

expense of justice or other principles." The difference in these two definitions, and the spectrum of meanings that lies between them, best illustrates what the historian faces when trying to judge the component of appeasement in a given situation or character in prewar history. The first definition must be complimentary: to create peace is honourable and acceptable. The second definition, however, carries with it a pejorative connotation, contains a moral context, and brings to mind the phrase, "peace at any price," or even the overworked cliché, "the end justifies the means."

Historians vary in their choice of definitions of appeasement and the way in which they apply them. In The Appeasers, Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott employ the second dictionary meaning. To them, English appeasers were pro-German and willing to make the most extravagant concessions to Hitler in order to avoid war.[8] Their study overemphasizes the division between appeasers and non-appeasers or resisters and makes a moral judgement. Appeasers in the thirties were "bad guys"; and resisters were "good guys": those belonging to neither extreme group were few and far between.

Other historians are less polemical than Gilbert and Gott in their definitions and assessments of appeasement. According to Keith Eubank in Munich,

Neville Chamberlain's appeasement was "the study and peaceful solution of problems that could cause war. By removing these causes, [the British prime minister] hoped to avoid the war."[9] Arthur H. Furnia, in The Diplomacy of Appeasement, describes Chamberlain's policy in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Eubank's definition.[10] In The End of Glory, Laurence D. Lafore indicates succinctly the creed of the more extreme British appeasers: "[i]f you can't beat them, join them."[11] Christopher Thorne, in The Approach of War, 1938-1939, writes that English appeasement was a mixture of the abhorrence of another war combined with an ideal of justice for those wronged by the Treaty of Versailles; to appease was "to settle just grievances, not to cringe and betray."[12] A more inclusive meaning of appeasement is offered by William R. Rock in Appeasement on Trial. To him, it signifies:

> . . . the reduction of international tension in Europe and the world by the methodical removal of the principal causes of friction among nations. More specifically, [appeasement] meant the promotion of conciliation through the redress of legitimate grievances of the defeated powers of the World War. Exactly how all this should be done, however, and in what circumstances, was always open to debate . . . 13

Although these definitions are not entirely dissimilar, their common denominator is their concern

with British appeasement. What has been written about French appeasement? One of the most eminent students of French foreign policy in the 1930s, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, has little to say about appeasement and certainly does not define it. Nevertheless, the title of his volume, La Décadence,[14] may be taken as an indication of what he thinks of the route that French policy-makers followed. Anthony P. Adamthwaite, the author of several pieces on French policy, also fails to define appeasement. What he does say, though, is that, while weakness certainly played a part, two other factors also affected French attitudes.[15] First, the roots of French appeasement lay in the 1920s, and the immediate prewar version was the consequence of an extended process, rather than the sudden response it is often declared to have been. Second, French appeasement contained a component of idealism: if European nations were willing to make sacrifices, the final result must be a European peace.

Recently, a new volume of articles devoted to appeasement has appeared under the editorship of Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Lothar Kettenacker.[16] Essentially it offers a new and refreshing view of appeasement. In the introduction, Mommsen defines appeasement as "a policy that would avert a major

conflict with the fascist powers."[17] Mommsen, however, strongly emphasizes that it is not enough to look only at the policy itself; one must also take into consideration the many factors, economic and social, domestic and international, that dictated the adoption of a policy of appeasement.[18] Moreover, he warns the reader to beware of the over-use of hindsight; one must view the situation in the 1930s as it was perceived by contemporary leaders, not as it can be seen now with the aid of newly available sources. Thus, Bernd-Jürgen Wendt can write that appeasement "should be released from a purely political application and be restored to its full significance of settling political, economic and financial conflicts at the international negotiating table."[19] In addition, Denis Mack Smith declares most reasonably that "[a] wise foreign policy has to contain some element of appeasement, because diplomacy is the art of composing differences short of war and cannot operate without a readiness to make concessions."[20]

Now it is tempting to choose Mack Smith's view of appeasement as a framework with which to examine Franco-Italian relations in 1938 and 1939 and André François-Poncet's part in them. However, despite the really fine efforts of the Mommsen-Kettenacker volume to remove the pejorative and polemical connotations from

appeasement, there are several other factors that preclude its use as a model. For one thing, of course, the definitions of appeasement vary too much. As Rock notes, "[a]ppeasement took on divergent meanings in response to specific events in Europe . . . "[21] and the same variations have occurred with historians writing about these events. Then, too freqently, writers, such as Gilbert and Gott, have tried to force a moral judgement upon those who were commonly termed appeasers. Another point concerns these appeasers themselves. Chamberlain is often referred to as the epitome of appeasers. What about those whose ideas lay less clearly with appeasement but, at the same time, cannot be placed in the resistance camp? Moreover, some appeasers were dedicated admirers of Fascist ideology, while others certainly were not. In other words, the appeasers of the thirties perceived their policy individually, not as a homogeneous entity. A common feature of the idea of appeasement is its application to British policy. Can French foreign policy be viewed in the same light as that of Great Britain? Was French appeasement a primary phenomenon, in that France followed her own policy of appeasement, or was it a secondary phenomenon, in that she only followed the British lead, as some French writers believe?[22] Finally,

is it ridiculous to talk about the appeasement--resistance dichotomy as if either France or Britain really had much of a choice in policies?

This thesis, then, will do as Robert J. Young, in In Command of France, has done and declare appeasement to be "an over-used hat-rack of a word."[23] In the interests of supplying a unifying concept around which to structure the points of this paper, though, the term conciliation will be used. The Random House Dictionary defines the verb "to conciliate" as "to overcome the distrust or hostility of; placate; win over; to make compatible; reconcile." Although certainly not far removed from appeasement in the general sense of its meaning, conciliation carries with it none of the moral or pejorative connotations of the former word. As René Massigli, an anti-munichois, declares in his memoir of his embassy in Turkey, Munich has prejudiced the term appeasement. He reminds us, as Mack Smith has done, that:

> une intelligente volonté de conciliation ne doit jamais être absente d'une action diplomatique à la poursuite de résultats durable . . . . Mais volonté de conciliation et apaisement ne signifient pas conciliation et apaisement à tout prix. 24

By rejecting the potentially deceptive notion of appeasement, then, this study will attempt a new approach to one of the issues of the thirties. Franco-

Italian relations in 1938 and 1939 and the role of André François-Poncet in the Rome embassy will be judged upon the assumption that successful diplomacy must include, not only conciliation, but even reasonable concessions. To obviate any problems with the term "reasonable concessions," this study will view them as points that may be ceded by one country to another without, however, alienating the integral rights of either the conceding country or those of a third power.

* * *

Besides a fresh approach, this study can claim other aspects of newness with regard to its subject, André François-Poncet. As mentioned earlier, the career of the ambassador has not been a popular topic for scholarship, particularly that part of it which concerns the first ten months of his embassy in Rome. The remaining months of François-Poncet's tenure in Italy, which terminated in June 1940, must be left for future study when, hopefully, more primary documentation will be available. Moreover, since the publication of the works by Adamthwaite, Ford, and Cairns, which have touched upon certain aspects of Poncet's career, a fair amount of new material has appeared. First and foremost, of course, are the most recent volumes of the Documents Diplomatiques Français.[25] Since Adamthwaite's

France and the Coming of the Second World War 1936-1939 was published in 1977, five new volumes, extending to 24 June 1939 and containing some 2,300 documents (including over 200 written by Poncet), have appeared. Other new primary sources include some unpublished British Public Record Office material[26] and memoirs by Léon Noel, Jean Daridan, and Armand Bérard who served under Poncet in Rome.[27] As well, a veritable host of new secondary studies are now available. There are four recent colloquia collections (one of which was unpublished at the time of writing), which contain many relevant articles.[28] Furthermore, Roselyn Solo's dissertation of 1978 is essential for Poncet's embassy in Berlin.[29] Then there is Denis Mack Smith's new biography of Mussolini and George Soutou's article on René Massigli, a political director of the French foreign ministry.[30] Recent investigations of French foreign policy and allied matters comprise works by François Bédarida, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, Robert J. Young, and Elisabeth du Réau.[31] As well, the Mommsen and Kettenacker volume contains several good articles besides the one by Maurice Vaïsse.[32] Lastly, Italy has been treated by MacGregor Knox, Pierre Milza, and Paul Stafford.[33] In sum, all this new material should allow a fresh interpretation, not only of Franco-Italian relations in

1938 and 1939, but more particularly, of André François-Poncet's conduct of affairs as the French ambassador in Rome.

Chapter I

François-Poncet, French Policy, and the German Problem

In the person of André François-Poncet, France's tradition of intellectual excellence in her diplomats was well represented. Witty, exquisitely mannered, aristocratic in bearing, he seldom failed to impress those with whom he came into contact. Under his direction, the French embassy in Berlin became, not only the hub of diplomatic society in that city, but, more importantly, a centre for the collection and analysis of information on every aspect of the Third Reich. About him, the German marshal, Hermann Goering commented, "La France a des diplomates: l'Allemagne n'en a pas!"[1]

The son of a magistrate, Poncet was born in Provins in 1887. Very early he showed signs of his great intelligence: by four years of age he could read, and he graduated from his lycée at fourteen (the usual age was sixteen).[2] From there he went to Germany for six months where he lived with a German family and attended a gymnasium. He then returned to France to study at the Collège Stanislaus and l'Ecole Normale Supérieure (along with Léon Blum and Yvon Delbos), from which he graduated with an Agrégé d'Allemand. When he was twenty-four years old he attained a professorship at

the Lycée de Montpellier and soon after was appointed lecturer at l'Ecole Polytechnique. When World War One broke out, Poncet served as a lieutenant of infantry and received the Croix de guerre at the front. Later in the war, he entered the intelligence service, an experience which provided him with excellent training for his future career in the diplomatic corps.

After the war Poncet left academics for the world of economics and politics. In 1922, he was one of the delegates to the Genoa Conference where he headed the French information service. At this time, too, he began his association with the Comité des Forges, the steel trust representing the interests of heavy industry, partly through his marriage to Jacqueline Dellais whose family was involved in the steel industry. He also began his friendship with Robert Pinot, the secretary general of the Comité des Forges, and became an articulate defender of industrial management. These associations earned him the lasting sobriquet of "Homme de Forge." Conversely, his sharp retort, one day, to François de Wendel, the president of the Comité des Forges, apparently caused some rightists to refer to Poncet as "un homme de gauche masqué." In 1924, he entered politics as the Alliance Démocratique deputy from the VIIe arrondissement of Paris. By 1929, he was

Under-Secretary of State of Fine Arts and Public Education, a position which was followed by that of Under-Secretary of State under André Tardieu. It was his knowledge of economics and, presumably, his expertise in German which won him, in 1931, the appointment of ambassador of France in Berlin at a time when French leaders were striving to establish economic co-operation between France and Germany.

One facet of Poncet's character has already been established: his great intelligence. He also seems to have been a diplomat par excellence; Martha Dodd, the daughter of the American ambassador in Berlin, recalls that he was:

> head and shoulders above anyone else in the diplomatic corps. He used language to conceal rather than reveal meaning. It was an intellectual exercise to speak fifteen minutes with Poncet--so strenuous, vivid, and fascinating, that most people would leave him exhausted and defeated. He remained calm and serene, quietly twisting and caressing his mustaches and adjusting his monocle . . . [3]

A contemporary in Berlin described him as elegant but cold although he was very affectionate toward his sons.[4] Both fellow workers and contemporaries seemed to like him despite his reputation as a severe taskmaster. Jérôme Carcopino of the French school in Rome states that he was "le plus bienveilant des archicubes"; and while he was interned during the war with Poncet, Albert

Lebrun found him good-humoured and optimistic.[5] General Paul Stehlin, the air attaché in Berlin, soon became very fond of Poncet who was "si grand par l'espirit et aussi par le coeur"; but Stehlin also admitted that Poncet "was hard on us. He demanded more than we could give. In the manner of those of a very superior intellect, he could be cruel."[6] While Poncet expected excellence from others in their work, he was no less hard on himself. His dispatches from Berlin alone (1931-1938) constituted forty volumes.[7]

Poncet's wife, Jacqueline Dellais, seems to have been greatly admired by all who knew her. Not only was she beautiful and a perfect hostess, she was modest, amiable, clever and gracious, and her charity and goodness were "almost legendary"--the perfect wife for an ambassador.[8] She was also religious, an interest her husband apparently did not share although he seemed pleased enough when the Pope blessed two of his children after they had received their first communion.[9]

François-Poncet was a prolific writer and journalist. His dissertation, "Etudes sur les affinités électives de Goethe," was soon followed by Ce que pense la jeunesse allemande (1913), a study based upon a survey of German students and intellectuals. His association with Robert Pinot and industrial interests

produced La France et les huit heures (with Emile Mireaux, 1922) and La Vie et l'oeuvre de Robert Pinot (1927) which outlines the classically liberal social and economic views of both Pinot and Poncet.[10] In 1922, with two friends, he began publishing the Bulletin Quotidien, a periodical geared to industrial management.

Besides the vast amount of diplomatic correspondence, "une suite de véritables chefs-d'oeuvre,"[11] from both Rome and Berlin, Poncet later wrote memoirs of his embassies.[12] While well written and useful, the historian, of course, could wish that they were more detailed. His memoirs of Berlin, for instance, omit several events, such as those in 1938 prior to Munich; but whether or not this was done to conceal his part in these events is difficult to ascertain. Although one historian describes the memoirs as a "lucid and restrained analysis of the dangers . . . symbolized by the Nazi movement,"[13] this description actually better fits his diplomatic correspondence.

Following the war, Poncet wrote articles for several periodicals. The short pieces that he wrote for Le Figaro have been published in a volume, Au fil des jours, propos d'un libéral 1942-1962.[14] It contains two descriptions of the classical liberal which would seem

to be what Poncet considered himself. Historia, from time to time, carried Poncet's reminiscences of various political events and personalities, for example, the one entitled "Hitler et Mussolini."[15] One of his most interesting books is Carnets d'un captif,[16] a day-by-day account of his internment by the Nazis during World War Two. What is most interesting in this book, however, are his critical analyses of such writers as Shakespeare, Balzac, and Dostoievsky, a range which reflects his great intellectual versatility.

This short resumé of the life and character of André François-Poncet shows him to be a man of superior intelligence and varied accomplishments. As well, he was a hard taskmaster, although, by the very volume of his diplomatic correspondence, he was as hard on himself as on his co-workers. Certainly he was a perfectionist, if he was not actually imbued with some traits of the obsessive-compulsive personality. These characteristics, his experiences during the Great War and in the world of industry and business, and his knowledge of German culture and language, would be invaluable to him when he entered the diplomatic service. The fact that he did not have the diplomat's customary training[17] does not seem to have deterred him. Nothing seems to indicate that he was not a good

ambassador of France in Berlin; on the contrary, the years that Poncet spent there would have taxed the most experienced diplomat. Poncet's embassy in Berlin is not, of course, the subject of this study, but a brief review of French foreign policy in the inter-war years and some thoughts on Poncet's experience in the Czeckoslovakian crisis will provide a setting for the discussion of his subsequent embassy in Rome.

* * *

For France, the defeat of Germany in World War One was a hollow victory. Although the Italians were fond of complaining about their vittoria mutilata, it was the French who actually had more cause for complaint and who recognized the menace of a German hegemony in Europe. The failure of Great Britain and the United States to ratify Clemenceau's hard-won Guaranty Pacts, added to the demographic disaster, forced French statesmen to look elsewhere for security against an expected resurgence of German power. Therefore, French foreign policy in the interwar years was based upon two concepts: the search for security through a system of alliances and the maintenance of the European status quo by a strict adherence to the clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. Neither concept was fully realized by the foreign policy makers. By the last years of peace,

France's alliance system lay in ruins, and Hitler had successfully upset the continental status quo. By 1939, only the long sought after alliance with Great Britain had been finally realized.

Throughout the interwar years, successive French governments clung to these two concepts, a situation that ensured much stability in governmental attitudes toward foreign policy. While the goal, French security, remained the same, the means of its attainment varied with the political orientation of the government in power. Thus, in the 1920s, two approaches were apparent. Poincaré's decision to occupy the Ruhr Valley in 1923 exemplified the rigid enforcement of the Treaty of Versailles that centre-right governments employed, while Briand's enthusiasm for the Locarno Pacts, as a replacement for the Guaranty Pacts, demonstrated the willingness to conciliate Germany that characterized centre-left foreign policy in this era.

Fear of a revanchist Germany dictated two other commonly held premises. Confronted with their postwar weakness, French leaders viewed the League of Nations as a sort of world-wide policing instrument, but a concurrent lack of faith in the efficacy of the League turned them back to the traditional alliance system. In 1920, France signed with Belgium a military agreement

directed against possible German aggression in the west. Agreements with the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Roumania and Yugoslavia) and Poland replaced the pre-World War I agreement with Russia, France's traditional ally in Eastern Europe, served as a cordon sanitaire against Russian Bolshevism, and created a check on Austrian ambition and Hungarian revisionism. The ally, however, that France particularly desired was Great Britain, so anti-Russian feeling in Britain also played a role in the rejection of the Soviet Union. Because successive French governments wooed Britain so assiduously, British influence upon the formulation of French foreign policy was frequently exercised either directly or indirectly. Indeed, in the 1930s especially, French leaders often used this influence, or perceived influence, as a subterfuge for French inaction. Conversely, the British depended upon the French, though in a less apparent manner; as Arnold Wolfers notes, France was Britain's "guardian on the Rhine."[18]

France's return to her traditional alliance system was both a positive and negative move. The long sought after alliance with Britain could bring France several advantages: British sea power to protect Mediterranean interests, a bulwark in the English

Channel, English air power. Strategically, Britain, as a close neighbour, was well placed geographically to assist France. The eastern allies were another case. On the one hand, of course, should France find herself in trouble, she could expect some help from the east. On the other hand, however, if one or more of the eastern allies should experience an aggressive attack from a third power, France was now expected to go to its assistance. If the aggressor should be Germany, then France would have to attack in the west, at least, and perhaps even defend the frontiers of the eastern ally. (This situation presupposed a friendly Italy. A hostile Italy, of course, would have meant three frontiers to defend, a factor that would seem to dictate a Franco-Italian détente.) Here, then, was the inherent weakness in French foreign policy, for France was not militarily prepared to defend her eastern allies. It was, perhaps a gamble that French leaders were prepared to take in the hope that the occasion, which would turn the eastern allies into liabilities, would not arise.

By the early 1930s, the descent to la décadence in French foreign policy had begun in earnest. In 1932, France's network of security remained relatively untouched. By 1933, however, faced with the Nazi victory in Germany, French policy makers became

increasingly unnerved, and "with increasing loss of clarity in political reasoning, French governments permitted the undermining of a system for the sake of which France had obstinately blocked any reasonable treaty revision in favor of a democratic Germany."[19] The last proponent of the traditional alliance system was Louis Barthou who, until his tragic death in 1934, struggled to put new life into this system. He was succeeded by Pierre Laval whose foreign policy, in the last analysis, must be deemed a failure.[20] He accomplished nothing in the way of reducing the German menace to France or in improving Anglo-French relations, and his Italian policy soon lay in ruins beside the dying League of Nations. Laval's foreign ministry marked, for the French right, a period of transformation from its traditionally strong stand against Germany to a position of conciliation. From this situation would evolve, in the late 1930s, the policy of appeasement, the idea that making concessions to the eastern neighbour would prevent war or, at least, would defer it until France had mustered her resources. Conversely, the French left began to stiffen its opposition to the dictators although this did not deter Léon Blum, when he came to power with the Front Populaire in 1936, from endeavouring to ameliorate relations with Germany. This

hope, however, never came to fruition, mainly because it was inconsistent with his other foreign policy objectives, the enforcement of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War and the strengthening of French alliances in Eastern Europe, both of which failed as well. Blum's attempt to marry idealism with realism and necessity made his foreign policy "inherently dualistic, perhaps even contradictory and painfully naive."[21]

Relations with Great Britain fluctuated in the earlier 1930s. France's turn back to the Soviet Union with the Franco-Soviet Pact of May 1935 annoyed English leaders just as the Ango-German Naval Treaty soon distressed the French; and the Ethiopian crisis created another point of contention. Nevertheless, France could not remain at odds with her perceived best ally for too long, and, by 1936, the year which brought both the Rhineland and Spanish crises, Anglo-French relations were once more fairly harmonious. Although Britain appeared to dictate what action France took in these two crises, the latter had her own good reasons for allowing British interference in her foreign policy. The opinion of the French General Staff that France could not confront Hitler alone, formed the basis of French inaction in the Rhineland crisis.[22] However, France's suggestion to England that she would indeed act, if

British assurances were not forthcoming, resulted in a British pledge to support France.[23] So although Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland spelled a defeat for French foreign policy, particularly with regard to the value of France's eastern allies, the Third Republic now had, not only an ally, but also a scapegoat who would be useful in the near future to conceal weaknesses in French policy. Only a few months later, Blum agreed with British leaders that non-intervention was the best policy for France in the Spanish crisis, although this decision was also dictated by important strategical considerations in the Mediterranean and the vehement opposition of the French right to sending aid to the Spanish Republicans.

The two Chautemps governments (June 1937 to January 1938 and January to March 1938) that followed Blum's defeat showed little initiative in foreign policy and gradually succumbed to the British lead. In March 1938, two days after the resignation of the second Chautemps government, Hitler marched into Austria and accomplished the Anschluss without protest from Britain whose lead France quickly followed, for Austria was not worth the risk of pitting herself alone against Germany. What the Anschluss did for France, however, was to turn her in a new direction. Foreign affairs now eclipsed

domestic affairs, and the German threat took precedence over Spain. The orientation of foreign policy shifted decidedly to the right and to the appeasement of Germany and Italy. The Anschluss also proved to be the death blow of the Front Populaire; the prerequisite of the new direction in foreign policy was a Union Nationale "which had nothing to do with the Popular Front, being concerned only with foreign policy."[24]

On 10 April 1938, Edouard Daladier formed a new Radical-Socialist government. In 1961, looking back over the years, Daladier claimed that, "[j]'aurais voulu un ministère allant de Léon Blum à Paul Reynaud, mais le parti socialiste avait cru préferable de me refuser sa participation."[25] The result was a government of moderates and Radicals who had not been particularly comfortable with the Front Populaire and now, freed of the socialist influence, moved back to the right. The cabinet included Georges Mandel and Paul Reynaud, both members of the moderate right, who would later show themselves more anti-munichois than their fellow adherents. There was, as well, a small inner circle of ministers who would form the crux of the government: Daladier, Camille Chautemps, Georges Bonnet, Albert Sarraut, Paul Marchandeau, and Reynaud. All were Radicals except Reynaud. The new government received

unanimous support in the Senate, outstanding acceptance in the Chamber (576 votes to 5), and the power to rule temporarily by decree (574 votes to 8).[26] Writing after the event, Daladier said the overwhelming confidence in the government was due to a great concern with the generally desperate state of affairs and, possibly, to a desire to ensure ministerial stability.[27]

What sort of man was Edouard Daladier? His photographs show a sad-faced, apparently uncertain, man, a man burdened by the cares and responsibilities of his position. Although physiognomy, perhaps, is not the best way to judge character, descriptions by both contemporaries and historians seem to bear out what his appearance suggests. Of humble origins, Daladier began his career as an academic. In the course of his studies, he spent a year in Italy where he studied nineteenth-century history and became adept enough in Italian to please Mussolini at Munich.[28] In the First World War, he attained the rank of infantry captain and received the War Cross and the Legion of Honour, while his courage earned him mention in three dispatches. Moreover, he never forgot the horrors of war that he had experienced. Following the war, he became a professor of history at the lycée Condorcet in Paris, and entered politics in 1919 as a Radical deputy for Vaucluse. In

the same year he married Madeleine Laffront, "an admirable woman, an uncompromising and passionate democrat" who was "both his conscience and his character."[29] Unfortunately she died in the early 1930s and, presumably her influence lost, Daladier began a gradual evolution toward the right. Although basically honest, methodical and analytical, contemporaries and historians alike agree that Daladier was irresolute and weak, "un velleitaire obligé de jouer le rôle de l'homme résolu,"[30] able to change his mind with the prevailing wind, "a chameleon politician."[31] Georges Bonnet, Daladier's foreign minister, would have agreed with this description; to him, the premier was "cet homme hésitant et influençable," but he had "l'apparence de la force."[32]

What can be said in Daladier's favour is that he seems to have realized his own weaknesses as well as those of France, and the problems that he faced as leader of the new government[33] would have disconcerted better men. While affairs on the international scene were precarious enough, French domestic affairs were indeed in disarray and had been so for some years. Financial matters had preoccupied French leaders at least since the onset of the Depression, which had come to France a few years later than to other western

nations and whose effects were felt most strongly in the Third Republic in the mid 1930s. Efforts to buttress the feeble economy had resulted in two devaluations of the franc (in September 1936, when France left the gold standard, and in June 1937) and would result in another in May 1938. The state of French industry both reflected and contributed to the financial plight. While the physical damage done to industry in the north of France during World War I had been mended fairly rapidly, other factors caused a twenty-four per cent drop in industrial production between 1929 and 1938.[34] For one thing, industrial organization was relatively primitive; small proprietors still controlled most enterprises. Moreover, many industries were technologically backward, and the protectionism, practised to support industry, hindered economic recovery. To bring the situation full circle, French industry was heavily dependent upon imported raw materials such as rubber and coal, a deficiency which put an even larger burden on the weakened franc and circumscribed government expenditure.

France's financial and industrial dilemmas only exacerbated social problems. French workers had enjoyed few of the benefits that their fellow Europeans had attained over the years, and it was this problem

that Léon Blum had tried to address with his social reform programme in 1936. But some of his reforms had unfortunate results for economic recovery. For instance, the forty-hour week, and the consequent loss of man-hours, redounded negatively upon industrial production. Although Blum's reforms alleviated some of the worst short-comings of the labour scene, the personal income tax, begun in 1920, continued to weigh most heavily upon those who could least afford to pay--the average French worker. Moreover, the cost of social reform had to compete with the cost of rearmament (which was also begun in 1936), and, unfortunately for social peace, rearmament won out, although it was also hindered by the problems in industry alluded to earlier. Financial, economic, and social problems, which both aggravated, and were aggravated by, the Depression, in turn created ideological and class strife. Confrontations between left and right became common and perhaps reached a peak in 1936 over Blum's reforms and the Spanish Civil War. Certainly Blum's decision to adhere to non-intervention in the war was at least partially conditioned by the fear of a similar conflict in his own country. In sum, ideological divisions severely strained French national unity.

At the base of France's problems was the

political stagnancy that had reigned for some years. Despite the many changes of government in the 1930s, the men forming the different cabinets changed little (although there were a few new faces in Blum's government), except, perhaps, in the portfolios they carried. While this situation evoked a fair amount of stability in governmental views, it produced a governing elite which had gradually become too rigid to respond effectively and rapidly enough to social, economic, and financial imperatives. Edouard Dalaier, then, when he came to power, had not only to deal with many problems, but he was also hindered in doing so by the stagnancy with which the French political system was fraught. He had, therefore, very little room to manoeuver in the selection of his cabinet and of his policies.[35]

Daladier's lack of alternatives seems to have dictated his choice of Georges Bonnet as foreign minister. Later, Daladier would claim that he took into account Bonnet's experience at the Stresa Conference and his Washington connections. In reality, however, Joseph Paul-Boncour was the premier's first choice, and the story of how Daladier decided against Paul-Boncour after hearing of his determination to defend Czechoslovakia has been told often enough.[36] Sir Eric Phipps, the English ambassador in Paris, liked to credit himself

with having influenced Daladier to reject Paul-Boncour.[37] His story may contain some truth, but it is certain that other factors weighed heavily upon Daladier, too. According to Bonnet, he fully expected the appointment of Paul-Boncour and was surprised when the choice fell upon him, a choice evidently approved by Reynaud but opposed by Mandel.[38] Daladier chose Bonnet, indeed, partly as a counterweight for Mandel.[39] General Maurice Gamelin, Chief of the General Staff, did not like Bonnet at the Quai d'Orsay either: "Bonnet était de coeur . . . avec Laval."[40]

Whether or not Bonnet resembled Laval, he seems to have been almost universally distrusted if not actually disliked. The son of a judge, he received his higher education at the Ecole libre des sciences politiques. In 1911, he married Odette Pelletan whose family had political influence; and Mme. Bonnet had great ambitions for her husband.[41] Following active service in World War One, Bonnet entered politics as a Radical where his specialty was finance, and he served as Minister of Finance in 1933. His expected opposition to Front Populaire financial policy made Blum send him off to Washington as ambassador, but soon he was back in Paris as finance minister under Chautemps.[42] In January 1938, the premiership eluded him due to lack of support

from the left and even from his own colleagues, but a few days later, Chautemps appointed him minister of state. In March, Blum considered sending him to Rome as ambassador, but the government fell before arrangements could be made. Long before Bonnet became foreign minister under Daladier, there were abundant signs that Bonnet's policies were not acceptable to the left. There seems to be a consensus on certain points of Bonnet's character: he was intelligent and hard-working, but he was also ambitious and untrustworthy, indeed, even devious. Although the British had not wanted Paul-Boncour, neither were they always entranced with Bonnet. Oliver Harvey, secretary to Lord Halifax, contends that he was "a public danger to his own country and to ours."[43] His own countrymen found him shifty; nevertheless, he had his supporters, too.[44]

On foreign policy, Daladier and Bonnet differed as to degree. Daladier's choice of Bonnet as foreign minister certainly seemed to indicate the direction in which the premier meant to go as far as Czechoslovakia was concerned. Some sort of agreement with Germany was necessary to preserve the peace, but Daladier does not seem to have been ready to accept "peace at any price" as Bonnet was. Daladier was inclined at least to make a show of standing by France's

allies; conversely, he fully appreciated the military weakness of France and the impossibility of risking war with Germany without British support. Bonnet, however, had apparently completely lost faith in his country's capabilities. Soon after his appointment to the Quai d'Orsay, he told Pierre Lazareff of Paris-Soir that:

> Daladier a l'apparence de la force. Il excellera à donner au pays . . . l'impression que la France elle-même est forte. Pour moi, ce que je redoute le plus, car nous sommes faibles, c'est que si ce pays peut être trompé, Hitler, lui ne le sera pas. 45

In the same conversation Bonnet clearly intimated the line that he intended to follow in foreign policy:

> Ne faisons pas d'héroïsme, nous n'en sommes pas capable. . . . Les Anglais ne nous suivront pas. . . . En tant que Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, je suis résolu d'aller jusqu'au bout de mon rôle, qui est celui de trouver une solution avant que le Ministre de la Guerre soit obligé d'en prendre une. La France ne peut plus se permettre une soigneé comme celle de 1914. 46

In his first few weeks in office, Bonnet implied that France would stand by her treaty with Czechoslovakia. But in one of his books he states that, when Hitler accomplished the Anschluss, "la Tchécoslovaquie était virtuellement perdue."[47] Obviously, whatever he might have stated publicly, in private Bonnet had already forsaken the eastern ally. Soon it was evident that Daladier and Bonnet were not always in agreement although Daladier tended to tolerate

Bonnet, perhaps for the sake of avoiding a ministerial crisis such as occurred during the Munich emergency. By September, the two men sometimes argued openly at cabinet meetings.[48] At times, Bonnet actually intrigued behind Daladier's back as on 27 September 1938 when he offered Hitler a new and better deal which considerably weakened Daladier's stand at Munich.[49]

Generally speaking, the picture of French foreign policy in 1938 is one of weakness, of action only in response to the lead of the dictators, although from time to time the French showed sparks of initiative. Yet, it is not completely correct to say that French policy was dictated in London. However much Daladier and Bonnet might have sought the backing of Britain, their perceptions of French weakness, both domestic and external, and the limitation of action delineated by these realities,[50] circumscribed their choice of policy a great deal. Indeed, it must be said that in Britain, Daladier and Bonnet could find a convenient alibi for not doing what they had finally agreed they could not do.

* * *

As vital and central as the Munich crisis is to any discussion of French foreign policy in the 1930s, this paper will not deal with it in any detail. Many

able historians and contemporary writers have offered their opinions about it, and presumably controversy and discussion will continue in the future. However, a brief overview of the crisis from the view of André François-Poncet in Berlin will both serve to introduce the man who would soon leave Berlin for Rome, and allow some understanding of his position and opinions in the crisis. As well, the ramifications of the Munich settlement for French foreign policy should explain the reasoning of French leaders in their decision to approach Italy once again. However much François-Poncet may have known and admired the German people, he was not deceived for long by their Nazi leaders. In the beginning, he apparently entertained some optimistic hopes about the advent to power of Hitler and his cohorts.[51] Soon, however, these hopes were dashed, and Poncet realized that German militancy could only be incompatible with the Nazi peace rhetoric which he heard from all sides.[52] At the beginning of 1936, he heard rumours of an impending action in the Rhineland, and he warned Pierre Laval, the foreign minister, that:

> [d]e toute facon, le déroulement des projets allemands ne sera plus arrêté que par l'attitude très ferme d'une France qui montrera qu'elle sait regarder en face les problèmes délicats et qui trouvera un appui dans la solidarité de la Grande Bretagne et des principaux membres de la Societé des Nations. 53

Unfortunately for the future, the French foreign minister did not heed Poncet's advice, and Nazi troops marched into the Rhineland with scarcely a murmur from either the French or the British.

The German-Czechoslovakian crisis, which began to simmer in the spring of 1938, brought no change in Poncet's opinions. The May weekend crisis, in which a German invasion of Czechoslovakia had seemed imminent, had been abated by a strong Anglo-French stand. Poncet, though, warned the Quai d'Orsay not to believe that Hitler had in any way moderated his determination to separate the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia.[54] Again he urged that the western allies stand firm and united; the Nazi leaders had a tendency to view their adversaries as weak and divided and believed that "fortune favours the audacious."[55] Although Czechoslovakia should be ready to make reasonable concessions, servitude or the demise of the Czechoslovakian state was out of the question; what François-Poncet favoured was the neutralization of that state as guaranteed by the great powers.[56]

Throughout the summer of 1938, Poncet's forebodings continued to pour into the Quai d'Orsay. In the middle of August, he adroitly analyzed the plans of the Nazi leaders.[57] First, to gain maximum concessions,

the Nazis were attempting to lead France and England to exert pressure on Czechoslovakia. Second, the Germans wanted to initiate a forceful action against Czechoslovakia without encountering obstruction as on the May weekend. Third, France and England were to be cowed enough to prevent their sending assistance to Czechoslovakia. Fourth, if the western allies refused to be intimidated, then Germany had to be sufficiently prepared for a general conflict. What these statements and Poncet's diplomatic correspondence demonstrate is that the French ambassador neither admired the Nazi régime nor advised any sort of accommodation with it. Always he advocated Anglo-French solidarity and strength and French political stability as the only means to forestall Hitler's schemes, for Poncet realized clearly that Hitler would not retreat a second time from Czechoslovakia. What would come, then, at the end of September 1938, was nothing directly of Poncet's doing. Indirectly, however, his pessimism over the German military preparations, and even his continual advocacy of Anglo-French solidarity, which remained elusive in the eyes of the French government, could only have reinforced the fears of the foreign minister, Georges Bonnet.

In September, Poncet's pessimism remained

unabated.[58] He confessed not to be able to:

> apercevoir l'issue honorable qui permettrait de sortir pacifiquement d'une telle situation; la logique des choses, à moins de circonstances imprévues et quasi miraculeuses, semble ainsi conduire à des événements dramatiques et prochains.
>
> Les indices que l'on recueille, les bruits qui courent, les renseignements que l'on reçoit sont tous, d'ailleurs, de nature inquiétante. [59]

Poncet's notion of a peaceful solution to the German-Czechoslovakian problem through granting autonomy to the Sudeten Germans seems, by the middle of the month, to have been dissipated by Hitler's speech at Nuremberg on 12 September. In Poncet's opinion, Hitler was bent upon a military action against Czechoslovakia; the troubles which broke out in the Sudetenland were not only a result of the speech, but "ils font partie d'un plan."[60] In the days that followed, Poncet's correspondence contained a crescendo of warnings about German military preparations and the continued predilection of many Nazi leaders for a violent settlement of the problem. On 27 September, Poncet offered to the Quai d'Orsay his solution which consisted of the occupation of the Sudetenland by an international force. France and England would guarantee the cession of the Sudeten area, but, if Hitler proceeded with an armed invasion, the western powers "seront obligés de

penser qu'il a voulu provoquer la guerre et se comportent en conséquence."[61]

Whether this plan of Poncet influenced Bonnet and the Quai is not clear, but the next day Bonnet wired Poncet the news that the British government was proposing to Berlin that German troops should immediately enter part of the Sudetenland.[62] If this plan failed, Poncet was to offer Hitler the immediate occupation of a much larger portion of the Sudetenland, and France would do everything possible to bring Czechoslovakia around. Poncet followed these instructions, but before he received an answer from Hitler, the Munich Conference was called. Of the historic agreement made at this conference, Poncet had this to say:

> [l]a conférence de Munich permet ainsi de penser qu'il y a encore place pour un concert européen, lui-même capable de vouloir et de maintenir la paix. 63

At the same time, he certainly did not deny the Czechoslovakian sacrifice.

The problem here, of course, is not to make a judgement upon the Munich settlement. It is to decide whether Poncet's attitude toward the Third Reich and the German-Czechoslovakian crisis fell within the bounds of a diplomacy based upon conciliation, but not unwarranted concession. In other words, did he seem to advocate

that France participate in a balanced conciliation with Germany over international problems, all the time maintaining her integrity, dignity, and strength; did he seem to advocate a slavish and short-sighted surrender to the Third Reich's demands; or did he seem to advocate a stand of unrealistic resistance that would disallow any discussion at all?

The opinions of the majority of Poncet's contemporaries show his attitude to be balanced and realistic. Only two, Bella Fromm, the German journalist, and William E. Dodd, the American ambassador in Berlin, suggest that he might have had pro-Fascist sympathies.[64] Many of his colleagues, conversely, claim that Poncet was decidedly anti-Nazi (although admittedly some may have been biased). Armand Bérard, who served under him in Rome, recalls that the dread of another war, like the one Poncet had already experienced, and in which France would not have the advantage, dictated Poncet's policy.[65] General Paul Stehlin, the military attaché in Berlin during part of Poncet's tenure, records how Poncet's warnings about German rearmament were derided by General Maurice Gamelin of the French General Staff.[66] Count Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian foreign minister, recounts that, following the signing of the Munich Agreement, he heard Poncet exclaim,

"[v]oilà comme la France traite les seuls alliés qui lui étaient restés fidèles."[67] This last, while it may not indicate disapproval of the settlement, at least shows that Poncet realized the enormity of what had been done.

The views of Bérard and Stehlin, particularly, seem to demonstrate that Poncet at least had a realistic view of what faced France. When this testimony is combined with the summary of some of his dispatches from Berlin, it becomes fairly obvious that Poncet advocated a relatively strong stand by France while, at the same time, he did not rule out a limited concession by Czechoslovakia. Shortly after Munich, Poncet once again warned his government that:

> [i]t is necessary that while continuing to affirm their will to peace and neglecting no means of reaching an understanding with the totalitarian States, they [the western democracies] should nevertheless eliminate all causes of internal weakness, that they should fill up as quickly as possible any gaps in their armaments, and that they should give to the outside world tangible proof of industry, cohesion and strength. [68]

In essence, this quotation illustrates Poncet's stand clearly: in order to maintain peace, France should try to come to an agreement with the dictators, but, in the meantime, she had to build up enough strength to show Hitler and Mussolini that a willingness to conciliate was not a sham to conceal weakness, but a positive measure to ensure European

peace. This passage also demonstrates that, while advocating conciliation, Poncet had not lost faith in the ability of the west to face the dictators should the necessity arise. Regarding Germany and the Czechoslovakian crisis, then, Poncet's, attitude was balanced as he knew successful diplomacy had to be.

* * *

Although François-Poncet's reaction to Munich was mixed, Frenchmen generally received the settlement with unrestrained joy. The peace had been preserved. Poor Daladier, personally much disturbed at what he had just done, was surprised to alight from his plane to the sound of cheering crowds. "Idiots," he exclaimed, "they do not know what they applaud."[69] Daladier knew, but on 4 October in the Chamber, he defended his actions, saying "aujourd'hui, venant vous rendre compte de notre action, je peux vous dire que, dans cette crise, nous avons sauvé la paix", and the Chamber showed its approval by a vote of 331 against 78.[70] Only Georges Bonnet and his followers seem to have been reinforced by Munich in their conviction that the dictators were amenable to agreements, hence his eagerness to conclude the Franco-German Declaration of 6 December 1938 (which would be, essentially, a "good neighbour" pact guaranteeing the existing Franco-German boundary).

However, his anxiety was probably also conditioned by the Anglo-German Declaration made at Munich which seemed to leave France out in the cold. Daladier, in his speech at the annual Radical Congress of 28 October, agreed with Bonnet that "whether it is a question of its relations with Germany or with Italy, France is convinced that . . . accords can be reached . . . "[71]

For France, however, the price of peace was exorbitant. French leaders learned some bitter lessons at Munich. For once and for all, they now knew that it was no longer possible to defend Eastern Europe against Hitler; indeed, France's remaining eastern allies were now virtually worthless. The gamble that French leaders had taken in the 1920s had not paid off: the eastern allies had now become liabilities. Munich, moreover, showed up clearly the dichotomy between France's foreign policy and her entirely defensive strategy. The French military system might be able to defend metropolitan France, but not distant allies and perhaps not even French colonies. Finally, Munich demonstrated that France was no longer a European power of the first rank.

Several other factors converged with the lessons of Munich to frighten French leaders. Germany, of course, continued to be the enemy. British support in war was by no means assured. Belgium had terminated

her defensive agreement with France in 1936. Relations with the Soviet Union were adversely affected by Munich; moreover, the Franco-Soviet Pact, which lacked a military convention, was far from universally accepted in France. The long drawn out Spanish conflict seemed to be coming to an end in a rebel victory; how much influence, then, would Italy and Germany have with General Franco? Italy remained hostile over the Ethiopian affair and Spain. The French air force was weak, and France's economic and social problems detracted from her international prestige. By the autumn of 1938, then, France was in a severe plight. What was she to do?

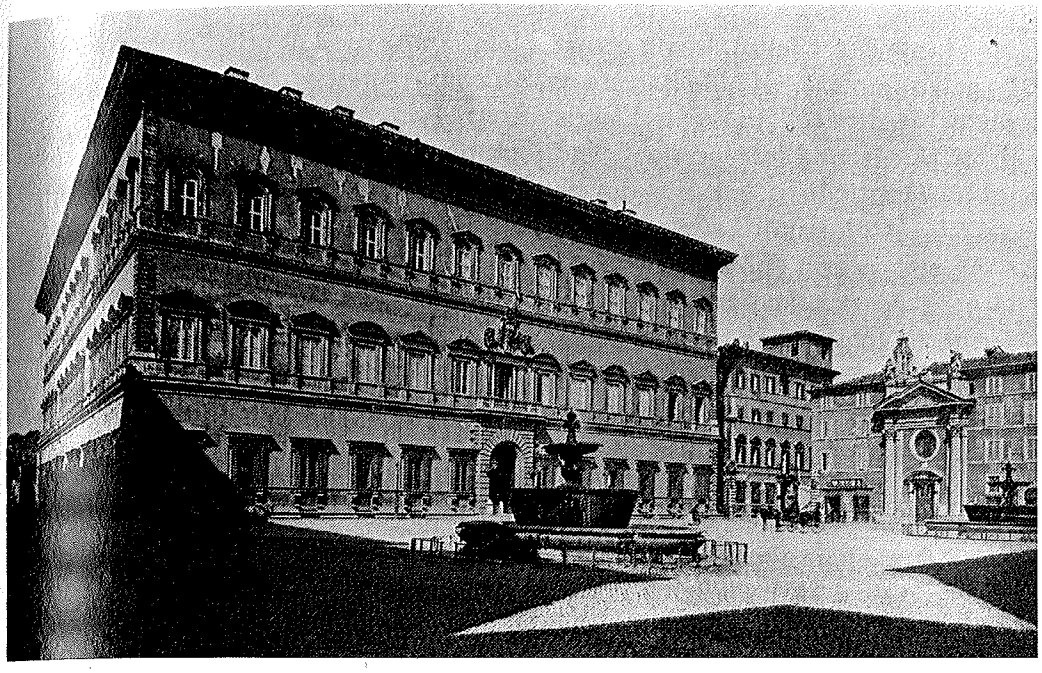
One solution was a retreat behind the Maginot Line and a turn to the French Empire. At least, the emphasis on empire, which allowed France to continue to see herself as a great power, provided an antidote to the humiliation of Munich.[72] At most, it drew the attention of Frenchmen to the importance of their empire and the defense of it, and the defensive manpower it could provide. Along with the concentration on the French Empire went a tougher and more stringent domestic policy. By the spring of 1939, Paul Reynaud, the minister of finance, would have considerably strengthened the French economy, and rearmament would be

progressing. Labour felt the pinch, too, in the fall of 1938. The forty-hour week was rescinded; and the general strike called for 30 November 1938 to protest this move was quashed by Daladier almost before it began.

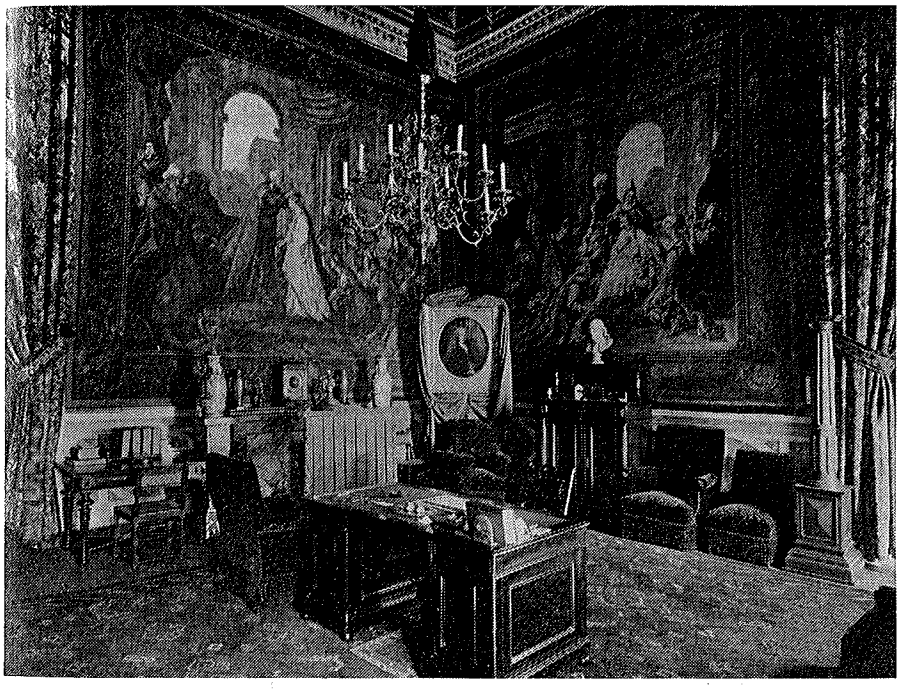
Another solution to France's predicament, which would alleviate at least some of France's international problems as well as help to ensure the safety of the North African empire, was an agreement with Italy. Thus in November 1938, André François-Poncet would arrive in Italy as ambassador of France in another attempt to win Mussolini's Italy to France's side.

André François - Poncet

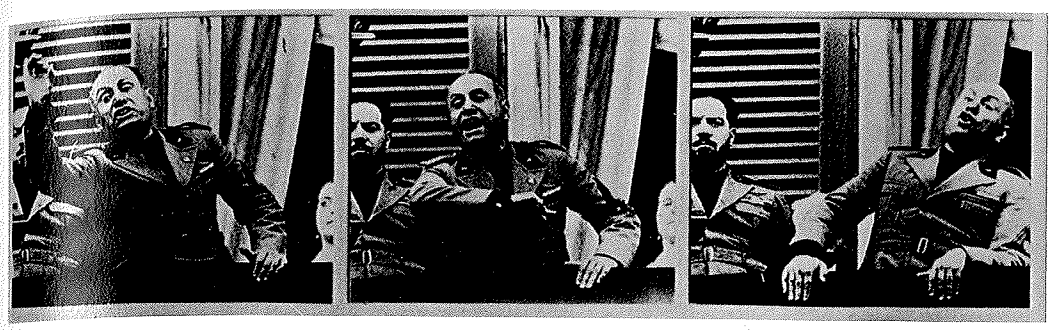
Ambassador of France



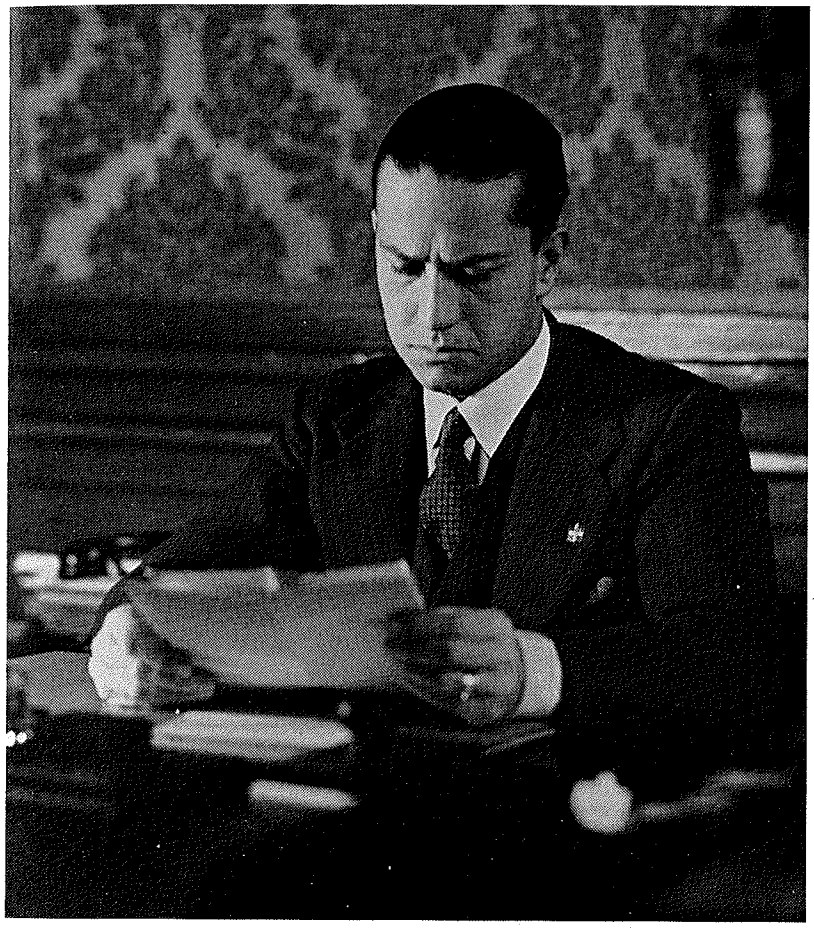
Farnèse Palace, Rome



The Ambassador's Office

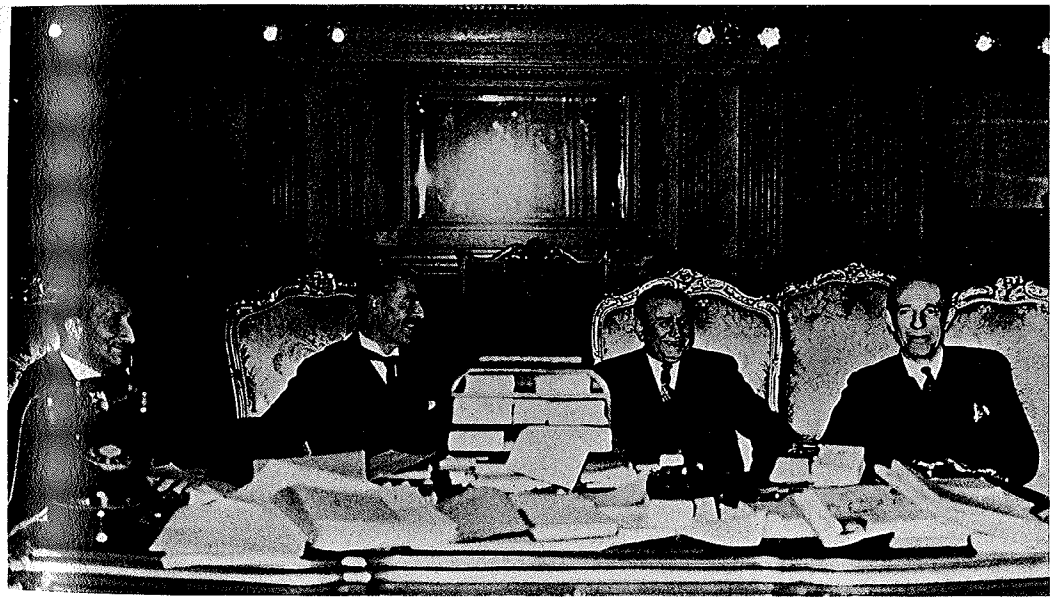


Mussolini



Ciano

Léger, Bonnet, Daladier



Bonnet, Chamberlain, Daladier, Halifax

Chapter II

Briefing the Ambassador: Dossier Italie

It was soon after the Munich Conference that French leaders decided to normalize relations with Italy. Mussolini, pleased with himself and his role as the "arbiter of Europe" at Munich, had been friendly toward Daladier and had admonished the French premier not to forget his address.[1] Indeed, the French leaders hoped that a Franco-Italian agreement might lead to a general settlement by the major European powers that would carry on the spirit of Munich.[2]

The decision to ameliorate relations with Italy involved, of course, the recognition of the Italian Empire and the appointment of a new ambassador to Rome. On 3 October 1938, Bonnet announced to Prunas, the Italian chargé d'affaires in Paris, that the French government had decided to re-establish normal relations with Italy, and then asked Prunas whether Mussolini would wish a career diplomat or a politician. By telephone, the chargé d'affaires consulted with Ciano, the Italian foreign minister, and the latter (unaware that the line was tapped) answered that "nous ne voulons pas de Laval . . . Qu'on nous envoie quelqu'un de la carrière."[3] Laval had hoped to be the chosen one,[4] of course, but Mussolini still blamed him for the sanctions

that had been imposed upon Italy over Ethiopia. The Duce having opted for a career diplomat, it was decided to transfer André François-Poncet from Berlin to Rome. Whether Mussolini personally chose Poncet is unclear. Bonnet, however, claims that he did because he had met Poncet at Munich,[5] although Bonnet was not present at Munich. No doubt, he and Poncet discussed the matter of the Rome Embassy at the meeting which Le Temps says they had on Sunday, 2 October, presumably in Paris.[6] If Mussolini actually specified the appointment of Poncet, it probably meant that only the best that France had to offer was acceptable to him, and it would be a feather in his cap to get Hitler's favourite ambassador. Conversely, if Bonnet made the choice, it must signify the importance that he attached to the renewal of the mission in Rome.

The Italian reaction to the French decision to send an ambassador to Rome was not entirely enthusiastic. Ciano noted in his diary that "the news leaves us more or less indifferent," although there was some satisfaction in the fact that France had finally relented.[7] Mackensen, the German ambassador in Rome, reported that the news "leaves the Duce cold" because the French decision had come too late and was a patent attempt to patch things up with Italy to the detriment

of the Rome-Berlin Axis.[8] Nevertheless, on 17 October, Mussolini agreed to accept Poncet, and within a few weeks, he had decided to send Raffaello Guariglia to the Paris embassy.[9]

François-Poncet seems to have accepted his appointment to Rome with eagerness; he was happy to leave the stifling atmosphere of Berlin.[10] Very soon after Munich, he had learned that Hitler was clearly dissatisfied with the settlement, and he feared that soon Hitler would resort to war to get what he wanted. Poncet, moreover, had been convinced by the behaviour of the two dictators at Munich that Hitler was fascinated by Mussolini: "quand le Duce rit, il rit; si le Duce se renfrogne, il se renfrogne."[11] Hence the path to deterring the German leader led through Mussolini. In conversation with Phipps, the British ambassador in Paris, Poncet expressed his fears that, failing a French agreement with Rome, an Italo-German military accord would result; at this time, however, he felt that, his freedom circumscribed by Hitler, Mussolini would gladly consider an approach by the western democracies.[12]

Although François-Poncet had been in Germany for several years, he would be aware of the aspirations of Italian foreign policy and of the course of Franco-Italian relations since World War I. And during his

short sojourn in Paris before setting out for Rome, Georges Bonnet and the experts at the Quai d'Orsay would have briefed him thoroughly on the situation to which he was going.[13] Moreover, the ambassador would have a good understanding of the functioning of the French foreign ministry and the formulation of French foreign policy. The section that follows, then, has been designed like the dossier that might have been prepared for the purpose of briefing François-Poncet.

* * *

The nineteenth-century unification of Italy had not made her a truly great power in Europe. As a power of the second rank, then, she survived diplomatically by astutely playing on the fortunes of the greater powers and, at the same time, by maintaining a close relationship with Great Britain, the possessor of so much naval power. Geographically, Italy's central position in the Mediterranean was an asset, but she controlled none of the entrances to the sea, a fact which could only threaten the great amount of sea-borne trade that was necessary to supply her with the raw materials and goods that she lacked in great quantity. Being a peninsula, Italy had long stretches of coast to defend, a reason for her continuing interest in Albania, one of the gates to the Adriatic. By the 1930s, Italian

military leaders were fully aware that Italy could not maintain a long war due to her dependence on sea-borne trade as well as to her industrial system, the development of which lagged far behind those of Italy's European neighbours.[14] All these weaknesses determined the outlines of Fascist foreign policy.

The man who represented Fascism to the world and who controlled foreign policy for most of the duration of the Fascist régime was Benito Mussolini. Although the roots of Fascism lay in Italy's history and seemed to answer the requisites of her society, Mussolini became the director and the pivot around whom the maintenance of the ideology revolved.[15] To this end, bellicosity, belligerence, and references to force filled his speeches and some of his actions, but, in fact, he was frequently vacillating, impulsive, and easily influenced by others. To enhance his own ego, he seems to have wanted power for power's sake. He gloried in his physical appearance and worked at keeping "in shape."[16] It has been said that Mussolini's greatest talent was myth-making; he managed to persuade his countrymen that only through him could Romanità be achieved, and to convince foreign leaders that Italy was not a power with which they could trifle. Norman Kogan has written a perceptive work that demonstrates the

influence of the Italian personality upon foreign policy.[17] "Cutting a good figure" or maintaining a bella figura is extremely important, as is the idea that the family unit, or in this case the national unit, will do its utmost to increase its own personal power and material assets to the disadvantage of others, if necessary; it is assumed, as well, that the other side will act under the same presumptions.[18] Though these characteristics may not have been wholly represented in Mussolini, an understanding of them helps to explain many of his diplomatic actions. And since Italian foreign policy was controlled mainly by Mussolini, it follows that the quest for Italian grandezza was frequently subsumed in a search for personal glory or a means of maintaining the allegiance of the Italian people to the Fascist régime.

By and large, the western powers had accepted Mussolini's takeover with equanimity, even reserved optimism. It was good to see some social stability being restored in the Peninsula, and, as the old joke goes, Mussolini finally had the trains running on time. Although Fascist rhetoric employed such terms as revolution and struggle, in reality, Italian Fascism was anti-Bolshevist and, in the end, conservative. The idea of the glorification of the state predominated, and a

kind of Social Darwinism in international relations dictated that "inferior" nations be subjected to the greater glory of the new Roman Empire.[19] Great emphasis was put on traditional Roman trappings, the exaltation of Romanità, and a great show of military might which, "lorsque l'on considère les sinuosités et les hésitations de la diplomatie mussolinienne, est loin d'être certain."[20] The press was soon tightly regulated, by brute force if necessary; by the late 1930s, the Ministry of Press and Propaganda was sending frequent instructions to editors. The ideology of the Fascist régime and the nature of its basis of power meant that domestic policy and foreign policy were mutually dependent upon each other.[21]

The quest for grandezza and Romanità did not actually begin with Mussolini. It was Francesco Crispi, in the late nineteenth-century, who decided that Italy was well on the way to creating the second Roman Empire. His plan for colonial expansion, however, was not eminently successful. Italy had already lost Tunisia to France at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, and the conquest of Libya in 1911-1912 failed to expunge Italy's national shame, the humiliating defeat by Abyssinia at Adowa in 1896. The end of World War I and the ensuing Paris Peace Conference added little to Italy's colonial

empire. Only Great Britain partially fulfilled her obligations to Italy under the Treaty of London of 1915, the quid pro quo for Italian support of the Allies; and she and France divided the German colonies between them. But overemphasis on the Fiume issue by the Italian delegates, who were beset by differing conceptions of Italy's needs, and instability at home, were as reponsible for what Italians soon named the vittoria mutilata, as the high-handedness of the Allies. In truth, and considering that she already had more colonies than she could handle, the war granted Italy an immense advantage: the disappearance of the Austrian Empire which lifted the diplomatic restrictions under which Italy had had to operate.[22] At any rate, by the time that the Fiume dispute was finally settled in 1924, Mussolini and his Fascists had been in power in Italy for some fifteen months.

Mussolini did not gain complete control of Italian foreign policy at once. The Ministero degli Affari Esteri, which Mussolini moved to the Palazzo Chigi, seemed content enough to accept the Fascist régime. Indeed, many of Mussolini's forays into diplomacy were entirely in line with the foreign policy of his predecessors. His first speech in the Chamber of Deputies (16 November 1922) contained little that was

disquieting except, perhaps, his statement that "[t]reaties are neither eternal nor irreparable; they are only chapters in history."[23] But Mussolini adhered to the Locarno Pacts if only for the publicity the signing of them afforded him.[24] Only the Corfu incident of 1923, in which Mussolini confronted the League of Nations, presaged events to come. It was not until the mid 1920s, with the "fascistization" of the Palazzo Chigi, that his foreign policy really began to exhibit its true colours. Dino Grandi's appointment as foreign minister signified that Mussolini would no longer tolerate interference from those less than enthusiastic about Fascist policy. He now began to emphasize the idea that Italy's future lay in the Mediterranean, mare nostrum, and that Italy had to add to her colonial empire. Plans for a future sortie into Ethiopia were made as early as 1924,[25] and Fascist leaders considered Albania to be an Italian sphere of interest.[26] By the late 1920s, then, the basic goals of foreign policy were set: revisionism, disdain for the League of Nations, Italian glory, a colonial empire, and hegemony in the Mediterranean.

The 1930s witnessed a gradual decay in Italian foreign policy, both in method and in goal. Mussolini's decision to invade Ethiopia in 1935 seems to have been

made for three reasons: Hitler's accession to power and the consequent threat of German rearmament (which could rupture the peace of Europe and force Mussolini to cancel his plans for the invasion),[27] the dismal economic scene at home, and the need to maintain the prestige of the régime both in Italy and abroad.[28] To Mussolini, the Ethiopian war was "une épreuve qui témoigne de la virilité du peuple italien."[29] Success in Ethiopia was soon followed by involvement in the Spanish Civil War in 1936, on the side of Franco's rebels. But here, Mussolini began to bog down. The war was long and expensive both in material cost and the loss of diplomatic freedom; the Duce's association with Germany in the campaigns of the Spanish rebels forced him into the arms of Hitler. On 26 October 1936, he made an agreement with Hitler to maintain Austria and proclaimed the Rome-Berlin Axis. A year later, he added his signature to the Anti-Comintern Pact of Germany and Japan. So when Hitler's troops marched into Austria in 1938, all Mussolini could do was to acquiesce. The descent to the Pact of Steel of May 1939 had begun in 1936; The Anschluss only reinforced it and compelled the Duce to sacrifice central European interests for Mediterranean interests. When, on the morrow of the Anschluss, Hitler wired this message to

Mussolini, "Benito, I will never forget it," the latter is supposed to have muttered, "neither will I."[30] The Munich Conference restored some of his confidence--he relished the role of mediator among the powers and the symptoms of disquiet that the western leaders exhibited. But, although it may not have been so apparent to contemporaries like François-Poncet, Hitler now had the upper hand, and all the Duce could do was to follow him slavishly to destruction.

* * *

"I am well pleased. The French in Tunisia--that means any understanding between French and Italians is henceforth impossible."[31] It was Otto von Bismarck who made this prediction in 1881 after the French occupation of Tunisia, and François-Poncet's experience in Rome would show the truth of it. But he also knew that, in the interwar years, Tunisia was not the only area in which French and Italian interests clashed. Affairs in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, the Mediterranean and Spain formed other foci of contention which were underscored by ideological incompatability and misunderstandings on both sides. Often referred to as the "Latin sisters," France and Italy frequently displayed most unsisterly qualities toward each other.

France's system of alliances with the Little

Entente and Poland suggested to Italy a desire for continental hegemony. Moreover, Italian feelings were hurt by what seemed to be a peace settlement wholly advantageous to France and her allies and obstructive to Italian plans in Eastern Europe. Italy's encouragement of dissatisfaction in Hungary, Bulgaria and Austria not only irritated France but tended to put Italy into the revisionist camp, a trend which further alienated her from the anti-revisionist French.

It was mainly in the Mediterranean and its environs, however, that French and Italian interests clashed. Conflicts over colonial possessions in the Mediterranean and in North Africa were virtually a continual issue from one war to the next. On the sea itself, the vital necessity for France to keep open her communications with her North African colonies and troops collided with Mussolini's mare nostrum theory.

The oldest bone of contention was Tunisia. For years before the beginning of the French protectorate in 1881, Italians had been migrating to Tunisia and had gradually come to expect that eventually their new home would become Italian. These hopes only made France's acquisition of Tunisia (a quid pro quo for Britain's acquisition of Cyprus), the harder to bear. It was the rights of the Tunisian Italians that, at

least ostensibly, concerned the mother country. The 1896 Conventions, however, stipulated the maintenance of Italian nationality for the immigrants and allowed them their own schools and other privileges. The Italian population increased, and things went smoothly until 1918 when France adopted a policy of aggressive naturalization. French citizens in Tunisia began to receive preferential treatment, and Italians were encouraged to adopt French citizenship. The Conventions, however, were still in force, and after much wrangling, France made a temporary agreement to renew them every three months while negotiations to finalize a settlement continued sporadically. Unfortunately the damage had been done: France now felt threatened by the growing number of Italians in the protectorate (where there were some 30,000 more Italians than French),[32] and Mussolini fired up Italian nationalism among his compatriots there. Relations between the two countries on the Tunisian issue teeter-tottered back and forth with recriminations from both sides. Not until 1935 would the problem be solved for a short period.

Another source of irritation between France and Italy concerned the Treaty of London and the allotment of colonies. Article XIII of the Treaty had

stipulated that, if France and Britain should acquire German colonies in Africa, then Italy could claim "equitable compensation"[33] favouring her in questions of the boundary settlements of the Italian colonies of Eritrea, Somaliland and Libya and the neighbouring French and British colonies. Britain fulfilled her part of the bargain, but France, for some reason, was more tightfisted in allowing Italy only some oases on the Libyan border. Of course, these meagre concessions whetted Italy's appetite for more, but they also created in Italy the not unreasonable feeling that the Italian sacrifice in the war had gone unappreciated in France. Perhaps France should have been more generous and thereby expunged some of the Italian rancour that was to emerge in the late 1930s.

The Ethiopian crisis and the ensuing Hoare-Laval fiasco[34] spelled the end of the Laval-Mussolini détente. For Mussolini, of course, the initial outcome of Ethiopia was a triumph. He brought the western democracies to their knees, ruined the League of Nations in which he had never had much confidence anyway, and brought what he thought of as glory to his new Roman Empire. At the same time, he overlooked the military and financial cost. For France the cost was devastating and fourfold. First, it ruined the Franco-Italian

rapprochement, a ruin that would only become truly apparent in the future. Both the Hoare-Laval plan and the very halfhearted attempt to impose sanctions on Italy were aimed at keeping Britain and Italy in the French camp; unfortunately, they did not succeed in their purpose. Second, the discrediting of the League was a blow to French foreign policy, based as it was upon the maintenance of the status quo as embodied in the Covenant of the League. Third, the crisis further divided France internally. Conversely, the domestic division partially dictated Laval's actions. The right demanded that Mussolini be conciliated, the left that Laval support the League and Britain. Laval, therefore, had little choice but to try to follow some sort of middle course.[35] Finally, Hitler was able to take advantage of the situation to march into the Rhineland which was just one of the eventualities that Laval had striven to avoid by signing the Rome Agreements with Mussolini.

In June 1936, Léon Blum's Front Populaire government took office. Despite pleas from the right to do something about smoothing out the relationship with Italy,[36] Blum and his foreign minister, Yvon Delbos, remained adamantly anti-Italian. There were several reasons for their attitude. To begin with, the ideology

of the Front Populaire was diametrically opposed to that of Fascist Italy and Mussolini, "l'assassin de Matteotti," the Italian socialist.[37] The association of the Front Populaire with the Communists and the Franco-Soviet Pact, only reinforced the ideological gap; and neither Blum nor Delbos was in a hurry to lift the sanctions imposed on Italy for the invasion of Ethiopia. When they were finally raised on 15 July 1936, the expected improvement in relations with Italy did not materialize although, apparently, Mussolini hinted that he would not mind some amelioration.[38] An unfortunate diplomatic incident further strained matters. In October 1936, Count Charles de Chambrun retired from his post as French ambassador in Rome, some said because he was too sympathetic to the Fascist regime.[39] His replacement was to have been René Saint-Quentin whom Mussolini refused to accept because he was not accredited to the "King of Italy" and the "Emperor of Ethiopia." Blum's refusal to add the second title, indicated his determination not to recognize the Italian conquest of Ethiopia. Thus, France was left with only a chargé d'affaires, Jules Blondel, in Rome, and in retaliation, Mussolini withdrew his ambassador in Paris, Vittorio Cerutti, in October 1937. Apparently Cerutti went to Blum with a message from Mussolini:

the Duce hated Hitler; if France and Italy could come together, "rien dans le monde ne pourrait résister à ce bloc de 80 millions de Latins."[40] There was a condition, however; France must foresake the Spanish Republic and put no obstacles in Franco's way, and Mussolini would put in a good word for France with Franco. Blum refused Mussolini's overture. In his postwar testimony, he claims that he was convinced that the Austro-German accord of July 1936 would mean Italy's turning to the Mediterranean to harass France and England there.[41]

When François-Poncet arrived in Rome in 1938, he was soon made very clearly aware that the Spanish Civil War still formed a formidable barricade between France and Italy as it had done for over two years. When the war first broke out in July 1936, France chose to adhere to non-intervention in Spain for several reasons. To begin with, Britain opted for non-intervention, and Blum and Delbos quickly followed suit in the interests of maintaining the vital Anglo-French alliance. But other matters were equally influential in Blum's decision. The ideological conflict in Spain between right and left quickly widened the gap between right and left in France, and Blum found himself faced by a divided country. To aid the Spanish Republicans

would alienate the right who feared a Communist Spain, and who were already looking askance at Blum's extensive social reforms. And then these cherished reforms might founder anyway if the Front Populaire spent too much on military help for their sister government in Spain. Strategic considerations also played a part. Blum feared for the security of France's communications with her North African colonies and troops. German and Italian influence in Spain could result in their being granted strategic points in the Mediterranean by General Franco. So Blum decided that neutrality would anger Franco less, should the Nationalist win the war, than outright hostility. Lastly, of course, Blum wished to prevent the spread of a local conflagration to a wider European theatre.

One of Blum's fears was almost realized. On 28 November 1936, Mussolini concluded a secret agreement with Franco's government of which two clauses seemed directed against France. Neither country would allow a third power to use its territory for "free passage" of armaments or troops or for preparation or operations against one of the contracting parties; and each would observe benevolent neutrality in case of war or economic sanctions.[42] So it would seem that if Mussolini did not have aggressive plans against France, he was certainly

bent upon keeping her hands tied; and he was able to occupy the Balearics soon after the war began. That Italy, after signing the Non-Intervention Pact, continued to aid Franco, was a strong reason for Blum to distrust Mussolini. The Nyon Conference of September 1937, which ended Italian piracy in the Mediterranean, was a diplomatic triumph for France and Britain but did nothing to endear them to Mussolini. Other events of 1936 and 1937 separated France even further from Italy. First, there was the proclamation of the Rome-Berlin Axis in the autumn of 1936, and then Italy's signing of a friendship pact with Yugoslavia in March 1937 and the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1937, closely followed by her withdrawal from the League of Nations. All were bad omens of the slowly strengthening bond between Germany and Italy and the widening gulf between France and Italy.

The issues dividing Paris and Rome were reinforced by rhetorical insults. After the reoccupation of the Rhineland, the Italian marshal, Badoglio, informed General Gamelin that Mussolini believed "que la France est perdue."[43] As well, the Duce dredged up all sorts of silly arguments to show that both France and Britain were irrevocably lost: the falling French birth rate meant France was decadent;

tonsillectomies caused British cowardice; anything good in French culture had originated in Italy; syphilis and alcoholism had wasted the French army.[44] France, for her part, was not hesitant about casting insults on Italian military prowess; even Daladier, at a Committee of National Defense meeting, referred to Italy as "cet adversaire, de qualité inférieure."[45] When Jérôme Carcopino returned to Rome in 1937, he was amazed at the insolence of the Italian press toward the west, but he also found that most Italian intellectuals still admired France either for herself or because they disliked the Germans so much.[46] Unfortunately, most of the nastier feelings would continue indefinitely.

Notwithstanding all the contentious issues, though, France and Italy indeed had mutual interests, however much they were obscured by conflicting interests. The principal factor which should have bound them together was mistrust of Germany. Both countries had a particular interest in maintaining the status quo stipulated by the Treaty of Versailles in order to keep Germany in abeyance. During most of the interwar period, they had buffers on their borders nearest Germany: France had the demilitarized Rhineland; Italy had Austria. Any expansionist attempt on Germany's part was bound eventually to upset these buffers. Despite

the dominance of the German problem, however, only a few times did the Latin sisters join forces over it.

The advent to power of Mussolini and his Fascist régime in 1922 was not unwelcome in France, although some unfortunate remarks by Mussolini about the Tunisian problem dampened French approval at the time.[47] Many Frenchmen, however, welcomed the new régime as a citadel of anti-Bolshevism and as an instrument of political and social stability. Moreover, the thought that Italy might be enrolled in an anti-German front on the reparations dispute was an intriguing one.

For her part, Italy was not averse to friendly relations with France. Although a renascent Germany would serve to control French hegemony on a long-term basis, at the moment, it seemed best for Italian interests to be on the winning side with France should she succeed in her venture. After all, both France and Italy had a common interest in keeping Germany unsettled, whether it be by a presence on the Rhine or at a pressure point like the Brenner Pass. Thus Italy, in December 1922, associated herself with the occupation of the Ruhr Valley, an undertaking that was especially agreeable to Italian industrialists who feared a disappointed France might block the Ruhr coal they depended upon so much.[48] Mussolini, too, waxed

enthusiastic about bringing Germany to heel; to Charles-Roux he stated that "my position is that Germany must pay."[49] But Italian support in the Ruhr episode, which the British had opposed, soon waned. Italian policy had for a long time been closely aligned with that of Britain, and now France realized the pitfalls of not working in harmony with England. Camille Barrère, the French ambassador in Rome at the time, succinctly defined the situation which would culminate in the Locarno Pacts:

> Franco-Italian relations will always be conditioned by the state of our relations with England. With a Franco-British entente, if it is solid and based on the regulation of political interests, like the Entente Cordiale, the effect will be to modify profoundly our relations with Italy and largely to diminish the importance of the differences which could arise in the Mediterranean as a result of the excessive pretensions of Italian policy. 50

Barrère's words were prophetic for two reasons. On the one hand, his idea came to be embodied in the Stresa Front. On the other hand, by the later 1930s, Mussolini would be systematically intriguing against such a situation: it had become a habitual device of his to favour either one or the other of the western democracies, but never both together, in an attempt to separate them.

Continuing difficulties in other parts of

Europe soon strained the initial cordiality of the Ruhr episode and the Locarno Pacts. Attempts were made in 1928 and 1929 to settle Franco-Italian differences and to stabilize the Mediterranean through a friendship pact. From the beginning, however, things got off on the wrong foot, not because the differences were not susceptible to agreement, but because of the gulf between the French and Italian approaches to the conversations. Where France saw the future pact as "an excellent starting point for a policy of active collaboration,"[51] Mussolini viewed it as a concrete avenue to the expansion of the Italian Empire. The whole thing came to nothing at the time (although the Laval-Mussolini Accords were an eventual outgrowth); with Germany still weak, there was no particular impetus to work harder to align the differing French and Italian views.

By 1932, France was ready to approach Italy. Isolated, and fearful of Germany, France "était liée à tous et, sauf les petits Etats de l'Europe centrale, personne n'était lié à elle."[52] But when Mussolini broached his idea of a Four Power Pact that would permit the great powers to inflict treaty revision on the Eastern European successor states with which France was allied, France hesitated because she feared she would

lose her Eastern allies should the matter of revision of one or more of them arise. Later, however, in the interests of a rapprochement with Italy, France agreed to sign the Pact but only after the offending revisionist clauses had been considerably diluted. The signing of the Pact was not a particularly glorious episode for France. While making concessions to the defenders of Versailles, she, at the same time, did not entirely repudiate the revisionist schemes of the dictators.[53] Thus the door remained open for rapprochement with Italy.

In October 1933, Hitler withdrew from the League of Nations and the Disarmament Conference. These alarming incidents helped considerably in bringing France and Italy together. In 1934, the French foreign minister, Louis Barthou, in forming his ring of alliances around Germany, realized that Italy and Russia should be part of his anti-German coalition. For his part, Mussolini, worried about Hitler's intentions toward Austria and in expectation of Barthou's approaching visit to Rome, said, "an entente with France would be very useful and very fruitful."[54] Three days after this statement, Barthou and the king of Yugoslavia were assassinated. Some have suggested that Mussolini was responsible for the double murder, but

Pierre Laval claimed that the Hungarians were the culprits.[55] Whatever the truth, Franco-Italian relations began to show some improvement. Not all Frenchmen, however, favoured agreement with Italy. Earlier Léon Blum had written:

> Je demande à nouveau pardon du rapprochement à nos camarades anglaises, mais la complaisance des républiques et des démocraties d'Europe vis-à-vis du fasciste Mussolini n'a de précédent dans l'histoire que la bassesse des grandes monarchies légitimes vis-à-vis du régicide Cromwell. 56

Although negotiations between Paris and Rome went along rather haltingly, Laval eagerly rushed off to Rome on 3 January 1935. There he had several meetings with Mussolini, one of which was entirely private, and on 7 January, the two men signed the Rome agreements. The first issue settled was an agreement to maintain the independence of Austria, a triumph for Laval and France's eastern alliance system. Colonial questions proved to be difficult, however, and it was only <u>after</u> the private meeting that these were settled.[57] Mussolini received some desert land in Libya, a bit of Eritrean coastline, and 2,500 shares in the Djibouti to Addis Ababa railroad. Moreover, he ostensibly agreed that the rights of Italian Tunisians would be gradually relinquished. All in all, it was a poor harvest for the ambitious Italian leader. Rather obviously he must have

received something that was not mentioned in the public agreement, and most historians and contemporaries believe that Laval at least hinted at a "free hand," whether political, economic, or both, for Mussolini in Ethiopia, during the private meeting. Georges Bonnet, another Italophile, claims that Laval made no concession about Ethiopia,[58] but since he was accused, in December 1938, of doing much the same thing about Czechoslovakia, his denial is understandable. On 25 December 1935, however, Mussolini wrote to Laval that:

> il n'aurait pas été possible de dire tout dans les actes écrits. C'est ainsi que dans nos conversations, il y a eu lieu de mentionner à plusieurs reprises "la main libre" qui m'était reconnue en Abyssinie . . . [59]

In his published diary, Laval claims that he was surprised to hear that Italian officials were dissatisfied with the Rome Agreements, and says he urged Mussolini to "follow the example of Marshal Lyautey."[60] Whatever the truth of the situation, and it may only have been a matter of each man believing what he wanted to believe, the results of this misunderstanding were far-reaching, especially for France.

The picture was still rosy when French, British, and Italian leaders met at Stresa, in April 1935, to agree on the importance of Austrian independence. Mussolini must have been very pleased

when Ethiopia was not mentioned; it seemed a good omen for his planned conquest of that country. Unfortunately, the Ethiopian war soon shattered the Stresa front and with it, for some three years to come, France's hope of a rapprochement with Italy to restrain Germany. In sum, there seems to be one outstanding conclusion. Except, perhaps, for the Laval-Mussolini Accords of 1935, the mutual attempts of France and Italy to restrain Germany were feeble and too often obscured by the numerous issues that separated the two countries.

Although, in the interwar years, Franco-Italian tension seems to have been more predominant than Franco-Italian co-operation, there were solid strategic reasons for France to come to terms with her "Latin sister." A friendly Italy would ease both the naval and the military situations. A naval agreement with that power would free the French fleet for possible action against Germany, an advantage that French naval leaders had appreciated after the signing of the Laval-Mussolini accords of 1935.[61] As well, French Mediterranean interests would be secure. For what would happen if Britain was actually forced to send her Mediterranean fleet to the Far East, as she had promised her eastern colonies, if trouble arose there? French military leaders, of course, were chiefly occupied with

their German strategy; nevertheless, Italy was not ignored. Military talks had arisen out of the Laval-Mussolini Accords, although the Ethiopian crisis soon ended them. But evidence "now establishes with some assurance how important the French general staff held this alliance to be."[62] A friendly Italy would allow France to send military help quickly to eastern Europe by land rather than by the much slower sea route and to allocate more troops to the Franco-German frontier. Moreover, French communications with North Africa would be safe. An unfriendly Italy would not only cancel these advantages, but France would lose Italy's military and extensive air force reserves and, in turn, would have to defend herself and her colonies against Italy. In 1938, an army spokesman argued vigorously for an improvement in Franco-Italian relations as the only way of curbing Germany: "IL FAUT RECREER L'AXE PARIS-ROME. . . . Quelque soit le prix de notre accord avec Rome, il ne sera jamais trop cher."[63]

By the beginning of 1938, indeed, the hope that the Paris-Rome Axis might be recreated had begun to stir in the breasts of French leaders. Mussolini had commenced drawing closer to Great Britain, however much it may have been in his traditional habit of never being amiable to both western democracies at once. On 2

January 1937, he had signed a "gentlemen's agreement" with England, the purpose of which was the maintenance of the status quo in the Mediterranean. France had been kept up to date on the negotiations, but at the insistence of the new Italian foreign minister, Count Galeazzo Ciano, she had not been invited to be a signatory. Unhappily, because Mussolini had continued to send aid to Franco, the agreement had been unsuccessful. Even Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister, later admitted that it "was designed to dispel suspicions and misunderstandings, but, unfortunately it proved that it did little in that direction . . ."[64] But it was the Duce who, in July 1937, had sent the Italian ambassador in London, Dino Grandi, to Chamberlain requesting that conversations be once again begun, perhaps because Anglo-German relations seemed to be in a friendly phase.[65] At any rate, Chamberlain responded eagerly, but conversations did not begin until February 1938 due to several reasons, two being the Italian submarine attacks and Mussolini's withdrawal from the League of Nations. It was Italy's stirring up trouble in the eastern Mediterranean, Radio Bari's propaganda in Arabic and Italian support of Arabic nationalism, and the increase of Italian troops in Libya, that decided Chamberlain to enter negotiations

rather than any idea of using Italy against Germany.[66] The conversations resulted in the Anglo-Italian Accord (also known as the Easter Accords) signed in Rome on 16 April 1938. The accord reaffirmed the earlier "gentlemen's agreement" and settled a broad spectrum of contentious issues between the two powers.[67] Its entry into force, however, depended upon the withdrawal of Italian troops from Spain, and, since Franco did not achieve a spring-time victory, ratification was delayed for some time. Ciano waxed enthusiastic about the accords: "it is the beginning of a new era in our relations with Great Britain. Friendship on a footing of equality--the only kind of friendship we can accept, with London or with anybody else."[68] Back in England, though, Anthony Eden, Chamberlain's foreign minister who had resigned in February 1938 partly in protest to the talks with Italy, saw the agreement as a "strange document" and as one more instance of Britain's dancing to the Italian tune.[69]

English and French leaders alike hoped for a complementary Franco-Italian agreement; and one of the reasons for the delay in enforcement of the Easter Accords (although not a definite condition of enforcement)[70] was the anticipation of such an accord. In a personal letter of 7 April 1938 to Jules Blondel,

the chargé d'affaires in Rome, René Massigli, then political director of the Quai d'Orsay, declared that the necessity of approaching Italy was "bien comprise ici," but that the method of doing so posed a problem.[71] A week later, Blondel wired to Georges Bonnet the news that Ciano, through an intermediary, had indicated his hope that France would shortly make some overture to Italy.[72] Most Frenchmen, Blondel felt, truly hoped for a rapprochement with Italy.[73] Several factors were operational in the French decision to approach Rome. To begin with, there was the gradual shift to the right in French foreign policy which had culminated in Bonnet's appointment and which indicated that France would now be more willing to accommodate the dictators. Then there was the fear of what Italy's acquiescence in the Anschluss would mean to Italo-German relations. Did it herald a new era of Italo-German collaboration?[74] Would Italy turn even more to the Mediterranean? In eyes like those of Massigli, France was isolated; hence she must strengthen her remaining alliances and rid herself of as many hostile neighbours as possible.[75]

So it was in the hope of renewing the friendship with Italy that the Ciano-Blondel conversations began shortly after the signing of the

Easter Accords. Paris decided to delay sending an ambassador to Rome until after the decision of the League of Nations Council on the fate of Ethiopia was arrived at in May. If Rome felt that Blondel lacked the authority to conduct negotiations, then Paris would send a special representative,[76] but apparently this was unnecessary. At any rate, the negotiations, which aimed at achieving a result similar to the Easter Accords,[77] proceeded very well at first. The Italian press seemed pleased, perhaps because Mussolini hoped the talks would bolster his position at the approaching meeting with Hitler in Rome.[78] In fact, the Duce and Ciano had already decided that nothing would be settled until after Hitler's visit.[79] By 11 May, there were signs that Ciano and Blondel were encountering difficulties over the Spanish issue; but Ciano quickly reassured Blondel so as not "to weaken Bonnet's action at Geneva tomorrow."[80] Everything went well, though, for Italy at Geneva; Bonnet and Lord Halifax, the British foreign minister, obtained enough votes for the Council to declare that League members could decide on their own about recognizing or not the Italian conquest of Ethiopia. Two days later in Genoa, Mussolini, presumably with his ego inflated by the triumph at Geneva, made a "very strong, anti-French speech" which

went far beyond the original draft.[81] Both official and public opinion in France were aroused by the speech. Lord Perth, the English ambassador in Rome, made a *démarche* to Ciano protesting Mussolini's hard line against France.[82] A few days later, against the will of advisers in the Quai d'Orsay, Bonnet made one more attempt to smooth things over in an interview with Prunas, the Italian chargé d'affaires in Paris. But it was to no avail: by the end of May, Mussolini had declared the negotiations ended, although he told Ciano that he would come to terms with France just before the occupation of Albania "so that the blow may be struck in an atmosphere of general euphory."[83]

French relations with Italy remained at a low ebb during the summer of 1938. Daladier was most indignant at the Italian attitude; he ordered the recruitment of native soldiers in Tunisia and began a "little Maginot line" on the border between Tunisia and Libya. Bonnet still hoped fervently for an agreement. Under some pressure from London and in the interests of appeasing Mussolini, he closed the Catalan frontier in June to halt any passage of arms from France to Spain. But nothing came of it. In August, *Le Temps* stated that "since the closing by France of the Pyrenees frontier the responsibility for making a gesture towards

reopening negotiations [has] devolved upon Italy."[84] No gesture, however, came from Mussolini, and thus matters rested until after the Munich Conference. He declared, though, that if France reopened the Catalan frontier, it would mean war.[85]

* * *

The information contained in this chapter constitutes a vital part of the dossier with which François-Poncet would acquaint himself before leaving Paris to assume his post in Rome. The difficulties that he would encounter all had their roots in the past which not only formed a process of progressively irritating points between France and Italy, but also hardened attitudes in both countries. But Poncet's difficulties in carrying out his mission were not only with the Fascist leaders in Rome. He had also to contend with a government at home that was divided over the Italian question and a foreign ministry which, he would later complain, ignored his correspondence and his advice. How did this situation arise?

In France, foreign policy was the preserve of the cabinet, or conseil des ministres. Ideally the cabinet, guided by the foreign minister, made unanimous decisions and then took them to parliament for approval. In practice, however, a consensus was often difficult to

obtain, and frequently the cabinet relied upon only the "appearance of unanimity."[86] On the whole, the cabinet did not hamper the foreign minister too much, nor did parliament, which was customarily more concerned with domestic matters. Hence the foreign minister could usually:

> pursue a personal policy within the limits imposed by the traditions of his office, the pressure of the permanent staff, the "national interests" of France, and the crossfire of criticism from without. [87]

The permanent body which both advised and informed the foreign minister was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or, as it was more familiarly known, the Quai d'Orsay.[88] Here, all information from the diplomatic corps and press services was processed, pigeon-holed, and redistributed. As with most permanent bureaucracies, the Quai, in the interwar years, provided a certain continuity in foreign policy which favoured the traditional method of preserving French security through alliances and the maintenance of military strength.[89] Prior to World War I, the Quai had had a fair amount of influence on the formulation of foreign policy,[90] just as it exerted a not inconsiderable amount of control over public opinion, usually through the medium of Le Temps. Unfortunately, by the 1930s, elected leaders were neither consulting nor heeding

either the Quai or the diplomatic corps as much as they had formerly.[91] Part of the reason for this was the advent of modern communications; increasingly, foreign ministers used the telephone which bypassed the Quai. The rest of the reason concerned a certain amount of inefficiency at the Quai and its increasing bureaucratization.[92] Frequently, too, diplomats in the field complained that their opinions and information received "un accueil très froid" at the Quai.[93]

Second only in importance to the position of foreign minister was that of secretary general of the foreign ministry. Alexis Léger held this post through most of the 1930s. There is something of an aura of mystery around Léger; he not only left no memoirs to aid the historian, but even his contemporaries seem to have found him a little inscrutable. Viscount Templewood claims he was "the very embodiment of the conservative traditions of the Quai d'Orsay, yellow-complexioned, silent, imperturbable and sphinx-like."[94] Another Englishman thought him a gentle and charming man without forcefulness.[95] Léger's secretary, de Crouy Chanel, claims he worked hard, and he seems to have had a talent for analysis, for "il lisait avec aisance à travers les textes comme à travers les hommes."[96] This trait was reinforced apparently by a prodigious memory.[97]

Léger's views on foreign policy generally agreed with those of the Quai. Although he may have tried hard to steer clear of political prejudices in his judgement of foreign policy issues,[98] most sources agree that he supported traditional French policy and always insisted upon the primacy of the English alliance. Munich, therefore, was not agreeable to him, but he saw that, for France to risk war without England at her side, was impossible.[99] On Italy, the common view is that the Quai and Léger disliked her government. One dissenter to this opinion, however, is Georges Bonnet, the foreign minister in 1938 and 1939, who claims that Léger was favourable both to Italy and to the attempt to come to an agreement with her.[100] However, because Bonnet's later memories must sometimes be taken with a grain of salt, this claim may not be entirely valid.

Indeed Georges Bonnet and Alexis Léger seem to have been at odds more than once. Regarding the Italian problem, for instance, in the summer of 1938, an English functionary reported that the French foreign minister "is anxious to work with us and wishes us to strengthen his hand against his colleagues."[101] Bonnet's reports of his conversations with foreign emissaries often conflicted with what the Quai learned from the emissaries themselves; moreover, he sometimes changed

instructions to French diplomats abroad on his own initiative without informing the Quai.[102] Bonnet's relations with Daladier, while cordial enough in the beginning, exhibited an increasing disharmony despite what Bonnet's memoirs claim. Daladier suspected that Bonnet sometimes withheld information from him, and throughout 1939, the premier gradually moved closer to Léger for advice.[103] As well, René Massigli, the sometime political director at the Quai, claimed that Bonnet used the telephone frequently and "parfois à l'insu du président du conseil."[104]

The strained relations between Bonnet on the one side and Daladier and Léger on the other could not help but affect France's diplomatic corps abroad. A contemporary writer has several complaints to make of the diplomats.[105] Increasingly, ambassadors tended to tailor their reports to agree with the preconceived notions of French leaders. Nor were they frequently consulted or instructed by the foreign minister, a failing which left them unaware of governmental policy. Under these conditions, the diplomatic corps "en dépit des efforts louables de certains de ses membres, ne pouvait à la longue que subir une détérioration progressive."[106]

The experience of André François-Poncet as the ambassador of France in Rome in 1938-1939 reflected many

of these developing problems in diplomatic methods and communications. It also, of course, reflected the data in the Italian dossier with which Poncet would have been briefed by the Quai d'Orsay--the summary of Italian foreign policy in the interwar years, the periods of both conflict and co-operation in Franco-Italian relations, the imperatives of French strategical planning, and the British role in these matters. For the problems, old and new, with which the new ambassador in Rome would have to contend, had their roots in the past. Poncet, however, was an experienced diplomat, and he undoubtedly felt fully capable of dealing with whatever issues might arise in his embassy. Indeed, he approached his new post with confidence that he could help to restore the Paris-Rome Axis.

Chapter III

François-Poncet's First Weeks in Rome: November - December 1938

As the diverse considerations treated in the preceding dossier show, it is clear that the decision to send André François-Poncet to Rome had many origins. There seems to have been an immediate factor also.[1] The French press's lukewarm account of Mussolini's role at Munich, with its continued representation of Italy as a second-class power, had irritated the Italian leader who ordered a retaliatory article to be published in the Giornale d'Italia. Apparently Ciano informed Lord Perth, the British ambassador in Rome, about Mussolini's ruffled feelings, and Perth, in turn, reported to Neville Chamberlain. The British prime minister immediately and strongly urged the French leaders to do something about patching up their quarrel with Italy. This advice, the French were only too happy to follow. Moreover, the moment seemed auspicious for a successful approach because the Duce had just announced the withdrawal from Spain of 10,000 troops. Perhaps this signified the dénouement of the contentious Spanish issue which had for so long divided France and Italy.

After spending only a few days in Paris en route from Berlin, André François-Poncet arrived in Rome

on 7 November 1938 having been duly accredited to the "King of Italy and Emperor of Ethiopia." Unfortunately, however, he would find his sojourn in the Eternal City probably less satisfying than that in the German capital, for reasons that would become apparent in the months to come. But Poncet was not to realize this immediately upon his arrival, although he seems to have had a premonition. Just before his train entered Rome, a dramatic electrical accident halted it for an hour or so. The incident appeared to Poncet as a bad omen for his mission in Rome.[2] Eventually, however, the train drew into the station where Poncet was warmly greeted by members of the French colony in Rome. As well, a fair-sized crowd of Italians was on hand to cheer him. This show of approval annoyed the Duce who had ordered that no fanfare be made over Poncet's arrival and that the Italian press be as subdued as possible.[3]

After this warm welcome to Rome, Poncet proceeded to the French embassy which was housed in the Farnèse Palace. Here, in this exquisite architectural delight, the very size of which made modern furniture seem to belong to a race of pygmies,[4] Poncet would live and work. In his memoirs, he speaks well of the embassy staff--Jean-Paul Garnier, the first secretary, Hubert

Guérin, the chargé d'affaires and councillor, Roger Lalouette, Christian de Margerie, and Armand Bérard, the latter arriving in February 1939 to be the second secretary. Sanguinetto and Montarnal were respectively the commercial and financial attachés, while General Toussaint (later succeeded by General Parisot) was the military attaché. According to Poncet, they were a remarkable group of young men, intelligent and industrious, an opinion in which the French foreign ministry must have concurred, for several of them later became ambassadors.[5] Mention should be made, too, of Jérôme Carcopino, the director of the French school on the second floor of the Farnèse Palace, for he and Poncet enjoyed a supportive friendship based partly upon their mutual interest in archeology. At least, with all these men, Poncet seems to have experienced an amity that was to temper much of the enmity shown him by official Rome.

After Poncet's arrival in Rome, the tone of the Italian press continued to be hostile, indeed vituperative, toward France. If Poncet thought that he could reassume the tradition of Camille Barrère (a former French ambassador in Rome), he was sadly mistaken.[6] Mussolini already had told Ciano that he did not like the new ambassador and that he would "help him

to break his head."[7] A few days later, Ciano noted in his diary that better relations with France were far off.[8] Mussolini had just told him what he expected from France: joint control (a condominium of sorts) in Djibouti, something similar in Tunisia, and direct control of Corsica, although he was uninterested in Savoy. At this time, he specified no time element for the accomplishment of these goals; that would be determined by future events. Thus the chilly atmosphere that Poncet detected upon his arrival in Rome was indeed based upon something more substantial than Mussolini's pique at the tardiness of the French to recognize the Italian Empire.

On 9 November, Poncet paid his first official visit to Ciano. Galeazzo Ciano had become the minister of foreign affairs in June 1936, an appointment that probably had something to do with him being Mussolini's son-in-law. Although later Ciano's wife would claim that he had never favoured Germany,[9] and his diary certainly shows that Mussolini's predilection for a German alliance alarmed him, Ciano was far from being a confirmed Germanophobe.[10] It is likely that he had more influence with his father-in-law than his diary indicates; the Duce, after all, seems to have been an indecisive man, and, if nothing else, Ciano had more

access to him than other Fascist leaders.[11] Ciano's character has often been criticized, perhaps not unjustly; he seems to have been a rather vain man, fond of strutting about. But Poncet liked him--he found the younger man kind as well as methodical and hard-working,[12] and their relationship became more sympathetic as time wore on, and war approached in the summer of 1939.

François-Poncet's first interview with Ciano went well enough,[13] and the foreign minister said nothing to alarm the French ambassador. Poncet began by stating that France had no intention of rupturing the Rome-Berlin Axis, and he expressed the wish that the Axis and the Anglo-French entente could be aligned in a common front to assure the peace of Europe. Ciano replied courteously that Italy desired the same goal; his government, moreover, was not opposed to the Franco-German conversations currently underway in preparation for the approaching signing of the Franco-German Declaration. The Spanish question, however, continued to be the barricade between France and Italy of which Mussolini had spoken in his Genoa speech of 14 May. Although France had closed the Catalan frontier, the Duce was well aware that many in France still urged help for the Republicans. Despite the recall of the 10,000

men from Spain, he remained as adamantly as ever behind Franco. If France, however, would entirely forsake any support of Barcelona, "il n'y a guère entre nous que des moustiques."[14] Poncet answered that the French government was carefully adhering to the Non-Intervention Pact, and that it was highly unlikely that it would capitulate to the demands of those hoping to assist the Spanish government. Ciano's words, however, had impressed upon Poncet the fact that Spain was the point upon which Franco-Italian relations would sink or swim.

In sum, the tone of Poncet's report to the Quai d'Orsay on his first conversation with Ciano was hopeful. For his part, Ciano felt that the ambassador gave the appearance of being more confident than he really was. At the end of the interview, Poncet looked weary and pensive, and Ciano concluded that "it is not easy to find one's way about in Rome."[15]

Three days after his audience with Ciano, Poncet dispatched to the Quai d'Orsay a perceptive report on the state of Italian psychology.[16] In this document, he discussed the attitude of Italian leaders toward France. Italy had not yet gained enough international status to be able to overcome the resentment felt toward France for her cavalier treatment

of their nation; that is, Italy suffered still from an inferiority complex with respect to her "Latin sister." Thus the Italian press had to continue to villify and stigmatize her as decadent. The internal condition of Italy, in addition, required an external enemy or "bogey" to deflect public interest from domestic problems. Conversely, of course, Fascist Italy was quickly enraged at real or imagined insults in the French press. The fact that Mussolini was a former journalist only aggravated the whole problem. Poncet ended his dispatch with the warning that these psychological elements had to be emphasized because they could be decisive factors in future Franco-Italian relations.

Indeed, Mussolini had already opened a little campaign against France, one which concerned the million or so Italian refugees who had fled to France or French possessions in order to escape the Fascist rêgime. He decided to try to repatriate them; Italian leaders apparently feared that France would turn these emigrants against their mother country should war break out.[17] Mussolini was far from unopposed in this decision, since a large influx of population would only make absurd his contention that overpopulation dictated colonial expansion. But he forged ahead with the campaign for

the publicity value it afforded.[18] Only a few days later, the Duce instructed Ciano to inform Dino Grandi, the Italian ambassador in London, about proposed Italian claims on Tunisia and Djibouti and for the revision of the tariffs applying to shipping in the Suez Canal. After Ciano did as he was told, he relayed the information to the minister of propaganda, Starace, so that he could "do his work of preparing the masses."[19]

In the meantime, as Poncet knew, discussions between France and Germany were underway. In late October, Mussolini had declared that he was not opposed to them as they related only to Franco-German matters.[20] By 8 November, however, he was asking, through Bernardo Attolico, the Italian ambassador in Berlin, that Germany delay the signing of the Franco-German Declaration until after Chamberlain and Halifax had visited Paris later in November.[21] The Duce, undoubtedly, felt he would be better able to gauge the direction of French policy as it might be influenced by the meeting with the British. Ernst von Weizsäcker, the state secretary of the German foreign ministry, complied with the Duce's request. But only a short time later, Attolico informed Weizsäcker that Ciano wished him to know that Mussolini now viewed the approaching declaration "in a somewhat different

light."[22] Was he now fearing that a Franco-German rapprochement might leave Italy out in the cold? Soon, however, he had something to strengthen his hand and to buttress his prestige. On 2 November, Neville Chamberlain had announced to the House of Commons that the British government had decided to bring the Anglo-Italian Agreement of April 1938 into force.

Several factors conditioned Chamberlain's decision.[23] Originally, the enforcement of the Easter Accords had been made contingent upon the settlement of the Spanish issue and the abatement of this threat to the peace of Europe. Mussolini's promise to withdraw the 10,000 troops from Spain had been carried out, and now the Duce claimed that he would withdraw the rest of his forces without replacing them with fresh troops. Moreover, Chamberlain was grateful to the Duce for his role at Munich. And now that Munich had ended the British part in eastern Europe, the Mediterranean assumed more importance than ever.[24] A friendly Italy, bound by an accord, would ease British security problems in this area. Lord Halifax hoped that bringing the Easter Accords into force would allow Mussolini to free himself from Hitler's influence and to revert to Italy's traditional position of equilibrium between Germany on the one side and France and Britain on the other.[25] Not

all Englishmen thought the accord a good idea. Winston Churchill observed how Chamberlain first had appeased Hitler, and then turned to Italy because "there must be love all around."[26]

Mussolini was very happy to see the Easter Accords put into force. He had threatened Britain with drastic action if she failed to act--"the usual blackmail" as Halifax's secretary termed it.[27] In reality, Mussolini had to produce something positive for domestic consumption. His costly intervention in Spain had not brought victory to Franco; to divert attention from this failure, he turned to England for satisfaction.[28] But he had no intention of letting the enforcement of the accords change his policy of which the Rome-Berlin Axis was the foundation; it would be to Italy's benefit to work with Britain but not with France, at whose expense he intended to benefit.[29] An additional bonus for Mussolini, of course, was Britain's recognition of the Italian Empire. Before Lord Perth signed the declaration bringing the accords into effect, he had presented new letters of credence to the Quirinal. He also had raised the idea that Chamberlain and Halifax visit Rome. Ciano had agreed, and although Mussolini had hesitated at first, in the end, he too, had consented, but with the stipulation that the

English were to make the first overtures.[30]

In this happy moment for Italy and England, France was more or less left out in the cold. To begin with, the British government did not immediately inform the French government of the decision to enforce the Easter Accords, nor had any complementary Franco-Italian agreement been developed. It is understandable, then, that "a certain ill humor" in Paris was evident to the German ambassador.[31] François-Poncet's reports on the manner in which the implementation of the accords was received in Rome must have done nothing to cheer French leaders.[32] Italians were absolutely overjoyed at their new relationship with England, and the Italian press enthused endlessly about the brilliance of Italy's position in Europe as an equal partner of the British Empire which, indeed, had come begging to Italy. However, as Poncet also noted, the press carefully emphasized that the Franco-Italian situation remained unchanged, that France was the reason for the prolongation of the Spanish conflict, and that the Laval-Mussolini Accords of 1935 could no longer form the basis of Franco-Italian negotiations because too much had changed in the interval. Did Italy now think that she could separate the two western allies? The only partially happy note for France was that, on 19

November, Poncet presented his letters of credence to the King of Italy who was very friendly and courteous towards him.[33]

While Poncet was busy in Rome fulfilling the duties demanded by protocol, Chamberlain and Halifax journeyed to Paris, on 23 November, for talks of a mainly military nature. During the conference, the British leaders gave their approval to the text of the Franco-German Declaration which Halifax's secretary called "a thoroughly dishonest declaration intended to chloroform public opinion."[34] And both sets of leaders agreed not to grant belligerent rights to Franco until the Italian volunteers had withdrawn. Earlier, Chamberlain had noted in his diary the reason for the visit to Paris; although Britain wanted rapprochement with Germany and Italy, "we were not on that account going to forget our old Allies, and finally to make it possible to go to Rome in January . . ."[35] But the proposed visit to Rome was not mentioned. Why it was not is not entirely clear; perhaps the British feared a refusal by the French to acquiesce in what would appear to them as another attempt by Mussolini to separate Britain from France. Mussolini indeed must have been seen by French leaders as their bête noire. His virulent anti-French campaign was intended not only to

envenom relations between the two western allies but to stymie the approaching Franco-Italian declaration. If he succeeded, France would certainly be left in isolation. It must have appeared to the French that their British ally, in appeasing the Duce with the implementation of the Easter Accords, was content to sacrifice France on the altar of British Mediterranean interests. Two members of the British delegation in Paris noted rumours that Daladier was drinking heavily.[36] It is no wonder if the French premier sought comfort in the bottle; the severe financial troubles at home only exacerbated the international fix in which France found herself.

In the meantime, François-Poncet had very little encouraging news to report from Rome. The Anglo-French talks in Paris had not upset Italian leaders; indeed, they considered the western entente to be slightly weakened as a result of them.[37] The Soviet ambassador in Rome saw little hope for a Franco-Italian rapprochement.[38] From another source, Poncet learned that Ciano was attempting to persuade Ribbentrop to discontinue the Franco-German talks. Italian leaders were maintaining a cool and reserved "attitude d'attente."[39] For what were they waiting? Poncet outlined several items that concerned them. Among them

were the uncertainty of the general European situation, the nature of Germany's real plans for Russia, the colonial problem, and the Anglo-French conversations in Paris. More ominous news pertained to the voyage to Berlin of General Pinna of the Italian air force; the purpose of his visit was to prepare an accord with the German general staff.[40] Poncet also reminded the Quai d'Orsay that the memory of what the Italians termed the betrayal of 1935 was still vivid in their country.[41] This memory, combined with the events of the intervening years, meant that Mussolini would be very cautious about any new arrangment with France; indeed, Poncet wondered if Italy really knew what she wanted.[42] Perhaps, having received the short end of the Axis stick, she would turn toward the Mediterranean for more compensation. As if in answer to his query, he learned a few days later that instructions had been issued in Rome for propaganda statements to stress the Italian colonial claims on Tunisia and Corsica. The extent of the claims was contingent upon the internal state of France which Mussolini was watching carefully. If France's instability continued, the claims would be augmented, but "s'il se rétablit, on traitera avec lui dans un souci de pacification européenne."[43]

It was not until 29 November that François-

Poncet had his first audience with Mussolini, a meeting that had been requested of Ciano some three weeks earlier but which had been deliberately delayed by the Duce.[44] According to diplomatic convention, Poncet should have met with the leader of the government before his audience with King Victor Emmanuel, but the king, evidently realizing what Mussolini was up to, made an earlier appointment with the new French ambassador. Despite his rudeness, Mussolini received Poncet amiably enough in the same room of the Venice Palace where Poncet had met him seven years before. Ciano, who was present throughout the interview, remained standing while Poncet sat across from the Duce.

Poncet opened the conversation by declaring that his appointment to Rome signified the intent of the French government to normalize and to improve Franco-Italian relations. The Duce answered that the Italian government had the same intention but that the Spanish war presented an obstacle; and he deeply regretted that, at their recent meeting, the French and British leaders had not seen fit to grant belligerent rights to Franco.[45] To this, Poncet responded that the French domestic situation and the opposition of a large part of the working class obviated the granting of rights. From there, Mussolini turned to the current labour troubles

that France was experiencing--indeed, he was very interested in them--and said that he knew what Daladier was going through. Poncet expressed the hope that once the government had settled the upcoming general strike, it would have more liberty of action. He then offered the idea of a four-power pact which Mussolini took up eagerly: "ce sont exactement les buts de la politique italienne. Elle n'en a jamais eu d'autres. J'ai préconisé il y a longtemps l'entente directe entre les quatre puissances occidentales . . . "[46] He would, however, include Poland in any pact, although certainly not the Soviet Union. On this subject, the audience came to an end with Mussolini declaring that "attendons donc, attendons ce qu'apporteront en France les jours prochains."[47]

Inexplicably Ciano's account of the audience differs somewhat from that of Poncet.[48] According to him, the atmosphere was not as amiable as Poncet claimed--apparently Mussolini was suffering from a miserable cold--indeed, the Duce seems to have been almost rude to the new ambassador. Where the accounts agree is on the interest that Mussolini showed in France's internal troubles. But Ciano claims that he quickly rejected the pact idea, and Poncet left "looking much less sure of himself than when he came in."[49]

Quite possibly Poncet saw the interview in a much rosier light than Ciano because, after all, he had great hopes of drawing Mussolini nearer France's orbit. And Ciano, in his Fascist confidence that held democratic France to be decadent, could bolster his own feelings of superiority by deceiving himself into thinking that Poncet had been sneered at, and cowed, by the Duce. Unfortunately, the issue of what was actually said about the pact idea has to remain something of a mystery. Was it likely that Mussolini, with his penchant for the dramatic, would want to spoil the little surprise that he had in store for Poncet the next day by letting the ambassador suspect his true feelings about France? Later the same day, Ciano virtually contradicted what he claimed, in his diary, to be Mussolini's attitude to the pact. Meeting with a group of Polish students, Ciano assured them that, while Italy did not intend to propose a new four-power pact, should another power do so, she would insist that Poland be part of it, a statement which certainly did not imply that Italy objected to such a pact.[50]

By the time of Poncet's audience with Mussolini, the Italian press was in full voice over Italy's colonial ambitions. There was a great deal of rhetoric about the Mediterranean and the new imperial

status of Italy. Specific issues were also raised: the Suez Canal tariffs, Tunisia, Djibouti. Poncet, however, found it strange that France was being asked to clarify her position regarding the Italian claims.[51] But the press asserted that, if France were truly interested in ameliorating relations with Italy, she would not haggle over letting Italy fulfil her destiny in the Mediterranean. Poncet concluded that Italy intended to try to realize her claims as soon as a favourable occasion arose.[52] What the Italian leaders seemed to seek was a colonial triumph to balance the sacrifices that the Italian people had had to make to the Rome-Berlin Axis. Until they realized some success, the hostility toward France would continue.

The issue of colonial claims came to a head on 30 November. Upon Ciano's insistence, François-Poncet attended a special session of the Fascist Chamber of Deputies at which Ciano was to deliver his annual speech on foreign policy. In essence, the speech was a moderately toned review of recent events in Italian diplomacy that praised Mussolini's role at Munich and put a great deal of emphasis upon the recent enforcement of the Anglo-Italian Accords. France was scarcely mentioned. All went well until Ciano voiced the words,

> [Peace] is to be the prime object of our

> policy, which we will pursue with tenacity and realism not untinged with that circumspection which is indispensable when it is our intention to safe-guard with unshakeable firmness the interests and natural aspirations of the Italian people. 53

Immediately several deputies rose to their feet crying "Tunisi!", "Corsica!" and even "Savoia!".[54] Poncet promptly thought that the demonstration had been well planned in advance. Mussolini showed no reaction; and the president of the Chamber (Ciano's father) seems to have made only a perfunctory effort to restore order. Realizing that he had been drawn into an ambush, Poncet "put on his top hat, adjusted his elegant monocle, and smiling, drove away,"[55] to the echo of further demonstrations in the street. Although Ciano maintained that the uproar was entirely spontaneous, he really fooled no one. In his diary, however, he related how pleased Mussolini was about it: "that is the way to pose a problem and to set a people in motion," he said,[56] a statement that would imply that Mussolini had planned everything. In fact, an American news agency had received from its correspondent in Rome information about the demonstration two days before it occurred.[57] Then a few days later, it came to Poncet's notice that the Italian under-secretary of state had ordered employers to give their workers a holiday on the afternoon of 30 November, ostensibly to be available for

demonstrating.[58]

If the manifestation in the Chamber was not spontaneous, then what was Mussolini trying to accomplish, and why did he choose that particular time? Opinions vary slightly. Probably the best explanation, and the one which ties in with Mussolini's interest in French domestic problems, is that the demonstration was co-ordinated with the French general strike called for 30 November. The hope was to catch France in a vulnerable position when she could do little to oppose the Italian claims. Unfortunately for the Fascist machinations and their instigators, who considered that France was "finished," the strike already had failed before Ciano began his speech.[59] Some contemporaries argued that the proposed visit of Chamberlain to Rome, about which France had not been consulted and which seemed to weaken her international position, gave Mussolini the idea that the hour was propitious for a demonstration and that the British leader would mediate between the two protagonists.[60] Other contemporaries believed that the Duce meant to remind Germany that she still owed Italy compensation for past favours, while still others were convinced that the two dictators were working hand-in-hand on the colonial issue,[61] or that Hitler was urging Mussolini to take action in order to

divert Italy's attention from German schemes in the Balkans. Perhaps, too, Italy thought that she had better act before she lost German support.[62] Bonnet took yet another tack: the demonstration "était une manière de protestation contre la venue de Ribbentrop à Paris qui avait rendu Mussolini furieux."[63] In England, The New Statesman and Nation averred that blackmail was Mussolini's purpose: "[b]y asking for something he cannot get and generously withdrawing the demand in the interests of peace, Mussolini may get things on which he has really set his heart."[64] Whatever the individual validity of all these hypotheses for the Duce's action, they show the bewilderment that his foreign policy created in all minds. And France, again humiliated by her "Latin sister," was one of the most perplexed.

As with Poncet in Rome, the initial reaction in France to the Italian demonstration was one of shock. Apparently Bonnet and the Quai d'Orsay tried first to suppress, and then to tone down, the news in the French press,[65] but this ruse failed; French correspondents in Rome already had wired in their reports. Bonnet predicated the suppression of news upon what he had learned from Rome.[66] His first move had been to send off a telegram to Poncet asking him to see Ciano immediately to protest the demonstration and to

determine what lay behind it. This Poncet did. But virtually the only definite answer that he received from the Italian foreign minister was that the demonstration was spontaneous and revealed only what a widely diffused public opinion must hold to be true, but that it in no way represented official government policy which must be surmised only from the speeches of Mussolini and himself.[67] Poncet, in the same conversation, made several other queries of Ciano. Were the 1935 accords not the proper basis for Franco-Italian negotiations? Ciano replied that only Mussolini could answer this question; in his opinion, intervening circumstances had made it necessary for the accords, which had never been executed, to be re-examined. Poncet then stated that France would not refuse conciliation but that she rejected any alienation of French national territory, at which point Ciano reminded him that Spain still lay between France and Italy. Poncet recalled Ciano's statement that, once the Spanish issue was out of the way, only "mosquitoes" would separate the two countries, "mais après les incidents du 30 novembre, il y avait lieu de craindre que ces moustiques ne fussent en réalité, des éléphants."[68] In his diary, the Italian foreign minister recorded, with some pride, that Poncet seemed worried and that he was "as white as a sheet" at

the end of the conversation.[69]

There matters stood for the next while until Italy once again sprang a nasty surprise on the French. In the meantime, Poncet continued to send lengthy reports to the Quai d'Orsay in which he relayed and analyzed the information and opinions which came to him from many different quarters. Although it is difficult to make a definitive statement on the volume of his correspondence--the Documents diplomatiques français have, of course, been compiled from selected documents--it is readily apparent that he was carrying on in Rome the reputation that he had acquired in Berlin of being an acute, untiring, and critical observer. A resumé of his observations will both show his own view of the Italian situation and the direction in which he felt events were moving.

Already on the day following the manifestation in the Italian chamber, Poncet had realized, in fact had been informed by the diplomatic "grapevine," that the Italian colonial claims as well as the Spanish issue now blocked an amelioration in Franco-Italian relations. One high-ranking Fascist official considered the 1935 accords to be "morts et enterrés."[70] If France attempted to settle the Tunisian issue unilaterally, Italy's answer would be war with the full support of

Germany. To Poncet, the incidents of 30 November "doivent être interprétés comme le premier signe extérieur d'un plan concerté et bien arrêté dont on pense que nous ferions les frais et qui se développera au cours des semaines prochaines."[71] Italian leaders, in Poncet's view, now meant to maintain the tension with France and, protected by the Anglo-Italian Accords and hopefully supported by Hitler, to produce a situation that would upset the British and result in France being forced to make extensive concessions to Italy.

On 5 December, Poncet warned the Quai that the French press's expression of its doubts about German support for the Italian claims was not only irritating Italian leaders but actually playing right into Italy's hands.[72] What Italy seemed to desire was an exacerbation of the conflict so that the resultant international tension would have to lead to a Mediterranean settlement similar to that of Munich. Both François Charles-Roux, the French ambassador at the Vatican, and Poncet reported that contingents of carabiniers now guarded the Taverna and Farnèse palaces, a rather transparent ploy meant by Fascist leaders to indicate a ferocious vindictiveness of the Italian people against France which generally did not exist.[73] In sum, Poncet quickly realized the ramifications that

might follow the 30 November manifestation. He also worried about the degree of firmness that the Briish were showing, and what effect this would have upon Italian actions.

The English reaction to the demonstration was, perhaps, less heated than the French might have wished. To begin with, Lord Perth sent this report to the Foreign Office: "[t]his passage [Ciano's words, 'the national aspirations of the Italian people'] was received with prolonged acclamation, which according to some accounts included cries of 'Tunis, Tunis,' though these were not distinguishable from the Diplomatic Gallery where I was seated."[74] Perhaps Perth's hearing was deficient, but as a supposed admirer of Mussolini and the Fascists,[75] he may have unconsciously rejected what he heard. Whatever the case, the English reaction was initially no more than lukewarm or, at least, varied, one of their main concerns being the fate of the proposed visit of Chamberlain to Rome. Nevertheless, Halifax instructed Perth to protest to Ciano about the demonstration and to remind him about the stipulation in the Anglo-Italian Agreement about maintaining the <u>status quo</u>,[76] an indication that Britain was more worried about her own Mediterranean interests. The day before, Sir Alexander Cadogan, the permanent under-secretary of

state for foreign affairs, suggested that the British government should also "give the ice-creamers a crack on the head,"[77] advice that Halifax seems to have followed to some extent. Perth went dutifully to see Ciano, but nothing the foreign minister said to him changed his opinion that the object of the demonstration was anything more than a means for Italy to gain a bargaining advantage in future Franco-Italian negotiations.[78] He also discussed the situation with François-Poncet who, he thought, "took an alarmist view" although Perth could certainly sympathize with the French ambassador's concern.[79] For his part, Poncet warned Perth not to be so optimistic and recalled to him the fate of Czechoslovakia, but, "bien entendu, je ne l'ai pas ébranlé."[80]

Chamberlain's attitude, whether genuinely or inadvertently lukewarm, also disturbed the French. When asked in the House of Commons of 12 December if any sort of understanding existed whereby Britain had to assist France in the case of an Italian aggression against the French Empire, Chamberlain answered that "no such specific requirement exists in any treaty or pact with France."[81] The next evening, however, he amended this disappointing statement by declaring that "[o]ur relations with France are so close as to pass beyond

mere legal obligations, since they are founded on identity of interest," and on 14 December, he asserted that the maintenance of the Mediterranean status quo included Tunisia.[82] Despite Chamberlain's later statements, the Italians continued to hope that he might yet encourage France to make concessions. Perhaps the tone of the London Times helped to maintain this idea in Italian minds. Although this newspaper disliked the whole idea of the claims and the demonstration, it considered that Italy did have "legitimate grievances" over the Suez Canal administration and the area of Djibouti containing the Addis Ababa to Djibouti railway.[83] British reaction to the 30 November demonstration was by no means uniform, but, as is to be expected, it was mainly British interests in the Mediterranean that dictated their disfavour rather than a sincere concern for the French position.

The other opinion that concerned Poncet and his superiors was that of Germany. Undeniably Italy counted rather heavily upon German support of her colonial claims. But was she justified in believing in German approval? Apparently she was not. The German press claimed that the Italian claims were none of Germany's business, nor that of Britain for that matter.[84] A high-ranking Nazi posed this question to a

member of the French embassy in Berlin: "[c]royez-vous que le Führer risquerait pour les Italiens de Tunisie ce qu'il ne veut pas risquer pour les Allemands d'Alsace?"[85] As well, the German ambassador in Rome was supposed to have told Ciano that Germany "ne saurait appuyer les revendications italiennes quant à la Corse et quant à la Tunisie."[86] Italian leaders, moreover, were told by German leaders to take no action against France. Ciano must have taken this admonition to heart, for, on 12 December, he sent Attolico a list of justifications for the 30 November demonstration to give to Ribbentrop, one of the excuses being the old one about the spontaneity of the affair in the Fascist chamber.[87] Obviously by now, Ciano was less confident of the expected support from the German end of the Axis.

On 6 December, Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German foreign minister, arrived in Paris to sign the Franco-German Declaration. During the course of his conversations with Bonnet, the subject of Franco-Italian relations rather naturally arose, for Bonnet was eager to learn what the Reich thought of the Italian claims. Ribbentrop asserted that he had not been informed by the Italian government of its claims on France; he thought, however, that Italian participation in the administration of the Suez Canal and some shares in the

Addis Ababa to Djibouti railway were not unreasonable. But the German government could never support any territorial claims: "[j]e vais expliquer ce soir par le radio . . . que l'Allemagne renonce solennellement à l'Alsace-Lorraine. Comment pouvez-vous supposer un instant qu'elle serait prête à faire la guerre pour donner Djibouti ou la Corse à l'Italie?"[88] German interest in the Italian claims, then, seemed to go no further than the point at which the Reich's foreign policy coincided with that of Italy in the Rome-Berlin Axis.[89]

Back in Rome and seemingly to please Ribbentrop, Mussolini and Ciano temporarily suspended the anti-French campaign in the Italian press.[90] François-Poncet reported to the Quai d'Orsay that the Italian press had dutifully and reservedly published the events of the 6 and 7 December, but it accompanied its accounts with repeated assurances of the unshakeable nature of the Rome-Berlin Axis. Although Poncet found it difficult to ascertain Italian opinion from the press, daily observation led him to believe that Rome had done everything possible to block the signing of the Franco-German Declaration. When all her efforts failed, she resigned herself to it unwillingly.[91]

Poncet continued to speculate and worry about

the nature of Mussolini's intentions. His well written and studious correspondence continued to flow into the Quai. Was it carefully perused by the staff at the foreign ministry? It is difficult to know although Bonnet, at one point, reprimanded him for trying to confuse Italian intentions regarding the claims with German policy during the Czechoslovakian crisis.[92] Poncet had advice for the Quai, too. France had to stand firm, but she had also to be prepared to speak reasonably with whomever would do the same for her.[93] In a later dispatch, Poncet sketched out the attitudes that he would like to see France adopt.[94] First, France had to avoid any anti-Italian polemics that would only buttress the Italian position. She should make it clear that she meant to maintain the integrity of her empire. But, at the same time, France had not to refuse to discuss matters that did not pertain to territorial questions. She should be willing to examine the changes that had occurred since the signing of the 1935 accords while, at the same time, she had to affirm the validity of them. Finally, France had to refrain from doing anything that Italy could use against her to show Britain or Germany that French obstinancy forced Mussolini to formulate even more extreme claims. This was Poncet's advice, and it is

doubtful that the Quai had enough time to do anything more than to read it when Italy decided to denounce formally the Laval-Mussolini Accords of 1935.

In essence, the Italian denunciation of the accords must have been less a climax and more of an anti-climax to François-Poncet and the French leaders. For weeks the Italian press had been declaring them dead, and Ciano himself virtually had denied their validity in his first conversation with Poncet. (The accords had never been implemented except for the transfer to Italy of 2,500 shares in the Addis Ababa to Djibouti railway.) For some reason or other, the Quai blamed Poncet for raising the question of the validity of the accords which, presumably, gave Ciano and Mussolini the idea of denouncing them.[95] Obviously the Quai must have been looking for a scapegoat. On the very day of his first audience with Ciano weeks earlier, Poncet had sent home a dispatch in which he reviewed an article in the officially inspired Relazioni internazionali. The article in question gave him the impression that the accords "peuvent être considérés comme désormais périmés."[96] So it would seem that Italian leaders needed no suggestive questions from Poncet to make up their minds. This is a small point, of course, but it demonstrates, perhaps, the lack of confidence that

French policy makers sometimes had in their ambassadors.

The essence of Ciano's communication, to be relayed by Poncet to Bonnet and Léger, was that the 1935 accords were being denounced because they were "historiquement dépassés."[97] Ratifications were never exchanged, the special Tunisian convention had never been negotiated, and events in the intervening years had rendered them obsolete. Ciano's note, however, implied that there was hope yet for further negotiations between the French and Italian governments. As Ciano wrote in his diary, "we must not, just yet, pull the cord too tight," because then the French might prevail upon Chamberlain to cancel his forthcoming visit to Rome.[98] On 19 December, Bonnet rose in the French chamber and, without mentioning Ciano's note of 17 December, made his famous statement that "[l]a France n'accepterai de céder un pouce de son territoire à l'Italie; toute tentative pour réaliser une telle prétention ne pourrait aboutir qu'à un conflit armé."[99]

Meanwhile, back in Rome, François-Poncet wrote a rather impassioned plea that France not close all doors to further negotiations with Italy, in case Mussolini would then decide to try one of his surprise aggressions against a French possession.[100] In his memoirs, the French ambassador explains why he felt a

door should be kept open:

> Le rôle de la diplomatie, son devoir, est d'empêcher que ne se crée l'irrémédiable. Un échange de vues aurait au moins l'avantage de nous renseigner sur la nature et l'étendue des revendications italiennes. Enfin, Mussolini était capricieux, sujet à des sautes d'humeur. Sa politique étrangère n'avait jamais été très cohérente. On ne pouvait poser en principe qu'elle échapperait, désormais, à tout revirement. 101

His plea, however, went unheeded at the foreign ministry. On 25 December, Poncet delivered to Ciano the reply of the French government to the Italian note of 17 December. Essentially, it was a defense of the validity of the accords and France's actions toward Italy since 1935.[102] But it contained no indication that France would be willing to re-examine the problems separating her from Italy. The next day, Poncet indicated to Perth his disappointment over the failure of his government to implement his suggestion to keep open a door to Italy. He also mentioned to Perth that the tone of the French note "indicated how strong must be the feeling of resentment at Paris about Italy's conduct."[103]

Poncet had correctly evaluated emotions in the French capital. Public opinion had arisen <u>en masse</u> against the Italian insolence. Facetiously it must be admitted, <u>Candide</u> claimed French rights to Sicily, and Parisian students demanded Vesuvius and Venice.[104] For the first time in years, the French overcame their

domestic dissensions to unite behind a demand to save their empire; and affirmations of loyalty flowed in from Tunisia and Corsica where fear of Italian rule was predicated upon Mussolini's reign of terror in Ethiopia.

Government opinion followed much the same lines as that of the mass of French people. Bonnet's failure to mention the Italian denunciation of the Laval-Mussolini Accords in his speech in the Chamber of 19 December inspired some fear that he planned a sort of Mediterranean Munich, an anxiety that had begun with the apparently lukewarm reaction of the British to the Italian claims and the announcement of Chamberlain's intention to visit Rome. In fact, on 29 December, the foreign minister's omission sparked a fairly heated protest from the Chamber about his methods. If Bonnet actually had concealed the Italian note, one deputy on the left charged, then he was resorting to secret diplomacy; if he had been ignorant of the note, "alors, que dire des services de nos ambassades et de notre personnel du Quai d'Orsay," if the note had been forty-eight hours in transit from Rome to Paris.[105] Members of the right, as well, added their criticisms. Louis Marin insisted that it was insufficient to state that no concessions would be made to Italy: the French government had to give "rien, absolutement rien, de plus

que ce qui avait été signé en 1935 . . . "[106]

Eventually Bonnet arose and averred that he had had no knowledge of the Italian note when he had spoken in the Chamber on the nineteenth; but even had he known, he would have said nothing because the Italian government had not made the note public and because he would have had no prior chance to discuss the issue with the cabinet. Bonnet's smooth response did not entirely satisfy the Chamber, an indication both that his Italian policy was becoming suspect to many in the government and that feelings against Italy were running high.

Daladier quickly quashed the notion of a Mediterranean Munich: "[l]a France ne cédera pas un pouce de territoire à l'Italie," he proclaimed at a meeting of the Committee of Permanent Defense.[107] The attitude of Léger and the Quai was demonstrated by a document prepared by ministry officials which listed French initiatives and Italian reactions to them since 1935. Phipps, the British ambassador in Paris, summarized the document in these words: "[i]n taking stock of Franco-Italian relations as they are now, the French government feel that they have made repeated and persistent efforts during the past two years to improve the atmosphere, only to be met with a rebuff on each

occasion."[108]

By now Daladier and Léger were in fairly close agreement upon what should be done about Italy. Mussolini's outrageous demands virtually had convinced them that further attempts at negotiation with the Duce were useless, at this time at any rate. Undoubtedly, however, something more profound than Italy's claims forced Daladier and Léger to assume a firmer policy toward the dictators. The memory and the shame of Munich were still fresh. Now, with the French Empire threatened by an adversary considered to be inconsequential compared with Germany, Daladier and Léger could stand firm. What Bonnet had in mind is less clear. Although he had declared that France would not cede an inch of territory, certain other actions of his, such as the possible concealment of the denunciation of the 1935 accords, indicated that he was definitly not averse to further overtures to Italy. In essence, his attitude is reminiscent of his two-sided view of the Czechoslovakian affair: publicly he had proclaimed that France would defend her eastern ally, but privately he already had sacrificed her. In the Italian crisis, with the integrity of his own country at stake, would he go to such lengths to avoid war?

It must have seemed to François-Poncet that

the ill fortune, presaged by the halting of his train outside Rome on the day of his arrival, was indeed coming to pass. Certainly the events of the last weeks of 1938 did not constitute an auspicious beginning for his mission in Rome. Undoubtedly, he now realized that the conclusion of a Franco-Italian agreement would be more difficult to achieve than he had initially anticipated. Nevertheless, the ambassador persisted in his belief that conciliation, rather than a stubborn obstruction of diplomatic channels, was the method that his government should use to deal with Italy. As he explained, the role of diplomacy was to avoid creating a situation that could not later be remedied. To allow conciliation with Italy would not only keep open an avenue that might prove very useful to France in the future, but also would permit the French government to discover exactly to what the cries in the Fascist Chamber pertained. Were the Italian claims indeed territorial, as the cries implied, or were they, in reality, matters of a non-territorial order that conciliation might easily settle? François-Poncet would receive some answers in the new year.

Chapter IV

François-Poncet's Winter of Isolation:

January - February, 1939

> I have brought here with unreserved good will and with sincere esteem for the great achievements of present-day Italy a desire and a hope to solve the difficulties and stamp out the quarrels dividing France and Italy . . . . Although circumstances have not up to now permitted these hopes to materialize, we shall not in any way abandon the task we have begun. We shall persevere. 1

These words are from a speech made by André François-Poncet on 1 January 1939 to his compatriots in Rome. They are not mere rhetoric; rather they seem to reflect what the French ambassador was feeling at this time. Although Poncet would certainly persevere in his endeavours to bring about a détente between his homeland and Italy, his efforts in the winter months would be mainly doomed to failure. Too many circumstances were beyond his control. To begin with, his own government was divided over the course to take with regard to the Italian problem. The rift between Daladier and Bonnet would become more evident, and Poncet would find himself unsure of the nature of official French policy on Italy. The uncertainty of this policy, compounded by Mussolini's hostile attitude toward France, would not only isolate Poncet in Rome but would result, on one occasion, in him being ignored in his authorized

capacity. And the British would further confuse the issue with their chiefly self-interested interference. Finally, Poncet would remain perplexed by Mussolini's equivocations, by the insinuations of the Fascist press, by the uncertainty of the character of the Italian claims, and by the ramifications for Franco-Italian relations of the ever present Spanish problem.

* * *

To begin an examination of these circumstances, in reverse order, the Italian press continued its Francophobic polemics, although periods of outright viciousness alternated with periods of relative moderation. Poncet was able to discern in the press, however, several indirect allusions to a desire on the part of Italy for conversations with France and wondered if this attitude could be attributed to the approaching English visit.[2] Many thoughtful Italians held the anti-French campaign and the territorial claims to be but a bluff,[3] because they were well aware that Italy, with her military weakness and her dependence upon imported resources, lacked the capacity to support a war of any duration. Poncet, however, was not altogether convinced that Mussolini was bluffing. He traced the current Italian attitude back to Munich; Hitler was getting everything, and the Duce nothing, from adherence to the

Rome-Berlin Axis. As to the claims themselves, Poncet considered that:

> il est probable que celles-ci sont élastiques, évoluent entre un minimum et un maximum et ne seront définitivement arrêtées qu'en fonction des obstacles qu'elles rencontreront et de la situation diplomatique que M. Mussolini trouvera devant lui. 4

Whatever the territorial claims would eventually be, the Duce also remained an enigma to Poncet. Indeed, those closest to the Italian leader found him increasingly secretive; only Ciano might have had an inkling as to what was in his mind.[5] Two things, however, appeared certain: public morale was low, and the Rome-Berlin Axis, because Italy seemed to be getting the short end of the stick, was not becoming any more popular. Mussolini, therefore, needed some sort of success for the people. His attempt to get Britain into Franco's camp, when the Easter Accords were signed, had failed, and so he turned to France. Poncet reminded the Quai that whatever the Duce had in mind, whether or not he would decide upon some aggressive action against France, much would depend upon France herself and the amount of firmness she could muster in the face of his threats.[6] The average Italian was neither particularly anti-French, nor especially concerned with the Tunisian problem. Poncet warned, though, that these factors should not be taken at face value because, as in the

Munich crisis, the Italian people would follow their leaders--into war with France, if necessary.[7]

However much Poncet and the French government might worry about Mussolini's intentions, Germany was never very far from their thoughts. Would Hitler actually go so far as to allow Germany to become embroiled in an armed conflict in defense of the Italian claims, or would his support be merely of a moral order? Widespread contemporary and official opinion in France held that Mussolini and Hitler were working in close collusion.[8] The French General Staff, who concurred in this conviction, feared that the Italian claims were part of a larger scheme designed by the two dictators, and thus, they could lead to war.[9] In reality, French leaders had some cause for concern although they were probably unaware at the time that, on 1 January 1939, Mussolini had decided to sign a military alliance with Germany, albeit it was not signed until May.[10] Fortunately for France, though, German interest in the Italian claims seemed to be confined to perfunctory statements that the Reich would support Italy, because the Rome-Berlin Axis formed the basis of German foreign policy. From Berlin came word that the Nazi leaders considered the Italian territorial claims to be unfounded, even ridiculous, and that going to war for

Italy was out of the question.[11] In a similar vein, Poncet's Belgian colleague in Rome believed that, from what he had heard, Germany would not go to war for Italy except in the event where, for her own purposes, she might want to divert British attention to the Mediterranean.[12] As far as the Franco-Italian tension itself was concerned, Poncet's former embassy reported that official circles in Berlin thought it would not end in war. They considered that Paris, in refusing to accept Rome's denunciation of the Laval-Mussolini Accords, was ready to negotiate, a circumstance that apparently surprised those Nazi leaders who had assumed that France would be firmer.[13]

In point of fact, however, Edouard Daladier had decided to be resolute, as Poncet in Rome would soon learn. Both to strengthen imperial feeling and to augment support for his new policy of firmness, the French premier, in early January 1939, set out on a whirlwind tour of the French Empire. The whole thing was a vast success. Acclamations of support met him wherever he visited. A warm welcome greeted him in Ajaccio where he assured cheering citizens that "there is no need for France to be aggressive and threatening . . . . she knows she is imperishable and indestructible because she lives first in the hearts and minds of

men,"[14] a warning to Italy, presumably, that France would not stand for territorial claims upon her. In Bastia, he placed a weath on the war memorial after which he proclaimed "we swear by our weapons, our women, and our cradles; we swear to live and to die French;" and the crowd enthusiastically seconded him.[15] By 4 January, Daladier was in Tunis reminding the Bey that treaties linked Tunisia to France and that France would always be ready to protect his land. Daladier's speech in Algiers came more closely than any to the reason for his tour: "[w]hen I said that I would maintain the integrity of this Empire, I meant . . . that I would not yield one acre of the lands of this Empire . . . . There is no right against the right of France."[16] Daladier must surely have impressed the citizens of the French Empire; a tribesman in Tunisia apparently declared, "Daladier, not Mussolini, is our protector."[17]

The premier's tour, however, was more than a round of patriotic speeches. Everywhere he went he inspected troops and military installations. In Tunisia, he visited the Mareth Line, or "little Maginot Line," which lay not far from the Libyan frontier. In essence, Daladier's tour may be compared to the "iron fist in the velvet glove." On the surface, it was a

moving celebration of patriotism, but basically it was intended to be a show of French strength and determination, an assurance to the empire, a warning to Italy, and an attempt to reverse the blow to French prestige suffered at Munich, by emphasizing the greatness of the French Empire.[18]

Poncet's enjoyment of Daladier's success must have been diminished by the reaction in Rome. The Italian press, as was to be expected, had nothing good to say about the French premier's imperial tour.[19] Nothing was said that would indicate the enthusiasm and good will which greeted Daladier at every stop. The few minor anti-French incidents were blown up out of all proportion. The press accused Daladier of provoking trouble, and Radio-Bari claimed that some British leaders disapproved of the voyage.[20] Anybody who was familiar with the Italian press, said Poncet, would know that the spite and malice it exhibited "est le meilleur témoignage du succès de l'utilité du pèriple que vient d'achever le président du Conseil."[21]

Besides the benefits accruing to French patriotism as a result of the North African tour, Daladier achieved a personal victory. From that time, while his popularity and prestige rose to new heights, Bonnet's influence continued the downward spiral that

had begun with his failure to mention the Italian denunciation of the 1935 accords in his speech to the Chamber on 19 December. As pleased as Poncet must have been with Daladier's success and the show of resolution in his tour, he must also have speculated upon what the rift between the premier and the foreign minister would mean for his mission in Rome. What direction would France's Italian policy now take? Was there yet a chance for an understanding with Rome? Would this governmental tension leave Poncet in a sort of diplomatic no-man's-land, caught between Daladier and Bonnet and faced with a vacillating Mussolini in Rome? To complicate matters further for the French ambassador, the visit of the English ministers to Rome was fast approaching. What implications would the visit hold for France and her Italian problem?

Shortly after Daladier returned home from his North African triumph, Chamberlain and Halifax set off on their visit to Rome where they would meet with less success than their French counterpart had enjoyed in North Africa. The visit had been planned for some time. Unlike many French statesmen, the British prime minister believed that Hitler and Mussolini were not working very closely together and that Hitler probably kept his Italian partner in the dark as to his future plans for

Germany.[22] Nevertheless, he hoped that Mussolini might be persuaded to forestall Hitler in some way. This idea became the main reason for the visit, despite the declaration in the London Times that "courtesy" was the chief purpose.[23] Halifax was less optimistic than Chamberlain. He regarded the visit mainly as an instrument "to influence Italian public opinion in the right direction"; moreover, England must concede "Nothing for Nothing" when it came time to treat with the Duce.[24] Chamberlain, however, still remained under the illusion that Mussolini entertained good intentions toward Great Britain, although the Italian press continually carried news items about Italian troop movements in Spain composed, evidently, of some of the troops supposedly withdrawn as a condition of the enforcement of the Anglo-Italian Agreement.[25] The other reason for the visit, of course, was to assure peace in the Mediterranean so that, if necessary, the Royal Navy could be freed for possible action in the Far East against Japan. Although Britain formally requested the visit to Rome, it was done at Mussolini's instigation for the usual reason of Italian prestige and to show his subjects that "British ministers were begging to come and see him."[26] The Duce hoped that Chamberlain might be inveigled into putting pressure on France regarding

the Italian claims, something that Ciano, according to the German ambassador in Rome, did not seem to expect; however, if "Chamberlain offered his good offices in this connection, they would not be rejected summarily."[27]

Mussolini's hopes and expectations were exactly what François-Poncet and French leaders dreaded. Thoughts of a British mediation on the Italian claims, conceivably leading to a Mediterranean Munich, thoroughly horrified them. Indeed, they viewed the whole idea of the visit with chagrin. Planned, as it seemed to them, behind their backs, their anxiety was understandable though, perhaps, unfounded. Chamberlain may indeed have entertained notions about playing the role of mediator, but other British leaders were averse to the idea. In fact, as early as 12 December 1938, the British cabinet had decided that Mussolini would be told he could expect no British help with the Italian claims on France.[28] After all, if they allowed him to seize parts of the French Empire, there was no telling when he might decide to help himself to some of the British strategical bases in the Mediterranean. There was worry, too, in British official circles, about the Duce's talent for persuasion. In his diary, Oliver Harvey noted that Maurice Ingram, the head of the

Southern Department in the Foreign Office, "is much alarmed lest the P.M. should in any way acquiesce in Italian claims against France and we both fear the effects on him of Italian flattery and hospitality."[29] As a cautionary measure, Halifax advised Chamberlain to record all his conversations with the Duce, with an end to preventing any confusion about what might transpire between the two of them.[30]

In any case, Poncet and his superiors continued to worry, although a dispatch of Charles Corbin, the French ambassador in London, must have been reassuring.[31] From what he could gather, there was general agreement in the English capital that Chamberlain and Halifax would say or do nothing that could harm France, not only to preserve the Anglo-French entente, but because of British interests which were virtually identical to those of France with respect to the Italian claims. Corbin, however, continued to worry about how firm Chamberlain would be when he stated the British view to Mussolini. The latter must be left with no doubt about just where the British leaders stood. Corbin, along with Poncet, fretted about the English optimism regarding the Duce:

> [o]n ne peut toutefois se défendre d'une certaine appréhension en présence du l'optimisme, encouragé peut-être par les rapports de lord Perth avec lequel les

> ministres anglais et M. Neville Chamberlain en particulier persistent à juger les projets du gouvernement italien en se fiant aux difficultés auxquelles il est en proie et qui doivent à leur sens le détourner d'une aventure où il risque de voir sombrer son régime. 32

To reassure the French, Chamberlain and Halifax interrupted their journey to Rome for an informal chat in Paris on 10 January with Daladier and Bonnet. Daladier once again explained why he would make no concessions to Italy; the anti-French campaign in Italy had produced a "union sacrée" in France.[33] Some discussion arose as to whether the Italian claims were related to Hitler's supposed plans for the Ukraine. Both Chamberlain and Bonnet tended to think so. Having France occupied in the Mediterranean would allow Hitler to pursue his Ukrainian plans without interruption. The question of whether Mussolini would uphold the Anglo-Italian Agreement in regard to Spain also arose, and the British leaders doubted that his word could be accepted. The meeting in Paris left Bonnet optimistic. Complete agreement had been reached, he cabled to Poncet in Rome, upon all the matters which could arise during the conversations in Rome.[34]

From Paris, the British ministers travelled on to Rome where an enthusiastic crowd awaited them, a reception which set the tone of the whole visit. The

trade in umbrellas was brisk,[35] and Chamberlain and Halifax received the accolade from the Italian public that had been denied to Hitler on his vist the previous May.[36] Despite the warmth of the welcome, however, the visit itself and its results were negligible. Halifax's impressions were that Mussolini was "a good deal mellowed," that peace was important to him, and that he had misgivings about Hitler; nevertheless, the route that the Duce's foreign policy would take remained an enigma to the British foreign secretary.[37] The conversations between the English and Italian statesmen were "poor fare" for the press; opinions were politely exchanged, and nothing of France's was "given away."[38] Chamberlain and his host held two meetings in which they discussed the European situation.[39] The Rome-Berlin Axis remained the pivot of Italian foreign policy, according to the Duce, but he also hoped for good relations with Britain and other countries, and he meant to uphold the Anglo-Italian Agreement in the Mediterranean. As to the Spanish war, it remained the obstacle to further negotiations with France. Mussolini again declared that he had withdrawn his troops. Although Chamberlain noted that the air force and artillery remained, the Duce claimed that their strength had not been increased. He warned, though, that if France should intervene in a

large way (by sending more than flour), he would have to reconsider his position. The 1935 accords were dead, France had not responded to Italy's offer of new conversations, and, therefore, Italy would do nothing more in this regard until the civil war in Spain was over. Chamberlain, for his part, declared the Anglo-French entente to be analagous to the Rome-Berlin Axis; he hoped that the Duce would put a rein on anything that might cause further deterioration in Franco-Italian relations; and he reminded the Italian leader that these acute differences between Italy and France would be a source of grave embarrassment to the British government which wanted, at the same time, to improve relations with Italy.[40]

Chamberlain left Rome convinced that he had advanced the cause of European peace and seemingly relieved that Mussolini had made no mention of the Italian claims on France.[41] Neither the British nor the Italian leaders realized their objectives. Mussolini did not succeed in driving a wedge between France and Britain, nor did Chamberlain manage to wean the Duce away from Hitler. The two axes, indeed, were firmer from that time on;[42] and soon the German invasion of Prague would bring the western democracies even closer together. The Rome visit only helped to convince

Mussolini of the necessity for a stronger alliance with Hitler, and it reinforced his opinion that Britain was now a negligible quantity. He told Ciano, who thought the visit "absolutely innocuous," that the British were not "made of the same stuff as the Francis Drakes and the other magnificent adventurers who created the empire. These, after all, are the tired sons of a long line of rich men, and they will lose their empire."[43] In turn, Halifax's secretary commented in his diary that, while Mussolini's grip on Italy remained strong, he was "certainly less popular," and Italy was still "a lightweight outfit, no raw material, no real stamina to face a modern war. Mussolini will use every opportunity to blackmail us, the French and the Germans, but not to fight."[44] Halifax went straight to Geneva where he discussed the Rome visit with Bonnet. He apparently gave the latter a rather pessimistic account of the proceedings which Bonnet translated into happier terms for the benefit of the French press.[45]

François-Poncet's role in the visit of the British ministers to Rome was necessarily limited, both because France was not directly involved and because of Mussolini's attitude toward him and his government. Halifax made a point of meeting with Poncet to show France that Britain remained loyal to the agreement made

in Paris not to play the role of mediator between France and Italy. From him, Poncet received the impression that nothing positive would come of the visit and that Mussolini was reticent, either because the time was unfavourable or because he had encountered an unexpected firmness in the British position.[46] The Duce requested no British mediation of any sort, probably because he depended upon a Francoist victory in Spain to improve his position vis-à-vis the Italian claims about which he was quite unspecific. The British, apparently, had expected the Italian leader to be threatening, and his moderation rather surprised them. Poncet's opinion was that if the English really did emphasize Anglo-French solidarity as they claimed, then Mussolini had been successful in determining just where Anglo-French relations stood. He also believed, however, that it did not matter much any more

> que le Duce ait protesté de sa volonté pacifique et son désir de respecter le statu quo méditerranéen. Il interprète, sans doute, à sa manière cette notion du statu quo et il a la conception singulière d'une sorte de 'statu quo dynamique.' [47]

Halifax tended to agree with Poncet that Mussolini's intentions remained as mysterious as ever.

From sentiments reaching him from different points in Rome, Poncet perceived that the Italian government considered the British visit a failure.[48]

Mussolini did not seem to have obtained from the British what he was looking for, and he had failed to shake the Anglo-French entente; this was partly his own fault because the persistent anti-French press campaign had soured British public opinion as well as French. Only a few days after Mussolini's affirmation to the British that he would attempt no negotiations with France until after the conclusion of the Spanish Civil War, a high-ranking Fascist suggested to the first secretary of the French embassy a confidential exchange of views. Naturally Poncet found this strange. Ciano had given no indication of this change of heart although an Italian newspaper had dropped some hints. Poncet appears not to have put much faith in these obscure offers but attributed them to the customary Italian habit of "préparer le jeu sur plusieurs tableaux à la fois."[49]

* * *

As Poncet was surely aware, things were not going any better for Bonnet in the new year than they had in 1938. Since December, the noticeable stiffening in Daladier's attitude toward Italy had wrought a change in the fortunes of the French foreign minister and his small group of followers. Men such as Jean Montigny, Anatole de Monzie, Pierre-Etienne Flandin and Pierre Laval supported Bonnet's conciliatory policy, and would

continue to do so in the face of the premier's growing opposition to making overtures to Italy. Daladier, however, now had the upper hand. His successful North African tour, his strong stand on the Italian claims, the waves of popular resentment against Italy, and a gradual easing of economic and financial problems, all augmented his popularity as he came more and more to be regarded as the leader of an united France.

Coincidental with another surge of anti-French feeling in the Italian press came the debate on foreign policy in the French Chamber of Deputies. The debate centered mainly upon Spain, with several deputies on the left criticizing governmental policy and calling for the opening of the Pyrenees frontier. A Communist, Gabriel Péri, for instance, insisted that the destiny of France would be decided in Spain and demanded that France save the Spanish Republic first,[50] while another deputy accused the Quai d'Orsay of acceding to "le complot de Franco."[51] Later the Italian issue arose. Pierre Cot, a Socialist, declared that Italy by herself could not succeed in forcing France to cede to the Italian claims,

> mais, derrière Mussolini se profile l'ombre gigantesque de Hitler et nous ne voulons pas d'un nouveau Munich, dont l'objet serait cette fois la Tunisie française.
>
> Telle est la raison pour laquelle le problème méditerranéen et le problème allemand sont liés. 52

When Bonnet arose to speak, he did not heed the arguments of those who would intervene in the Spanish war. Under him, the present government would continue the non-intervention policy of its predecessors in order to avoid an extension of the conflagration.

But regarding the Italian claims, Bonnet affirmed that "[l]a France ne tolérera pas qu'on touche à l'empire édifié par le sang et le labour français."[53] Daladier, to the accompaniment of lively applause from the benches, seconded Bonnet's assertion; France would cede "ni un arpent de terre, ni un seul de nos droits!"[54] While Bonnet's statements on the Italian claims were well enough applauded, most of his speech received a very subdued accolade, except from Flandin and his followers "whose approbation, in view of their proclaimed isolationist views, must have been embarrassing rather than helpful to a Foreign Minister who had just been maintaining that France renounced none of her alliances."[55] In the end, the Chamber of Deputies gave its approval to the government's foreign policy. In Rome, Poncet noted how the Italian press played down the importance of the vote. The Popolo di Roma, for instance, decided that "Daladier cherche à enjôler l'Italie avec quelques bonnes paroles."[56]

The speeches of the two French leaders

demonstrate two points. First, while Bonnet declared that France would cede no territory, Daladier stipulated that neither territory nor rights would be given up, a statement that would seem to indicate the premier's aversion to conversations with Italy upon any issues whatsoever. Bonnet's words, The Economist felt, were "a screen for some tortuous policy of setting out to meet Signor Mussolini halfway . . . "[57] Further proof of Bonnet's attempts to undermine Daladier's position was the statement of Robert Coulondre, the French ambassador in Berlin, to Ribbentrop that the French government would consider making non-territorial concessions to Italy, perhaps over Djibouti and the Suez Canal,[58] a message that the German minister later passed on to Attolico.[59] The second point concerns the gulf between the degrees of public acceptance of the policies of Daladier and Bonnet. The speech of the former received almost universal approval while that of the latter did not. Apparently after a cabinet meeting which followed the debate in the Chamber, Bonnet held a press conference in which he requested the press to refrain from making comments injurious to Italy. Then he delivered to the assembled journalists a sort of apologia of Italian behaviour, a statement which did not sit too well with French public opinion, especially

coming as it did after Daladier's firm declaration.[60] Bonnet was also reported to have mentioned Italy's legitimate claims, a point he later denied, but again, his motives were suspected by the French public.[61] William Bullitt, the American ambassador in Paris, reported that, from several sources, he gathered that French opinion was increasingly hostile to the foreign minister; and Oliver Harvey noted a short time later, while he was in Paris, that Bonnet seemed to be "universally unpopular."[62] Bullitt also asserted that, at lunch one day, Daladier told him that he no longer trusted Bonnet, that he believed that Chamberlain had promised Mussolini to help him get what he wanted from France, and that a French refusal would make the British approach Germany with a view to settling the situation with another Munich compromise.[63] In sum, while Daladier became more and more intransigent toward Italy, Bonnet continued to favour a compromise and seemed bent upon allowing Italy the benefit of the doubt. However, it was Daladier's adamancy that the French seemed to prefer.

In the meantime, Coulondre continued to send news to Paris of German opinion on the Franco-Italian situation. A report of 12 January certainly seems to give some justification to Daladier's decision to stand

firm.[64] Generally, Berlin sources held that Germany did not want war with the west over the Italian claims, but much would depend upon the attitude of France. If she remained intransigent in defending her interests, Germany would avoid becoming involved. If France weakened in any way, though, Germany would back Italy to any lengths because, for her, France's attitude toward Italy represented her strength in Europe. Somebody close to Hitler labelled the Italians as "headstrong" and mediocre as soldiers,[65] implying that Germany had misgivings about the value of her Italian partner. No doubt this idea prompted Coulondre to suggest to Ribbentrop that Germany "might exercise a conciliatory influence on Italy," but the latter refused, seemingly because France had rejected any British mediation.[66] A little over a week later, Count Fernand de Brinon, a French journalist and chairman of the France-Allemagne Committee for Franco-German Understanding, made much the same suggestion to the German foreign minister who once again ignored it.[67] German support for her Axis partner, then, was not a sure thing unless, evidently, it would further Germany's plans.

* * *

Throughout the major events of January, Daladier's tour of North Africa, the visit to Rome of

the English ministers, and the debate in the Chamber of Deputies, François-Poncet's role was limited. Indeed for him, both the winter and spring of 1939 were a time of isolation, not only from affairs in France, but from Italian official circles also. In his memoirs, the ambassador declares that Mussolini hated him for two reasons. First, he had aroused the Duce's ire because of some derogatory remarks that he was purported to have made about the Italian leader,[68] and which he denied ever having made. Second, Poncet represented the government of France which Mussolini had disliked for some time.[69] The Italian leader, therefore, subjected the French ambassador to a sort of diplomatic quarantine in which his only communication with the Italian government was through French colleagues and other members of the international diplomatic corps, or by means of written notes from Ciano. To reinforce this isolation, demonstrations took place in front of the Farnèse Palace in which students paraded about carrying a coffin draped with the French flag. Fortunately for Poncet, Italian society, ignoring the Duce's boycott of the French embassy, helped to make life in Rome bearable for him and his family. The diplomatic corps and the French colony were also very supportive. Jérôme Carcopino, the director of the French school, remained a

great source of comfort and companionship as did François Charles-Roux, the ambassador to the Holy See, both on a personal and a professional level. From the latter, Poncet received frequent reports about the Vatican which distrusted Mussolini and his cohorts. Unfortunately, Poncet's relationship with Lord Perth, his English colleague, was less congenial.[70] It is difficult to ascertain just why the two men were not friendlier when the destinies of their respective countries were so closely linked. Perhaps it was no more than a clash in personalities or a difference in backgrounds. More likely, it was the perception that each held of the Italian menace, reinforced by Poncet's tendency to be suspicious of British motives. It is clear, for example, that Poncet blamed the British for Munich;[71] and it is possible that Perth came to personify all he disliked in British policy. In truth, however, Perth does not seem to have been the great Fascist admirer that he has been frequently accused of being.[72] Perhaps, then, he and Poncet were closer in opinion than either of them realized at the time. Certainly Perth seems to have been faithful enough in reporting to his French colleague on his interviews with Ciano.

By the last days of January, Poncet's reports

to the Quai d'Orsay had become openly pessimistic. The anti-French press campaign remained virulent and violent, one of its "high" points being the nasty article entitled, "Sputi alla Francia" ("Spitting on France"), in Il Tevere, which Mussolini indirectly engineered.[73] More than once, Poncet indicated that he certainly could not share the optimism of Lord Perth and others at the British embassy.[74] In a speech on 22 January, the Duce came out openly against France, something he had not actually done since the manifestation of 30 November in the Italian chamber.[75] Poncet feared that he was now preparing for his Mediterranean Munich, for his actions were so very reminiscent of Hitler's in the Sudeten affair. And so far, Mussolini had declined to specify just what the Italian demands on France would constitute. When would he announce them? Poncet could not say. In sum, he was increasingly despondent over what the future would bring:

> complications possibles, du côté de l'Espagne, enforcement du dispostif militaire italien, concentrations en Libye, présentation des exigences italiennes . . . avec des perspectives d'incidents toujours à redouter, d'autant plus qu'ils peuvent être artificiellement provoqués, tel pourrait être le bilan des prochaines semaines. 76

In spite of, or perhaps as a result of, Poncet's pessimistic reports about the Italian mood vis-

à-vis France, Bonnet and Daladier (notwithstanding his forceful "non"[77]) decided to make an attempt to determine just what Mussolini wanted. Rather than employing regular diplomatic channels, however, they chose to use a secret agent, Paul Baudouin. Baudouin, a man of the political right and a Munichois, was a director of the Bank of Indo-China and a financial expert. In that capacity, he had served under Léon Blum, although in most ways the two men must have been antithetical, for Baudouin seems to have been a representative par excellence of big business and an admirer of Mussolini and the Fascists.[78] In reality, his interest in Italy went deeper than admiration because Baudouin was also an administrator of the Société Franco-Ethiopienne du Sel which held the salt monopoly in Ethiopia. His intimate connection with the Bank of Indo-China also gave him a primary interest in the Djibouti to Addis Ababa railway, which was financed by the Bank, and the port of Djibouti. In short, all these business interests were dependent upon Italian good will. Baudouin, thus, had a personal stake in an amelioration of Franco-Italian relations, and it is highly unlikely that either patriotic good will or pure serendipity prompted him to agree to be a secret emissary.[79]

Actually it was not Baudouin who prepared the way for this mission. Early in January 1939, the Italian ambassador in Paris, Raffaelo Guariglia, received a visit from Vincenzo Fagiuoli, a business man with interests in Franco-Italian enterprises. The latter suggested to Guariglia the possibility of sending Baudouin to Italy to sound out Ciano on the Italian claims with a view to determining whether a Franco-Italian agreement was possible.[80] Guariglia, aware that regular diplomatic channels seemed to be blocked, approved Fagiuoli's idea. Fagiuoli then approached Baudouin who also agreed. Soon after, on the 21 January, Baudouin received a telegram from M. Rousset-Bert, of the Société des Salines in Djibouti. Rousset-Bert had been in touch with an Italian, General Teruzzi, who felt that, since the French government had not responded to Ciano's recent offer of negotiations (presumably the one of 17 December), an indirect approach was justified, and he apparently would prepare the Italian end.[81] When Baudouin received Rousset-Bert's telegram, he requested a meeting with Daladier, who was a friend of his. Bonnet was present as well when Baudouin tendered his plan to the two ministers. Daladier received it with some scepticism; Bonnet's reception was "plus confiant et plus décidé à ne rien

négliger."[82] This account of Baudouin is contained in his article in Revue des Deux Mondes (1962), but it differs from the testimony he gave at the Commission d'Enquête in 1949. In the latter, Baudouin claims that the telegram came from the duc d'Aoste, the viceroy of Ethiopia and a Francophile, and that he first approached Bonnet about it.[83] Bonnet, however, felt it was up to Daladier to decide, and it was then that the meeting of the three men took place.[84] Neither in his memoirs nor in his testimony to the Commission d'Enquête[85] does Bonnet admit that he saw Baudouin first; however, both his and Baudouin's accounts seem to clear him of the suspicion that he engineered the mission without Daladier's knowledge. At any rate, the two ministers decided that Baudouin would go to Rome (he had private business there anyway) and try to determine exactly the nature of the Italian claims. If the claims were acceptable, then the resulting negotiations would be carried on by François-Poncet through the customary diplomatic channels. The purely unofficial character of the mission meant it could be disavowed by either government. In the meantime, Fagiuoli saw Ciano and made the arrangments for Baudouin's visit; even Mussolini apparently, was agreeable to it.[86]

François-Poncet knew nothing of this plan, of

course. Consequently, he was naturally surprised and somewhat hurt one day in February, when he happened to be at the Rome railroad depot, to see his friend Baudouin alight from the Paris train and rush past him with no apparent sign of recognition.[87] He remained puzzled when Baudouin failed to contact him, and it was not until sometime later that he discovered what lay behind Baudouin's odd behaviour. In fact, Baudouin had been instructed not to contact Poncet.[88]

Baudouin's mission was successful in that he learned from Ciano what Italy expected from France. On 2 February, the two men had their first meetings, and Baudouin first made two stipulations to which Ciano agreed: only a general settlement of Franco-Italian issues could be considered, and France would cede no territory nor any of her sovereignty.[89] The Italian claims were four in number: first, the establishment of a free zone in the port of Djibouti; second, the cession to Italy of the Ethiopian section of the Djibouti to Addis Ababa railway; third, some seats on the Suez Canal Council of Administration and the lowering of tariffs; and fourth, for Tunisia, a revision of the 1935 accords so that Tunisian Italians could retain their Italian nationality. After the claims were delineated, Ciano and Baudouin discussed Spain. As Lord Halifax had been

told, Ciano declared that Italy had no territorial interest in Spain. When Franco attained the victory of which the Italians were certain, all Italians would be withdrawn and Majorca freed. Italy would expect nothing of Franco's Spain but a close and lasting friendship. Ciano informed Mussolini of the proceedings with Baudouin, and the latter fully approved them and hoped for negotiations initiated by France through normal diplomatic channels.

On his return to Paris, Baudouin reported immediately to Daladier and Bonnet, at the former's home. When he finished his report, Daladier stated that he could not follow up the Italian propositions due to domestic problems: "[i]l ne faut pas affaiblir la France par des actes qui pourraient apparaître comme des actes de faiblesse. Au surplus une négociation avec l'Italie diviserait profondément le parti radical."[90] Even before this conversation took place, however, the French press had learned about Baudouin's mission, and a public uproar ensued against Bonnet's "secret" diplomacy.[91] Fernand de Brinon's visit to Berlin--to hint to Ribbentrop that a German mediation on the Franco-Italian problem would not be unwelcome in France--added fuel to the fire. Just how the news of Baudouin's mission leaked out is uncertain. It is known, however, that

Ciano carefully reported his conversations with Baudouin to Mackensen (the German ambassador in Rome) who, in turn, informed Ribbentrop, in the utmost secrecy as ordered by Ciano, "not by telegram but in a letter typed by my own hand."[92] One theory has it that Ribbentrop was the one to let the news out because he did not want a Franco-Italian rapprochement.[93] Bonnet and the Quai d'Orsay denied knowledge of both the Baudouin and de Brinon missions, of course, but the damage had been done. The foreign minister lost more credibility in the public eye--unjustly perhaps, because Daladier, in fact, had been a partner to the mission--and he lost another chance for negotiations with Rome. Yet, at almost the same time as Baudouin approached Ciano, Bonnet reminded Corbin of the very firm position that France was taking on Italy.[94] Undoubtedly the French public was right to suspect Bonnet's motives.

The Baudouin affair throws into relief the unenviable positions of François-Poncet in Rome and Guariglia in Paris. The latter, although Fagiuoli had told him of the possibility of Baudouin's visit to Rome, was kept entirely in the dark by Ciano regarding these talks in Rome. When Baudouin asked Ciano if he should indicate through Guariglia the response of Daladier and Bonnet to the Italian claims, Ciano answered, "[s]urtout

pas, Guariglia n'est pas fasciste."[95] Indeed before Guariglia left Rome in November 1938, he had asked Ciano what he was to do in Paris; "[n]othing," answered Ciano.[96] Because he was given no instructions, he seldom saw Bonnet; he had nothing to say, and of the only two telegrams sent him by Ciano, one concerned finding a French governess for Ciano's children.[97] Poncet in Rome, of course, was not nearly the "outcast" that Guariglia seems to have been, but the Baudouin affair and the silence of the Quai "eut pour effet de me mettre dans la situation la plus fausse et de me causer le plus pénible embarras."[98] Ciano's subsequent references to it only added to Poncet's unease, for Ciano learned from Fagiuoli that Poncet was not to be told about the secret mission because "in Paris he is no longer considered an authority on the Italian situation."[99] Probably Poncet felt much the same as Coulondre did over the de Brinon affair. In fact, Coulondre journeyed to Paris to complain to Bonnet about his methods. It was not so much the use of unofficial agents, he said, but that "ils viennent développer une action contraire à la politique dont je suis officiellement informé, me mettent ainsi dans une situation fausse et nuisible à mon autorité."[100] On 21 February, Bonnet denied the whole affair to Poncet.[101]

He insisted to the ambassador in Rome that all Franco-Italian negotiations, official and unofficial, were carried out through Poncet. Then he had the effrontery to tell Poncet that it was on his advice, due to the anti-French campaign in Italy, that the French government had decided to forego any approach at all to Italy. As Poncet remarked in his memoirs, secret diplomacy usually ends by causing trouble and by doing more harm than good to the purpose it was meant to serve.[102]

The goal that the Baudouin mission was meant to further, indeed seemed farther away than ever. Poncet noted at the time Baudouin was having discussions with Ciano that, as long as the Italian press maintained its violent anti-French campaign, any attempt on the part of France to approach the Italian government would be viewed as a sign of weakness and would only encourage Mussolini to more daring ventures.[103] Moreover, as he told Perth, most Italians believed that Britain would defend France only in the case of a direct threat to British security, due to Chamberlain's emphasis upon negotiating differences. Perth, therefore, requested a less equivocal statement by the British prime minister.[104] Chamberlain duly uttered a declaration of Anglo-French solidarity in the House of Commons on 6

February 1939 which pleased Corbin in London.[105] Poncet, according to Perth, was also pleased[106] but added the rider that "il aurait mieux valu ne pas rendre possibles de telles illusions, plutôt que d'avoir à les dissiper, un peu tard."[107] The Italian press remained unimpressed by Chamberlain's declaration, stating that France's weakness was inherent.[108] From Berlin, Coulondre wrote that he had learned from a reliable source that Germany had told Mussolini that she wished no involvement in "une aventure" over the Italian demands; she wished to remain free so that 1939 could be "une année d'assimilation de nos conquêtes pacifiques . . . "[109] Undoubtedly what Coulondre had learned, and Chamberlain's declaration of Anglo-French solidarity, served to set Italian diplomacy back on its heels as a wave of uncertainty swept over the Italian public. Poncet and his diplomatic colleagues in Rome could now dare to view the international situation with a bit more optimism, although Poncet warned that Mussolini, so dependent upon having public opinion solidly behind him, must soon do something to restore the prestige of his régime.[110]

For a few days in early February, Poncet had noticed an abatement of the anti-French press campaign. Unfortunately things soon became nasty again, in fact,

nastier than ever.[111] Two themes were evident to the French ambassador: the alleged decadence of France and Italian rage over current events. In addition, Mussolini found something else with which to berate France. On 14 February, the Italian press exploded with the Bonnet-Coulondre set-to over the de Brinon and Baudouin missions, and it cited "des graves difficultés" that Bonnet's personal policy was creating in the French government.[112] Poncet's opinion on the Baudouin mission was that it only made matters worse by exciting Fascist appetites for more and more, and Poncet warned that, if France should give way to Italian demands, "nous nous exposerions au risque d'être, par la suite, mangés comme un artichaut, feuille à feuille."[113] Poncet, indeed, had hit fairly close to the truth with this statement. Only a few days later, Ciano remarked in his diary that Mussolini intended to persist in fomenting the Italian hatred of France; he meant to destroy France.[114] A bellicose article in Relazioni internazionali recently had stated that if France did not want to solve the problems of Tunisia, Djibouti, Corsica and Nice peacefully, then Italy would resort to war. Hearing of this, Halifax sent Perth to protest to Ciano and to remind him of Chamberlain's recent statement on Anglo-French solidarity.[115] Perth did so.

Ciano rejected responsibility for the article and refused to confirm or deny its contents, probably, Perth thought, because a denial of Italian interest in Corsica or Nice would deny him the support of the more extreme Fascist factions.[116]

As if he had not enough to worry him, Poncet was soon beset with another anxiety. In early February, news began to reach him of the increase in the number of Italian troops in Libya. His reports worried Bonnet, although General Maurice Gamelin of the French General Staff was confident that the Italian marshal, Badoglio, would alert him should a risk of war arise.[117] Bonnet, however, was soon virtually convinced that Italy, disappointed in the Mediterranean, meant to provoke some incident that could be blamed handily on France, perhaps on the Libyan-Tunisian border.[118] The augmentation of Italian forces seemed to mesh with his theory. Because, under the Anglo-Italian Agreement, Italy was to have reduced her forces in Libya, and because the colony also bordered on Egypt, the British, too, concerned themselves with Italian troop movements there. Halifax, therefore, sent Perth to Ciano to request an explanation. According to the latter, there were some 30,000 to 32,000 Italian troops in Libya, and purely defensive plans were underway to dispatch 30,000

more to the western frontier because the French had increased their forces in Tunisia to 100,000 men.[119] Poncet sent home much the same news, but added that Italy had not withdrawn as many troops as she claimed she had at the time of the Anglo-Italian Agreement, so that the additional force would bring the number of Italian troops in Libya to a new high.[120] Perth also told Poncet that Ciano had cited an article in Revue des Deux Mondes by General Armengaud as a further reason for increasing the number of troops in Libya.[121] Armengaud's rather self-assured article claimed that France was fully prepared for giving Italy a powerful "riposte" should she threaten his country in the Mediterranean;[122] and Perth had to warn Ciano not to rely on information from sources such as this.

At the end of February, Bastianini, the under-secretary of state for foreign affairs, told Perth that a military operation was underway in Tunisia which was large enough for the Italian government to fear an offensive action from France.[123] The Italians, therefore, would have to consider increasing their forces in Libya even more. Perth replied that neither he nor his government thought that the French meant to attack Libya, but Bastianini believed that the French expected Italy to attack Djibouti which, in turn, would

result in a French aggression on Libya. Perth was naturally alarmed, and so was the Foreign Office. The result was a decision made by Halifax and Sir Alexander Cadogan to offer to intervene for Paris in Rome and to urge Paris "to do nothing silly without consulting us."[124] The offer brought a somewhat indignant reply from Bonnet.[125] France had increased her troops in Tunisia only because Italy had done so in Libya. If Italy halted the augmentation, France would do the same. France intended to stand firm and not make even an appearance of concession to Italy which would only encourage Mussolini to further demands. Bonnet ended by stating that the British government would be kept informed. Halifax realized that the French wanted no help in their dealings with Italy,[126] although Bonnet did request that Perth make a <u>démarche</u> to Ciano in order to explain the French position, and Perth did so. There the matter seems to have ended, perhaps because Hitler's invasion of Prague soon overshadowed everything else.

While the issue of the Italian troops in Libya is important in Anglo-Franco-Italian affairs, it also illustrates certain problems relating to Poncet's position in Rome. Having, at this time, no formal communications with the Italian foreign ministry, Poncet was frequently forced to rely upon Perth for much of his

information. While the British ambassador seems to have been quite willing to perform this duty for his French colleague, Poncet was left in the unfortunate position, not only of having to rely upon second-hand information for his reports, but of being bereft of one of the primary duties of any ambassador, the opportunity to discuss matters directly with the foreign minister of the country to which he was accredited. Worse still, Bonnet passed over Poncet completely by using the British ambassador to make a démarche to Ciano. At this point, Poncet, already upset over the Baudouin affair, must indeed have wondered what he was doing in Rome at all. The Libyan affair, of course, also reflects another example of what the French would call, perhaps correctly, British meddling. Although Poncet's diplomatic "quarantine" may have forced the French to use British channels in Rome, the British were only too happy to be of service. No doubt this also gave them the idea that they could try to conduct French affairs. Sometimes, though, French leaders perceived British interference where it did not exist. A case in point, at this time, was the fear of another attempt by Britain to mediate in Franco-Italian affairs, although Cadogan, at the Foreign Office, denied there was any such intention.[127]

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As both Mussolini and Ciano had reminded François-Poncet in their first conversations with him, it was the Spanish Civil War that so bedevilled Franco-Italian relations. In France, it had engendered domestic, political and ideological divisions when it began, and it continued to do so almost until the day it ended. To intervene for the Spanish government or to refrain from intervening, that was the question that crippled not only French foreign policy but also helped to sour her relations with Italy who, throughout the civil war, maintained an industrious "volunteer" programme designed to assure a Francoist and non-Bolshevist victory. It will be remembered that, in June 1938, Bonnet had closed the Catalan frontier, partly at the urging of the British and partly as a sop to Mussolini. The Duce, however, remained sceptical of France's intentions toward Republican Spain, complaining to the British ministers in January that France was sending in flour, and threatening that, if France reopened the frontier, he would be forced to forego his "commitment" to the Non-Intervention Pact. By the beginning of 1939, it had been fully evident to all that a Francoist victory was imminent. On 26 January, Barcelona had fallen, followed by Catalonia on 5

February. By this time, both France and Britain had agreed that it was time to recognize the Nationalist government and to seize as much advantage in Spain as possible from under the noses of the dictators.[128]

French public opinion, of course, was not unanimous in the decision not to intervene in Spain. As late as January 1939, the French Chamber of Deputies had spent several days bitterly debating the issue; in the end, though, the non-interventionists had won the day. Bonnet, of course, had never favoured intervention. Daladier had wavered and was finally convinced of the wisdom of staying out of Spain only in the interests of Anglo-French solidarity and by Mussolini's stated intention to withdraw his troops from Spain and the Balearics when Franco won, for France feared an unfriendly Italy in the Pyrenees.[129] Coulondre, in Berlin, advised Bonnet to hasten "reconnaître Franco. Les Italiens ne partiront pas tout seuls et Franco aura plus de courage pour les renvoyer si nous sommes à ses côtés."[130] From Rome, Poncet sent the depressing details he had gathered of what the Duce probably had in mind for Spain.[131] Bonnet, however, needed little convincing; he was ready to help France's neighbour to "panser les blessures que lui ont faites ces deux années de guerre civile."[132] He had already dispatched Léon

Bérard to Burgos on 2 February to meet with General Jordana, the Nationalist foreign minister. What Bérard asked for, in exchange for French recognition of Franco's government, was the withdrawal of German and Italian volunteers, full Spanish sovereignty in all Spanish territory, and Spanish neutrality in the event of a European war.[133] To these demands, Jordana agreed, and he then requested that a "regular" French ambassador be sent to Spain. On 25 February, the Bérard-Jordana Agreement was signed by which France granted Franco's government de jure recognition and pledged to return all Spanish property held in France. The day before, the French Chamber had voted on these points; three hundred twenty-three deputies had voted for recognition against two hundred sixty-one.[134] In the end, Franco received the most benefit from the agreement; Germany and Italy would not be much use to him in a European conflict, and he knew that Britain and France would eventually have to recognize his government, so he was able to drive a good bargain with France.[135]

As Poncet knew it would be, the news of the Anglo-French recognition of Franco was received with ill humour in Italy. The Giornale d'Italia castigated the action of the western allies as "une course aussi piteuse que ridicule," which had come too late.[136] Just

before the signing of the Bérard-Jordana Agreement, Poncet had noted that Italian leaders, despite the many signs of amicability emanating from Franco, were far from reassured as to the probable course the Spanish leader would take.[137] So it was no surprise to the French ambassador to find Mussolini "extrêmement dépité et mécontent" at the way in which the Spanish affair had concluded.[138]

So ended Poncet's fourth month at the Rome embassy. The circumstances in which he had begun the new year still applied to his situation, but, if anything, they had been exacerbated. To begin with, the breach between Daladier and Bonnet continued to widen. Although the two concurred in the Baudouin affair, Bonnet was the more enthusiastic over its prospects. As emphasized by Daladier in the Chamber in January, France's official policy toward Italy was one of intransigence. While Bonnet publicly echoed the premier, his private policy was far from firm. Then, despite the doubts of Poncet and his superiors, France's Italian policy had weathered the English visit to Rome, although fears of a Mediterranean Munich, instigated by the British, were never far from the surface. Finally, Poncet remained as puzzled and worried as ever by Mussolini's vacillations.

At the end of February, then, the ambassador felt discouraged, and with good reason. Undoubtedly, the intransigence of his government and his bewilderment and anxiety over Mussolini's intentions toward France combined to dissipate, for the time being at least, his hope for conciliation with the Italian government. Not once in the first two months of the new year had he urged the Quai d'Orsay to consider negotiations over the Italian demands. In fact, he had gone so far as to declare that a French overture to the Duce would be received as a sign of French impotence and as a cue for producing further demands. Poncet's mood, indeed, closely resembled that of Daladier as he had insisted more than once that France had to be strong and determined in the face of the Italian menace. As the winter drew to a close, Poncet could only speculate upon what the future would bring. Would the ending of the Spanish issue force the Duce into a course of action even more inimical to French interests? Was there any chance at all for a Franco-Italian understanding? François-Poncet would find some tentative answers in the weeks to come.

Chapter V

François-Poncet's Persisting Dilemma: March - May 1939

The beginning of March 1939 brought no amelioration of either André François-Poncet's diplomatic isolation or his feelings of pessimism toward the Franco-Italian situation. His dilemma continued. The factors circumscribing his mission since the end of December would continue: the dichotomy in the attitudes toward Italy of his own government, the equivocations of Mussolini, and the interference of the British which now would, in truth, begin to work in Poncet's favour. Only toward the end of April would the French ambassador in Rome again resume an aspect of normality in his duties. The seizures of Prague and Albania, however, while not entirely unforeseen by European leaders, would further complicate Franco-Italian relations and the attitudes of those involved in them.

During the last weeks of winter, there was little change in the Italian attitude toward France. On the last day of February, François-Poncet informed the Quai d'Orsay that Mussolini remained in "un état de véritable exaspération contre la France."[1] Domestic difficulties, particularly within the Fascist party,

were only exacerbating the Duce's nasty mood, and this situation caused Poncet to think that the solution might be a war against France. Sources close to the Italian leader said that he would either exploit or create some incident "pour se dégager de l'impasse dans laquelle il se trouve sans avoir à définir officiellement les revendications de l'Italie à notre endroit."[2] France and her stubborn refusal to open negotiations would be blamed for any war, and Mussolini would never abandon his colonial claims. Time seemed to be running out for Italy; if the Duce meant to act, then it was "now or never." Foreign policy makers in Berlin had much the same impression,[3] although Mackensen, the German ambassador in Rome, disagreed. He noted that the Italian army was not yet prepared for action, and he felt, therefore, that Mussolini was anxious to "allow certain questions to mature in peace and quiet."[4] However much Mussolini might desire Italo-German staff talks, he continued to delay them. Perhaps he waited for the end of the Spanish Civil War, or perhaps he feared that news of these talks would bring an immediate French invasion of Italy.[5] Nevertheless, in early March, Attolico informed the German foreign ministry that Mussolini now wanted conversations to begin as soon as possible and wished this news to be released to the

press.[6]

Corbin, meanwhile, learned in London that the German foreign office had addressed a confidential communication to its diplomats abroad.[7] It declared that the Italian government had yet to state its claims against France; but it appeared that these did not include territorial demands because, according to Mackensen, Mussolini realized that claiming Tunisia would mean war. The statement of Anglo-French solidarity made recently by Great Britain had impressed the Duce; henceforth then, war with France would bring war with England. Now, therefore, the Italian leader would be content to return to the 1896 Conventions to settle the Tunisian issue. On this claim and on those of Djibouti and the Suez Canal, Germany would support her Axis partner.

Until the middle of March, Poncet had little to tell the Quai d'Orsay. Mussolini, he heard, was considering an action of some sort against Djibouti, but apparently its purpose would be to instigate negotiations with France rather than to foment a war.[8] Moreover, someone had informed him that Mussolini hoped Britain would try to involve France in talks, and that the incident would form a catalyst for this. Rumours of troubles encountered in Djibouti by the French railway

forced Bonnet to ask Poncet to inform Ciano that, if the trouble was not stopped immediately, France would have to act.[9] Spain continued to be a sore point, too. The Bérard-Jordana Agreement and the dispatch of Marshal pétain to Burgos as ambassador at the beginning of March had rankled Italian leaders who feared that Franco meant to escape their influence for that of France and Britain.[10] Speaking to a Spanish diplomat, Poncet learned that Franco intended to align his foreign policy more closely with that of France, so perhaps Italian fears were to be justified.[11] Moreover, the Fascists were displeased with the new Pope, Pius XII, the former Cardinal Pacelli, the election of whom seemed to indicate to them a continued independence on the part of the Vatican. Poncet invited Ciano to a dinner he was giving for the official French delegation which was in Rome to attend the coronation of the new Pope. Mussolini, however, instructed Ciano to send his regrets as some of those who would be present, he claimed, had written items insulting to Italy.[12]

Attitudes on both sides of the Alps remained essentially unchanged. From Paris, Phipps informed the Foreign Office that the effects of the Italian claims--the surge in French patriotism, the emphasis upon empire, and the consequent reinforcement of Daladier and

his government--continued. "On no one issue in recent years," the English ambassador declared, "has France been so united and, although not irrevocably opposed to friendly negotiations [with Italy] in due course, on other than territorial issues, so determined to resist threats and blackmail."[13]

According to Poncet, Italian stances and tactics also continued unaltered. France was stubbornly wrong. Italy was right, the Rome-Berlin Axis was as strong as ever, and Germany would support her Fascist partner. In the end, France's weakness would bring her to the negotiating table. As Poncet observed:

> [t]out en se livrant sur nous à une tentative de pression et d'intimidation, qu'il pousse et poussera, sans doute plus loin encore, jusqu'aux limites où la manoeuvre deviendra dangereuse, le gouvernement fasciste attend et souhaite, probablement, que nous venions à composition; et il a épié les signes. 14

Rumours ran in Rome that the French ambassador intended to go to Paris for authorization to open negotiations. The Italian press carried a news item from the London Daily Mail which stated untruthfully that he was forever pestering the Quai d'Orsay to make an overture to the Italian government. The Rome correspondent of the Daily Mail decided, therefore, that soon regular diplomatic channels would settle the Italian claims. Bonnet's answer to this wishful thinking was that it was only a

part of a "vaste manoeuvre italienne" to spread false news about France.[15] Soon, however, the Italian press would have something else to worry about.

The news that upset the Italian press and the rest of Europe was Hitler's seizure of Prague on 15 March 1939, an act which effectively shattered what had remained of the "spirit" of Munich. In reality, Hitler's latest aggression was not entirely unwelcome to French and British leaders--no longer did they have to feel so guilty over the shrunken remains of Czechoslovakia. Unwelcome or not, the March episode signalled a certain change in direction of French and, especially, British foreign policy. From then, firmness and alliances would more frequently be the watchwords where Germany was concerned. Moreover, English leaders finally consented to joint military staff talks which would begin at the end of March, an undertaking that naturally gladdened French hearts and undoubtedly allowed Daladier a little more independence in foreign policy. Much as many French and British leaders might have wished to apply the same tenets to Italy, as they were applying them to Germany, the realization of their own weakness and unpreparedness for war meant that Italy should be kept in an amicable state as an ally or, at least, as a rein on Hitler.[16] The British, therefore,

began to encourage France to make amends with Italy by granting her some concessions. Signs of this policy, indeed, had been apparent in Halifax's offer of mediation in the Libyan troops affair of February and early March. The offer, of course, had been summarily rejected by Bonnet, or at least in his name. For the divisions in the French cabinet over Italian policy and the Bonnet-Daladier differences, especially, were already quite noticeable and would continue to become more pronounced as the spring of 1939 wore on.

Bonnet would not only suffer later for his Italian policy, but he faced a great deal of intense, contemporary criticism over Prague. At a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber, the right-wing Henri de Kérillis declared that Bonnet's Munich policy had been catastrophic and recommended that he "seek employment in another sphere of activity."[17] In the Chamber of Deputies, Gabriel Péri, a Communist, queried what course French policy would now take because "[d]e quel prix cette tolérance a-t-elle été payée?"[18] Obviously, many French politicians doubted the efficacy of the foreign minister's policy, and only the approaching visit of President Albert Lebrun to London averted what could have been a major governmental crisis.[19] France's Italian policy also came under fire

in the Chamber. One deputy arose and pleaded with his fellow parliamentarians to understand that Italy and Germany were irrevocably bound to each other; no concessions, therefore, could be made to Italy.[20] Daladier heartily agreed with this statement: "nous ne céderons, que ce soit à la force ou à la ruse, ni un seul de nos droits, ni un arpent de nos territoires."[21] Three days later, the Chamber granted the premier special powers in order that France could prepare to face the dictators.

How interesting it would be to know exactly what Poncet in Rome thought of the conflicts at home. Without question he had some sympathy for Bonnet's views. After all, both men still hoped for some sort of agreement with Italy, however pessimistic Poncet might have been over the chances for it at this particular time. Neither the ambassador's reports nor his memoirs gives any express opinions on the positions of either Daladier or Bonnet. It may be assumed, however, that Poncet would not have been as critical of Bonnet as Péri and de Kérillis had shown themselves to be.

In the meantime, as Poncet realized, Italian leaders smarted under the new humiliation they had just suffered at Hitler's hands. Just why Hitler had failed to inform the Fascists of his plans to seize Prague is

not entirely clear. Perhaps his preparations distracted him, or perhaps he did not trust Ciano's ability to keep a secret.[22] Whatever the reason, Mussolini hid his resentment publicly, but not privately. "Every time Hitler occupies a country he sends me a message,"[23] complained the Duce; nevertheless, Italy had to accept this new aggression. A few days later, Mussolini declared that the idea of a military alliance with Germany would be anathema to Italian public opinion, and he deployed troops to the Venetian border where he was prepared to shoot Germans if necessary. Soon, though, he had changed his mind again. He would stick with Germany, for "we cannot change our policy now. After all, we are not prostitutes."[24] Ciano, for his part, was ready to desert the Rome-Berlin Axis and to attempt to win his father-in-law over to agreement with France and Britain, an undertaking which would be possible only if France were less intransigent.[25] Like Mussolini, Ciano was careful not to show his true feelings--if that is what they indeed were--to William Phillips, the American ambassador. He assured the latter that the seizure of Prague fully accorded with the principles of the Rome-Berlin Axis and, he said less confidently, "with an understanding between the German and Italian Governments."[26] But he did not hoodwink Phillips.

The same day that Hitler took Prague, François-Poncet sent a cable to the Quai d'Orsay warning that Hitler's action could well incite Mussolini to emulate the German leader. France, he said, had to be extremely cautious.[27] The essence of what Poncet reported to Paris about the Italian reaction to Prague corroborates much that has already been mentioned about it. Italian public opinion was less than enthusiastic about Hitler's latest coup. Italy seemed to be "le dindon d'une farce tragique"; therefore, she could surely be expected to attempt obtaining compensation probably by pressuring Germany to support her in some action against France.[28] The news that Poncet received about Germany's acquiescence in the Hungarian occupation of Ruthenia (15 March) indicated to him that Hitler had postponed his plans for the Ukraine in order, perhaps, to be ready to help Italy in the west.[29] A later report developed these themes and ended with a warning from Poncet that France had to patch up her domestic divisions and present a united front against "le péril extérieur."[30] The ambassador's initial reaction to the situation created in Italy by Hitler's coup, then, was to fear an Italian aggression against France. In his memoirs, he states that, on 22 March, he asked the Quai for permission to re-establish relations with the Chigi

Palace but received no response.[31] Interestingly enough, though, Poncet had received a letter on 21 March from M. Gentizon, the Rome correspondent for Le Temps,[32] in which the writer urged that an immediate gesture be made by France to Italian leaders. Gentizon had suggested that Hitler, ostracized in world opinion by his seizure of Prague and faced by a coalition of hostile powers, now needed Mussolini's support urgently. Italian public opinion, however, was presently anti-German. So, before Germany succeeded in winning Italy irrevocably to her side, France had to act, for Poncet should remember that "la seul neutralité de l'Italie, c'est l'effrondrement de l'Allemagne."[33] Unfortunately, there is no record of Poncet's reaction to this letter nor any plain indication that it influenced him in any way. Nevertheless, Gentizon's views would seem to echo his own, and his letter may have encouraged Poncet to make his request of 22 March.

Meanwhile in Paris, and probably without Poncet's knowledge, Pierre Laval and others continued to press for a resumption of conversations with Italy. At a secret session of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee on 16 March, Laval, when asked by Bonnet if he believed it possible to negotiate with Italy at the moment, declared that he "regard[ed] it as indispensable."[34]

He then tendered his services for a secret mission to Italy, but Daladier did not accept the offer. Apparently Guariglia informed Italian leaders of Laval's proposal,[35] but Mussolini, too, refused to have anything to do with the former foreign minister.[36] At the same time, Paul Baudouin was involved in an attempt at another secret mission.[37] Soon after Prague, Ciano had approached Fagiuoli to see if he could induce Baudouin to resume negotiations. The latter cabled this news to Baudouin who went straight to Daladier, but the premier could not accept Ciano's offer.[38] The anti-French campaign continued unabated in Italy, a condition which precluded any negotiation. As well, Daladier believed that secret missions, such as Baudouin's in February, only weakened France the more when news of them leaked to the public. Much would depend upon the coming speeches of the King of Italy and Mussolini; if they suggested the possibility of conversations, Daladier said, "je la saisirai avec plaisir."[39]

On 23 March, at the inauguration of the new Fascist Chamber, King Victor-Emmanuel III delivered the speeech from the throne. In it he reiterated the usual string of recent Italian "triumphs," the Ethiopian conquest, the Rome-Berlin Axis, and the Anglo-Italian Accord, and he emphasized the Italian wish for peace.

As a whole, it was a moderate speech. Three days later, on the twentieth anniversary of Fascism, Mussolini made another speech, a long awaited speech, in which he covered the same points that the king had and welcomed the impending victory of Franco in Spain. Peace, he said, while not always possible or desirable, was necessary for a time for Italy in her "vital space" of the Mediterranean. Turning to France, he declared that the Italian note of 17 December 1938 had clearly set out the issues that divided Italy from France:

> [c]es problèmes ont un nom: ils s'appellent Tunis, Djibouti, canal de Suez. Le gouvernement français est parfaitement libre de se refuser même à la simple discussion de ces problèmes, comme il a fait jusqu'ici à travers ses trop réitérés et trop catégoriques jamais. Il n'aura pas à se plaindre ensuite si le fossé qui divise actuellement les deux pays, devient si profond que ce sera une tâche ardue, sinon impossible, de le combler. 40

Mussolini, however, did not further delineate these problems.

The reactions to Mussolini's speech were not overwhelmingly negative. In Rome, François-Poncet felt that if one ignored the violent rhetoric of the speech, the Duce's message was relatively "modéré et prudent."[41] Evidently, the Italian leader wished to keep some bridges intact behind him. He had virtually allowed, though, that Spain was no longer a barricade between France and Italy; thus, Poncet said, he left a road open

for negotiation over the remaining issues separating the two countries. Italian public opinion since Prague, moreover, wanted a rapprochement with France to keep the peace, and Italian leaders wanted to escape the heavy hand of German hegemony. Poncet warned, however, that if France refused to talk, then alliance with Germany would be the next step for Italy.[42] The Economist noted that the Italian claims were now purely colonial, that is, there was no mention of Corsica, Nice, or Savoy; nevertheless, the western democracies should not be falsely assured by the speech.[43] Sir Alexander Cadogan found Mussolini's discourse "pretty offensive."[44] From Germany came word that support for the Italian claims was rising there because German leaders realized that the Italian public saw all benefits of the Rome-Berlin Axis accruing to Germany and because, since Prague, Germany needed Italy to avoid European isolation.[45]

Why, after so much journalistic violence and general show of bellicosity toward France, had Mussolini uttered a speech that, while in itself as boastful and as vengeful as before, contained a modicum of moderation? Several factors, no doubt, influenced the Duce, the first one being the most recent affirmation of Anglo-French solidarity which may have alarmed him. Perhaps he also hoped that British influence might still

be brought to bear upon France, a prospect that would brighten if he appeared to be reasonable. Then there was Daladier's rejection of a new secret mission by Baudouin which Ciano seems to have favoured. He termed Daladier's response as "rather unsatisfactory";[46] perhaps Mussolini's attempt at moderation was meant, in reality, to please the French premier. Finally, there was the recent Italo-German exchange of views in Berlin. On 20 March, Attolico had met with Hitler and Ribbentrop.[47] Hitler had made several statements that later were either repeated or implied in Mussolini's speech. He desired a continuation of peace to allow Germany to consolidate her military and naval forces, because he was virtually certain that Britain would support France in a war. (Surely this would give the Duce food for thought; if war broke out, the Royal Navy could quickly separate Italy from her North African colonies and hinder the imports upon which she was so dependent.) In order to avoid war, the Führer felt that France might be willing to make some concessions to Italy. Hitler did not say non-territorial concessions, but they may be assumed, and they were what Mussolini was claiming. How much these statements of Hitler influenced the Duce's speech of 26 March will never be known. Yet the very similarity between them and some of

Mussolini's declarations surely suggest that they had given Mussolini something about which to think.

The Duce was correct if he thought that the British might attempt to influence France's attitude regarding the Franco-Italian conflict. For this was exactly what Halifax wished to do. While Bonnet was visiting in London with the French President, he had a talk with the British foreign secretary. The latter very gently suggested that he and his colleagues sometimes "wondered" whether they could assist France and Italy to settle their problems.[48] They had decided, however, that discussions of the Italian claims might be touchy, as Mussolini had yet to define them. With this, Bonnet agreed. Reading between the lines, though, it seems, perhaps, that Halifax's intention here was not so much to offer British assistance as to plant the idea in Bonnet's mind. On 27 March, Phipps relayed to Halifax a suggestion of Joseph Caillaux, a member of the French Senate; although the French government wanted no British interference, Caillaux said, perhaps the English could exert a "tactful and beneficial influence" upon the Italians in order to moderate the claims.[49] Finally, on 28 March, Halifax instructed Phipps to attempt to determine the French response to Mussolini's speech, as enunciated by Daladier, because he feared that "M. Léger

may be exercising his influence to prevent any response being made to what may have been intended by Mussolini nor [sic] to make things more difficult."[50] If Phipps should find that Daladier was preparing to be intransigent, the ambassador was tactfully to question this stance and then to suggest to the French premier how he might save France's face in the situation without jettisoning the chance for negotiations with Italy. Phipps did as his minister advised him, but the tone of his reply to Halifax suggested that Daladier was not receptive to the delicate proposal from the Foreign Office.[51]

So, probably unknown to Poncet in Rome, attempts were being made to convince Daladier and the French government of the necessity of some sort of contact with the Italian government. First Laval had offered his services, and then Ciano had tried to resume talks through Baudouin. Finally, the English had made another approach to the French premier. All these overtures, of course, were rejected by Daladier, but the pressure was mounting. Moreover, on 23 March, Le Temps carried a cryptic news item, obtained from L'Agence Fournier, which stated that Hubert Lagardelle, a personal friend of Mussolini, had arrived in Paris from Rome to take charge of a special mission involving

Franco-Italian relations.[52] At the same time, Le Temps continued, L'Agence Havas declared that such news was unfounded; an unspecified authority had denied that any agent, official or unofficial, had come from the French embassy in Rome with Italian propositions.[53] The truth of this episode will probably never be known. Perhaps Lagardelle was merely vacationing in Paris, or perhaps he had been sent by Poncet. For, in his memoirs, the ambassador notes that he tried "sous des formes diverses" to persuade Paris to listen to his plea for contact with Rome.[54] Whatever the case, nothing came of this incident.

The French cabinet met twice between the time of Mussolini's speech and that of Daladier on 29 March.[55] At the first meeting, on 27 March, it was decided to publish the Italian note of 17 December 1938 denouncing the Laval-Mussolini Accords of 1935 and the French reply of 27 December. Then Bonnet stated that, along with François-Poncet, he believed that Mussolini's speech had opened the way for the conversations they both desired. A rather heated exchange followed, with Monzie, Chautemps, and Marchandeau favouring Bonnet's stand, in opposition to Campinchi, Mandel, Reynaud, Champetier de Ribes, and Zay, all of whom declared that "nous n'avons qu'à attendre et à ne prendre aucune initiative."[56]

Daladier seemed to be left in the middle. Tunisia, he said, was the real bone of contention; he would not fight over Djibouti or the Addis-Ababa railway. Two days later, the cabinet met again to discuss Daladier's speech for that evening. The Premier, apparently, had not familiarized Bonnet with his speech, and the latter and Chautemps tried unsuccessfully to have it diluted a bit. Bonnet reminded the assembled ministers that both the British and the Pope eagerly hoped that France would not completely reject Mussolini's offer; Daladier, however, answered that the British frontier seemed now to be the Vistula rather than the Rhine, a veiled reference, no doubt, to the increase of English interest in European affairs since Prague. The feelings expressed at these two cabinet meetings certainly point to the widening gulf between the views of Daladier and Bonnet on Italian policy. This split was further illustrated by Daladier's failure to inform Bonnet of the position he would take in his speech, although Bonnet might have guessed it. The episode is also instructive in showing that the foreign minister no longer exerted as much influence upon his leader as he had in previous months.

Daladier's speech, broadcast the evening of 29 March, was certainly firm, if not completely

intransigent.[57] Contrary to what many believed, he said, the Italian note of 17 December did not define the Italian claims but only denounced the 1935 accords on the grounds that, since 1935, the creation of the Italian Empire had engendered new Italian rights. The premier, however, rejected this allegation because it meant that henceforth Italian demands would multiply. Once again, he reiterated that France "would yield neither an acre of our lands nor a single one of our rights."[58] Yet, on the basis of the 1935 accords, France would be willing to talk with Italy if only she would define her claims. In other words, Italy had to take the initiative through proper diplomatic channels.

In Italy, Ciano declared that Daladier's speech implied that the French government was hardening its stand. Mussolini's response to this was, "so much the better; it was just what I desired."[59] Corbin signalled from London that the speech was well received there; the French premier, the English thought, had been both moderate and firm.[60] François-Poncet, isolated as he was from official Rome, learned of the Italian reaction through the Russian <u>chargé d'affaires</u> in Rome. Ciano had said to the latter, "[o]n fait tout pour nous pousser chaque jour davantage dans les bras de l'Allemagne."[61] Regarding the Italian claims, Ciano was

more reticent but stated that Italy would take no initiative. He wished that Britain and France would be tougher with Germany and not tend to tar Italy with the German brush, for Italy had had no part in the seizure of Prague. The assumption that Rome and Berlin always acted in concert only strengthened the tie between the two capitals.

Disappointed as Poncet must have been at the intransigence in Daladier's speech, he nevertheless persevered in his opinion on the value of France's answering the tacit invitation contained in the Duce's 26 March speech. Furthermore, he must have been aware that the Italian public favoured talks with France.[62] Although in his reports to the Quai immediately following Mussolini's speech, Poncet did not directly state that France should approach Italy, the tone and content of his dispatches certainly implied that the time was right and that refusal portended dire circumstances. Guariglia in Paris held many of the same sentiments as Poncet.[63] He had often warned Mussolini that territorial claims would only cause France to refuse all conversations with Rome and might even lead to war. The Duce's speech, therefore, indicated to the Italian ambassador that the time was ripe for a negotiation that Mussolini sincerely wanted. From Rome,

on 29 March, Poncet noted the local pessimism that already attended France's failure to make an overture to Italy.[64] Italians attributed this omission, he said, not to any Italian impingement upon French rights, but to French hostility for the Fascist régime and French disdain for Italian power. Although Mussolini's desire for a rapprochement with France was seen by some as an attempt to exonerate himself in Italian opinion and to improve his international prestige, Poncet was inclined to believe that the Duce was more or less sincere. As the French ambassador had stated on 28 March:

> il y a lieu, à mon avis, de ne pas repousser l'appel indirect du Duce. J'estime qu'il faudrait au contraire l'amener à nous dire en quoi consistent pratiquement ses demandes et ne pas négliger les chances qu'il peut y avoir présentement de la fixer sur un programme minimum. 65

Even after Daladier's speech, the tone of the Italian press remained relatively moderate. In the opinion of foreign observers, this was a rather surprising turn, which seemed to indicate that Italian leaders, while disappointed by the speech, still hoped that negotiations with France were yet possible.[66] The first week of April brought no change in what Poncet heard from all sides. Italian public opinion continued to watch "telle Madame Barbe-Bleue . . . par tous les yeux de Soeur Anne, en direction de Paris."[67] So far,

however, no instructions for the ambassador to make a *démarche* to the Italian government were forthcoming from Paris.

Indications that Fascist leaders had not despaired of a French overture came, as well, from other sources. On 31 March, Sir Noel Charles, the counsellor of the British embassy in Rome, approached Ciano, apparently in a private capacity.[68] He asked the latter if some contact, whether secret or otherwise, could not be made between France and Italy, presumably with the assistance of the British. Ciano graciously listened to what Charles had to say but replied that he would have to refer the matter to Mussolini. Had it not been for Daladier's speech, Ciano claims that "I should have said yes without hesitation."[69] From Berlin came similar indications. Attolico had found Mussolini's speech moderate; the idea of territorial conquests had been discarded as well as the notion of resorting to war to realize the Italian claims. Although Daladier's speech created a barrier to discussions, Christian de Vaux Saint-Cyr, the *chargé d'affaires*, to whom Attolico spoke, gained the impression that the Italian ambassador had been told by his government to sound out France, another indication that Italy still hoped that France would not remain intransigent.[70] Ominously, though, a

few days later, de Vaux Saint-Cyr reported a change in the Italian attitude toward Germany; repugnance toward the Reich had slowly become resignation to the fact that Italy would align herself with Germany should war come.[71] In Rome, Perth received the same impressions as Charles and de Vaux Saint-Cyr. He also informed London that Poncet was fully prepared to see Ciano should orders come from Paris.[72] Unfortunately, even though both Poncet and Bonnet favoured a démarche to the Italian government, several in the French cabinet remained adamantly opposed to any settlement with Mussolini.

During the furor over the speeches, the Spanish Civil War finally dragged to the end of its tragic course. By 28 March, Madrid had surrendered, and Franco declared the conflict to be over. Italian troops, however, remained in Spain; in fact, rumours circulated that they had been increased. Poncet informed the Quai that some Fascists talked of war with France in the Pyrenees and of using the Balearics for military operations.[73] Although retaining or increasing troops in Spain may have been dictated by Mussolini's desire to remain influential with Franco and to be on hand to grab the lion's share in Spanish reconstruction, Poncet feared another reason for this action.[74]

Perhaps, he mused, Mussolini also meant to threaten France from the Pyrenees in order to put her in a more conciliatory mood. The Italian press capitalized on the events in Spain by exalting the Fascist victory over Bolshevism and by extolling the strength of the bond between the two countries.[75] Franco, it seemed, would not ask the Italians to evacuate the Balearics immediately. Would the Italians then use their foothold there to force England to influence France regarding the Italian claims? Poncet could not answer this or other questions about future relations between Spain and Italy; hence France had to watch Italy carefully. One thing certain was that involvement in the Spanish war had cost Italy dearly, both financially and militarily. Diplomatically, she had sacrificed much of her freedom; siding with Germany and the Spanish nationalists had placed her more plainly in Hitler's camp. Was the expense worth it all? It might have been, had Mussolini secured his way with Franco, but the Spanish leader soon asserted his independence and refused any part in another war. Perhaps the Duce saw his next little rupture of the European scene as compensation for the Spanish loss.

* * *

Partly in emulation of his Axis partner,

Mussolini, on 7 April, invaded Albania. Moreover, just as Hitler did to him over Prague, the Duce seems to have deliberately neglected to inform the German leader of his decision to occupy Albania.[76] While the actual timing of the event may have surprised European opinion, there had been rumours and speculations around for some time that Italy was considering doing something about her Adriatic neighbour,[77] which, of course, had been in the Italian sphere of interest for years. No doubt the wish to prop up his domestic and international prestige, which had suffered over Prague and France's refusal to consider the Italian claims, played a prominent part in Mussolini's decision to go ahead with the coup. The Duce, however, also meant to let Hitler know that the Balkans and the Adriatic were Italy's domain. The invasion was Ciano's pet project. He had planned it down to the most minute detail,[78] although things almost went awry at the last moment, but his plans gained really nothing for Italy that she did not already control in the resource-poor country. The Italian puppet, King Zog I, resisted the idea of a military occupation to oversee Italian interests and fled to Greece with his wife and new-born child, thus adding "Albania" to the Italian king's titles.[79] The crown, and what Mussolini considered to be prestige, were

virtually all Italy gained, for the annexation of Albania cost the Italian treasury some three hundred million lira (about three million pounds), an expense that the already over-burdened Italian taxpayer would have to bear.[80]

The western powers were not slow in reacting to the coup, although not in the sense of attempting to restore what little independence Albania had had prior to the Good Friday invasion. Undoubtedly Mussolini perceived that the British would make few objections because they looked to him for help in controlling Hitler.[81] Nevertheless, some British leaders, at least, seemed almost relieved that the Duce had put himself in the same evil boat as Hitler and hoped that others would realize it, too.[82] Halifax, who was concerned about the Anglo-Italian Accord, sent Perth to obtain an explanation from Ciano. Perth learned that Italy meant only to restore order in Albania and that the status quo in the Mediterranean would not be ruptured.[83] At the same time, Mussolini sent a message to Chamberlain assuring him that Italy would do nothing to upset Anglo-Italian relations or the larger European situation.[84] On 9 April, another message followed which stated that the occupation of Albania had been peaceful and was welcome by all Albanians, that Italy was now planning

the withdrawal of her troops from Spain, and that "a possible crisis in Anglo-Italian relations would indeed be deplorable."[85] In the end, the British government gave in to Mussolini's assurances about Spain and his alleged disinterest in Greece and agreed not to denounce the Anglo-Italian Accord, but not before it had contracted to come to Greece's aid in view of rumours about proposed Italian attacks on Corfu. (There were also rumours of Italian interest in Egypt and Gibraltar.) A promise was also made to Roumania, again on the basis of hearsay, and similar to that given at the end of March to Poland.

The French reaction to the Italian annexation of Albania was much more agitated and pessimistic than that of the British. One reason for this was that Albania only reinforced the French conviction that German and Italian planning was fully co-ordinated, a conviction that the British did not share. Thus, Daladier represented the coup as the beginning of a "big Italo-German offensive from the North Sea to Egypt."[86] For once, Bonnet agreed with his leader. He asked the American ambassador to inform his government that war could break out at any time.[87] The Comité Permanent de la Défense Nationale met on 9 April and decided that Italy would be the first target in a war; as well, the

French navy and airforce were deployed in the Mediterranean.[88] The invasion of Albania, then, confirmed rather than changed French and British attitudes toward Italy. For the French, it reinforced what they had thought about Mussolini's policy for some time, that is, that the Italian leader was up to no good. The British, however, while now less sure than ever of Mussolini's intentions, continued to abide by his assurances (for instance, the now time-worn one about withdrawing troops from Spain) for the sake of their Mediterranean interests and in the increasingly thin hope that the Duce could forestall Hitler.

From Rome, François-Poncet added to the French dread of war. He calculated that almost two million men had been called up in Italy; was this just for Albania, or was an operation against France in the offing?[89] Even Perth, according to Poncet, was somewhat anxious about the extensive military preparations going on and was beginning to doubt the words of the Fascist leaders; he felt, however, that Italy still did not want war and was mobilizing only in case war should break out.[90] The Albanian coup, to Poncet, was only the first step in an Italian programme, rather than an end in itself, and Poncet ventured three guesses as to what Mussolini now proposed to do.[91] If Italy was in collusion with

Germany, then an operation against Poland or Roumania was possible. If Italy was acting alone, then perhaps she would turn on Greece and Roumania next. Finally, Italy might be planning to settle the Mediterranean problem, that is, her conflict with France. "Quoi qu'il en soit," Poncet concluded, "ce répit ne sera pas long. L'horizon demeure chargé de nuages et le baromètre n'est pas au beau."[92]

The fear of action against Roumania prompted Daladier to guarantee French aid to her, a decision to which Britain reluctantly adhered, mostly because France had so quickly approved the British guarantee of Greece. The Albanian coup seems also to have provided Daladier with the final evidence that a French approach to Italy was impossible. Phipps informed Halifax that the French premier now considered the Italians to be only "gangsters" who sought to pull the wool over the eyes of the western powers.[93] In the end, then, Mussolini's adventure in Albania had some less than pleasant consequences. Whatever further plans he entertained had been rather sharply curtailed by the western powers, an obstruction which, in turn, forced him into closer and closer company with Hitler.

* * *

Despite Daladier's determination to have

nothing to do with Italy, Poncet and Bonnet continued to hope for an opening. Just two days before the invasion of Albania, Perth had had a long talk with his French colleague, the first in some time. He had found the latter's view considerably altered; Poncet had been most eager for talks between his country and Italy. Evidently, he had written privately to Bonnet and had even sent a special messenger to Paris, but all to no avail; Daladier remained adamantly opposed to conversations with Italy.[94] Poncet had even gone so far as to suggest to Perth that the British government might have some influence in the matter; apparently he had had an idea that Corbin in London might be reinforcing the premier in his intransigence.[95] Upon receiving this information from Perth, Halifax had immediately instructed Phipps to make a delicate and careful approach to the French government, but this had been forestalled by the Albanian affair.[96] Soon after the invasion, Perth learned that Poncet had been ordered to stay away from the Italian foreign ministry.[97] Nevertheless, François-Poncet continued to urge Paris to make an overture to Rome. The picture that he painted of Italian public opinion, while not entirely optimistic, was not wholly pessimistic.[98] The recent military measures, he said, did nothing but worry the

Italian public with whom war was most unpopular. In addition, the anti-French campaign had succeeded only as a function of the anxiety generally felt over Axis policy. France's refusal to discuss the Italian claims, thus, had become the force thrusting Italy nearer and nearer to Germany. Poncet believed that the majority of Italians opposed closer relations with Germany, but he also warned that it was the Fascist leaders, who saw things differently, who would be making the decisions. From Charles-Roux at the Vatican came similar indications.[99] According to Cardinal Maglione, the Vatican's secretary of state, Mussolini feared the heavy hand of Germany but was too proud to do something about it. France, the Cardinal suggested, should perhaps take the first step toward solving the Franco-Italian troubles, for the prospect of war between France and Italy was so terrible that anything that might avert war was worth trying. The same day, Poncet wired to Bonnet that he believed that Mussolini was not yet irrevocably tied to the Axis.[100] It was a shame, therefore, that France was not in a position to influence Italy and thus to do something to avoid war. Poncet himself was only too keen to make some contact with the Italian government, but no authorization for this had come from Paris:

> [j]e n'en dois pas moins, étant donné le sérieux des circonstances, signaler les inconvénients d'une situation, dont nous ne sommes assurément pas responsable, mais qui, pratiquement, en leur interdisant toute initiative, réduit les ambassadeurs des deux pays à un rôle de simples observateurs et équivaut à une suspension des relations diplomatiques normales. 101

So Poncet could appreciate that Guariglia in Paris suffered under the same hampering conditions as he did. Not only did the French ambassador continue to rely upon Perth and his other colleagues for information, but, more importantly, he was being prevented from doing anything to ameliorate the relations of his own country with that of the country to which he was accredited.

Bonnet apparently absorbed all of Poncet's indications that there was still hope of keeping Mussolini on the side of the west. The Earl of Perth was due to retire from the English embassy at the end of April, and Bonnet requested of London that Perth's replacent, Sir Percy Loraine, be sent without delay.[102] Unfortunately, Phipps did not say why the foreign minister was so anxious to have Loraine in Rome, but the wish probably reflected the conversation which Bonnet had had with Loraine on 6 April when the latter had expressed himself in agreement with Bonnet on the necessity of making contact with Italy.[103] Oliver Harvey was also very happy that Perth's term was finished,

although he hoped that Loraine would take a firmer line than Perth had.[104] The retiring English ambassador tended to blame the French government for the state of Franco-Italian relations.[105] Mussolini, he claimed, would do nothing about trying to forestall Hitler unless France took the initiative in making an overture to Italy. Poncet evidently held much the same opinion as Perth, but so far, he had received no authorization to approach the Italians.[106] Bonnet was willing, so Poncet told Perth, but Daladier and Léger were not, and Poncet hoped that London might be able to persuade them to relent. Poncet's hope of British assistance would seem to indicate that he felt almost desperate about the necessity to resume contact with the Italians. It was, after all, only three months earlier that he had been so worried about British meddling during Chamberlain's visit to Rome.

On 17 April, Poncet had a meeting with the German marshal, Goering, who had been on a tour of North Africa.[107] The two men discussed matters in eastern Europe, Goering claiming that Germany was now sated in this area and did not consider the return to the Reich of Danzig as urgent. Nevertheless, he added, if France and Great Britain sincerely desired peace, they should tone down their polemics against Germany. On

Mussolini's plans, the marshal was reticent, although he did not think that they would lead to war. However, the message that President Roosevelt had sent to the dictators imploring them to do nothing more to endanger the peace, Goering considered to be a "Document grotesque! Manoeuvre grossière! Manifestation puérile et stupide! Outrage révoltant!"[108] Later, Charles-Roux found that the German response to Roosevelt's message had negatively influenced that of the Italians, and that Ciano's recent speech in the Fascist Chamber had been relatively moderate where France was concerned.[109]

Despite indications, such as Goering's tour, that the Rome-Berlin Axis was gradually strengthening, Poncet continued to notice many other signs that led him to believe that Italy was far from happy in her association with the Reich. The invasion of Albania, for instance, had had two purposes: to hinder French and British influence in the Balkans, but also to indicate to Germany that the Balkans and the Adriatic remained in the Italian sphere of interest.[110] Furthermore, Poncet believed that Italian leaders were wooing Yugoslavia in order to save her from German intrigues in Croatia and Slovenia, just as they were encouraging Hungarian leaders to desert the Reich in favour of Italy. To the French ambassador, these Italian manoeuvres were hopeful

indications that, while Italy continued to proclaim her faithful adherence to the Rome-Berlin Axis, she was keeping her options open, a strategy that might work to the advantage of the west. From Berlin came other signs that all was not completely well with the Axis.[111] Mussolini's recent, rather moderate speech had not pleased Hitler, but, although Italian and German policies seemed often to be in opposition, in the face of criticism, the two dictators were always eager to affirm the solidarity of their partnership.

Perth's conviction, which Poncet shared, that Mussolini could still deter Hitler, led the British government to attempt once again to persuade the French government of the wisdom of re-establishing contact with Rome. For the British guarantee of Poland made a friendly Italy, who might be able to restrain Hitler, even more vital.[112] Halifax, therefore, instructed his ambassador to see Mussolini and to encourage him to declare specifically to France the nature of his demands. If this operation were done tactfully regarding the French government, the British foreign minister felt, "though I have no right to speak on their behalf--that the French government would take them into serious consideration."[113] The same day, he directed Phipps in Paris to urge French leaders to make an

approach to Rome.[114] He also instructed Phipps to make no mention to the French of his directions to Perth, just as he had told the latter not to tell Mussolini about the démarche to Paris. To do so "might only encourage them to do nothing pending result of my démarche in Paris."[115]

As could be expected, Bonnet received Phipp's suggestions eagerly. Daladier, however, despite Phipp's carefully prepared speech, remained convinced that the Italians were not to be trusted; the Albanian invasion had virtually precluded an overture to Italy which, besides, might upset French subjects in North Africa.[116] Even Phipp's statement about the British intention to introduce conscription apparently did not move the French premier. Phipps saw Bonnet on 27 April and again expressed the hope that France would approach Italy, now that conscription was a fact.[117] At the same meeting, Bonnet read the ambassador a telegram from François-Poncet telling of his conversation with Ciano on 25 April on the occasion of the signing of a Franco-Italian commercial accord.[118] When Poncet had inquired of him the nature of the Italian claims, Ciano had answered amiably that they consisted of a free zone in the port at Djibouti, a share in the railway there, two seats on the Suez Canal board and a revision of canal tariffs,

and an extension of the 1896 Conventions on Tunisia. But no territorial claims were included. In his diary, Ciano had noted that Poncet declared his government always ready to talk on the basis of the claims proposed earlier to Baudouin, and he added that his démarche was authorized by Paris. Later, Ciano had told Mussolini about the meeting, but the latter was unimpressed: he had "no intention of starting negotiations with France until after the signing of the treaty with Germany."[119] Poncet's telegram, however, had pleased Bonnet who urged Phipps to let Daladier know that London considered a resumption of talks with Italy to be vital.

On 24 April, Perth left Rome in an optimistic state of mind after his last audience with Mussolini. The latter had reassured him that neither the Danzig issue nor Franco-Italian relations would lead to a catastrophe; a conference could settle them.[120] For his part, Halifax carried Perth's ideas and the results of Poncet's meeting with Ciano to Corbin and requested him to inform Daladier that the British government understood the French premier's position. With due regard for it, however, the British government still felt that the opportunity was now available to patch things up between France and Italy.[121]

* * *

In early May, Grigore Gafencu, the Roumanian foreign minister, made a tour of several European nations. Some of his observations on Franco-Italian relations are instructive. During his sojourn in France, he quickly discerned the dichotomy in opinion over Italy. Daladier accused that country of playing a double game, while Léger at the Quai d'Orsay was clearly suspicious of the motives of the Italian leaders. The secretary general claimed that:

> [a]ny external effort made to bring them to our side is doomed to failure; it will strengthen them in their policy of duplicity, cause them to ask the highest price for what they have to offer, and give them a keener appreciation of the benefits which the Axis can bestow. Only when they have thought it through will the idea that only just begins to dawn--the danger to Italy of subservience to Germany--cause them to turn again to us, not so that they can make a deal with us, but to rediscover the state of equilibrium that had always ensured their safety. Only then shall we be able to clasp hands. 122

Bonnet disagreed with Léger. He was fully in favour of approaching Italy on the basis of the non-territorial claims discussed by Baudouin and Ciano. As Gafencu was on his way to Rome, Bonnet requested him to carry a message to Ciano reminding him that the numerical preponderance of the Anglo-French naval combination in the Mediterranean had to make alliance with Britain and France a vital necessity for Italy. 123

Gafencu duly travelled to Rome, pleased that

France and Italy might be able to patch up their differences and thus relieve some of the tension in the Balkans. In Rome, he conveyed Bonnet's message to Ciano. Although, he said, some in Paris rejected the idea of an overture to Italy, Bonnet and others favoured it. Ciano replied, "[i]t is the first who are right. If they wait, it will be too late."[124] Later, Mussolini received Gafencu and gave him an enthusiastic exposition on the Rome-Berlin Axis which somewhat embarrassed the latter because, when he had visited Berlin, the Axis had not even been mentioned. On France, the Duce was a bit reassuring; Franco-Italian difficulties, he said, "are of a colonial nature--they are not of a territorial order. We shall not make war on account of this."[125] After taking leave of Mussolini, Ciano warned Gafencu that, while no formal alliance yet existed between Italy and Germany, it could come at any time. Then he added ominously, "[t]he Germans do not waste their time. It would be advisable for your friends not to waste theirs."[126]

What Gafencu learned, in essence, was that the Italian leaders appeared genuinely interested in patching up their troubles with France. As well, he told Poncet that he believed that all was not perfect harmony between Germany and Italy.[127] Nevertheless, the

Fascists were not inclined to make the first move but tended to wave the German flag at France in an effort to bring her to terms. Probably Léger's assumption that Italy was playing a double game was correct, but she played it with a naivety and a desperation that demonstrated the uncertainty of her position vis-à-vis Germany. The Italian leaders, in attempting to walk a tightrope between Germany and the west, were neglecting to provide themselves with a net should they fall.

* * *

Although Daladier apparently remained adamantly hostile to Italy, on 3 May, Bonnet, with the seeming acquiescence of both Léger and the premier, at last instructed Poncet to make a <u>démarche</u> to the Italian government. The French ambassador must have been very happy. Finally, he would be able to resume his proper duties.[128] In his telegram to Poncet, Bonnet acknowledged that the ambassador in Rome had several times, since 15 March, suggested making contact with the Italians but had not been authorized by Paris to do so. The former then proceeded with what seems to be an apologia for his lack of response:

> [j]e pense qu'il convient de dissiper tout malentendu à ce sujet.
> Je vous ai indiqué, en ce qui concerne les revendications italiennes, que le gouvernement français n'étant pas demandeur, n'avait aucune proposition à formuler. Sur

ce point notre position n'a pas varié.

Mais il n'a jamais été dans ma pensée de vous interdire toute conversation avec le gouvernment italien.

Bien au contraire, j'ai toujours jugé essentiel que dans les circonstances internationales actuelles, vous ayiez avec le ministre des Affaires étrangères d'Italie, chaque fois que vous le jugiez utile, les contacts nécessaires à la poursuite normale de votre mission. 129

Why, then, had Bonnet not responded earlier to Poncet? Was he trying, indeed, to shift the responsibility to his ambassador, or to blame the latter for not doing his duty? Bonnet himself supplied the answer to the first question. It was only after "une négociation difficile" with Daladier that he had been able to persuade the latter to agree to Poncet's making contact with the Italian government, although he did not tell the ambassador about his plight.[130] As for the second question, Bonnet was probably not so much meaning to blame Poncet, as to conceal the difficulties that he was encountering in Paris with his Italian policy.[131]

Understandably, Bonnet's telegram upset Poncet. The next day, the ambassador took Bonnet to task for trying to wriggle out of his dilatoriness.[132] Not only had the foreign minister offended him, but the delay might have prejudiced relations with Italy even more. For, in his interview of 25 April with Ciano, the Italian foreign minister had asked if the French

government would eventually make an overture to Italy. Poncet, however, had had no authority to return to Ciano with an answer; therefore, as he noted, "[u]n silence prolongé de ma part risquerait d'être interpreté comme une réponse négative."[133]

Poncet now had the opportunity to try to rectify this situation. On 11 May, he met with Ciano in an attempt to learn more precisely the nature of the Italian claims.[134] At first, Ciano seemed surprised that Poncet wished to have the claims more discretely defined, and the answers he gave the latter were essentially those that Poncet had received on 25 April. What Italy wanted for Tunisia, though, now seemed less certain. When Poncet insisted that Italy could not expect the Tunisian Italians to retain their Italian nationality indefinitely, Ciano replied that he did not know whether the Duce had a precise plan in mind or whether he would agree to a simple extension of the 1896 Conventions. The Italian foreign minister accused Poncet of trying "to save what he could in the usual French way" which could only threaten future negotiations, and the French ambassador astutely "drew in his horns."[135] In a letter to Bonnet the same day, Poncet appeared quite pleased and optimistic at the way things had gone: "[j]'ai trouvé Ciano très empressé,

très gentil, nullement gêné par son accord avec Ribbentrop, au contraire, et ne retirant rien du programme qu'il avait tracé précédement. . . . Mes difficultés, au surplus, sont probablement moins grandes que les vôtres."[136] (On 6 and 7 May, Ciano and Ribbentrop had held conversations at Milan which were concerned with the preparation of a military alliance between Germany and Italy.) But Poncet's optimism was ill-founded. On 11 May, Daladier delivered a speech which Mussolini considered to be "needlessly stubborn" and which, he told Ciano, negated the foreign minister's talks with Poncet; Ciano, therefore, "should forget about them."[137]

Before the signing of the Italo-German military alliance, however, two other events occurred which again show the French attitude toward Italy. In the first week of May, Pope Pius XII proposed that a conference be held to discuss the international situation, specifically the Franco-Italian differences and the German-Polish problem. (Hitler, of course, now had designs on Danzig.) The countries invited, France, Italy, Britain, Germany, and Poland, declined the invitation. In France, Daladier, Bonnet, and Leger for once were in agreement in their rejection of the Pope's idea.[138] For one thing, the two problems had nothing in

common, but both France and Poland would probably end up on the losers' side. Léger believed, in addition, that the Italians were behind the whole idea because, all along, Mussolini had hoped for just such a conference.[139] Bonnet feared that external arbitration would only make an international problem out of something that should be confined to France and Italy.[140] Mussolini's view, evidently, concurred with Bonnet's,[141] so the Vatican's feelers produced no results. In a private audience on 25 May, Poncet found the Pope surprised, rather than annoyed, that his initiative had failed; nevertheless, the Holy Father persisted in the belief that Franco-Italian relations would improve.[142]

The second event was the conversations which Halifax held with Daladier and Bonnet in Paris on 20 May.[143] Upon Halifax's asking him about France's present position on Italy, Daladier replied that her position had not changed. If France fulfilled the demands of Italy, she would be making unilateral concessions above and beyond those of the Rome Accords of 1935. Not only would France gain nothing, but her prestige, especially in North Africa, would be damaged if she capitulated to Italy. Halifax could understand the French premier's concerns, but he persisted in believing, from

information coming from many sides,[144] that Italy was unhappy in her relationship with Germany and, therefore, might be amenable to helping to control Hitler. Moreover, Mussolini's decreasing domestic prestige could be bolstered by a few concessions from France which might also deter Mussolini from further adventures. The British foreign minister believed that Franco-Italian relations had to be ameliorated for the sake of peace, and, after all, Britain had ceded to France over conscription and the guarantee to Roumania. Daladier, however, remained unconvinced. An approach to Mussolini, he said, was out of the question. Only Italy would gain anything in the present situation, and there was no guarantee that French concessions would bring Mussolini to the side of the west. Although the Italian demands for a free port at Djibouti and a share in the Ethiopian railway might be considered, to concede on the Tunisian issue was impossible. Rather than do this, Daladier "préférait quitter le pouvoir."[145] It is evident from this discussion that the French and British leaders differed in their appraisals of the unity of the Rome-Berlin Axis. Daladier considered the Axis powers to be irrevocably linked while Halifax, perhaps more wisely, understood that Mussolini and Hitler were at odds as often as they were in harmony. In different

senses, both Daladier and Halifax were right.

The recent weeks must have been somewhat more satisfying for François-Poncet, for he had at last been able to reassume, to a certain extent, his proper role as ambassador in Rome and would, in future, have to rely less upon his foreign colleagues for information. As the events of spring passed, and disastrous as they were for the peace of Europe, they rekindled in Poncet the hope that Mussolini might yet be separated from Hitler. In this thought, Bonnet concurred. Both men, then looked forward to conciliation with Italy, although Poncet was careful to maintain a strong and dignified position for France. He did not favour territorial concessions to Italy, but he approved of negotiation over the non-territorial issues with which the Italians were concerned. The stances of both men benefited from the English "meddling"; indeed, they welcomed it. Far from fearing a Mediterranean Munich instigated by the British, Poncet now looked to them for help. Despite many persuasive arguments, however, Daladier maintained his posture in opposition to all dealings with Italy, even though he seems to have agreed to Poncet's resumption of communications with the Italian government. Was Daladier right? Only time would tell. Nevertheless, there were many signs in the spring of

1939 that he was not. Mussolini had made several vague gestures toward France; on the basis of these, Poncet, Bonnet, and the English leaders felt that conciliation was appropiate. Perhaps if Daladier had at least agreed to make an overture to the Duce, the latter would not have felt so pressured to sign the Pact of Steel with Germany.

Chapter VI

François-Poncet Resolves his Dilemma:

May - August 1939

Ah! aller ensemble
O Allemagne guerrière,
Côte à côte armées
A la recherche du destin!

Ensemble, marcher à fond
Comme le font les soldats
Ah! qu'il est bon d'avoir à ses côtés
Un camarade calme
Qui, à notre fidélité,
Répond par sa fidélité!1

André François-Poncet was probably amused, but concerned, when he read such patriotic doggerel in Italian newpapers. He would have been more appreciative and less worried, perhaps, had France been the "camarade calme" of Italy instead of Germany. The invasion of Prague, and the several indications by Fascist leaders that a French overture to their government would be welcomed, had raised Poncet's hopes in March and April that his country and her "Latin sister" might yet have a chance at a détente aimed at controlling Hitler's Reich. At that time, of course, he had had no authorization from his government even to communicate with the Italian government let alone to carry on negotiations for a settlement of the problems dividing the two countries. When word finally arrived from Paris that he could resume his association with the foreign minister, Ciano,

the relationship between the two partners of the Axis was closer than it had been when Poncet had begun his appeals.

Within a few days of Georges Bonnet's informing his ambassador that conversation with the Italian government was not forbidden, the foreign ministers of Germany and Italy had met in Milan to prepare a military alliance between their respective countries. Mussolini, of course, had been considering the advisability of such a step for some time; as early as January 1939, he had told Ciano that he anticipated war with the west and wanted to be prepared.[2] Since January, though, he seemed to have done a great deal of soul-searching, for he realized that Italian public opinion did not particularly relish closer connections with the Reich. It was undoubtedly the consequences of the Albanian venture that finally decided him. As Poncet had astutely appreciated, the invasion of Albania was meant, at least in part, to be a show of Italy's independence of Germany.[3] Unfortunately, French and British leaders saw it otherwise. They hurriedly guaranteed Greece and Roumania, thus increasing the encirclement of Italy and seemingly leaving her isolated. Germany, as well, seems to have misunderstood Mussolini's intent in Albania[4] and, instead, repeatedly

assured the Duce of the primacy of Italian interest in the Mediterranean. So it was to Germany that Mussolini turned.

According to what Poncet gleaned from the Italian press and other sources, the approaching pact was not popular in Italy.[5] The press tended to emphasize it as an instrument of peace, as a means of controlling Hitler. In an audience on 11 May, the Italian foreign minister told the ambassador that the pact would have no effect upon their conversations and that Italy still hoped to come to an agreement with France.[6] The speech that Mussolini delivered at Turin on 14 May appeared, to Poncet, to reinforce what he had learned from the press and Ciano. Despite its vehement tone, he thought the speech to be marked with reserve and prudence.[7] Although Mussolini had spoken of knots to be untied, he had added, that, for their loosening, "il n'est peut-être pas nécessaire de recourir à l'épée."[8] Significantly, moreover, the Duce made no reference either to the Italian claims on France or even to Franco-Italian relations. Despite Poncet's belief that the Duce had invited the west to negotiate in the interests of preserving the peace, the ambassador soon noticed that the Italian press was emphasizing the more bellicose parts of the speech as if Mussolini was

already regretting his conciliatoriness.[9] Perhaps this change in direction was dictated by the failure of France and Great Britain to react in a manner that might raise Italian hopes, or perhaps it was dictated by the German reaction. From Berlin, Coulondre reported a chilly reception of Mussolini's words.[10] Why had the Duce emphasized so much his desire for peace? Why had he omitted to mention the Italian claims on France? Why had he not denounced the Anglo-Italian Accord, as some German newspapers expected he would? In sum, Coulondre concluded, German opinion held the speech to be a retreat. This less-than-approving German reaction, combined with Mussolini's anger at French and American press items declaring Ribbentrop's cool reception in Milan to be symptomatic of the Duce's declining popularity,[11] likely impelled the Italian leader into precipitating the conclusion of his alliance with Germany.

The alliance, or as Mussolini christened it,[12] the Pact of Steel, that Ciano signed with Hitler and Ribbentrop on 22 May 1939, committed Italy to a military and political accord with the Reich which was both defensive and offensive in nature.[13] The pact comprised seven articles which included immediate consultation in any international crisis, mutual political, diplomatic,

and military support in the event of an external threat or of war, joint military planning, and the development of relations with Hungary, Japan, and Manchukuo. The text of the pact also contained a secret protocol which provided for the immediate organization of military planning and press and propaganda services. Following the signing of the pact, Ciano received the Grand Cross of the German Eagle from Hitler. He then delivered a speech affirming the eternal solidarity of the two signatories, their wish for peace, and their determination to oppose "any attempt to threaten their living space or to violate interests essential to existence, the development and work of their peoples . . ."[14]

What the Pact of Steel meant, in reality, was that Mussolini had become more than ever Hitler's creature. The Duce was convinced that now Hitler would help him to make good his claims against France, that the pact, in its consultative capacity, would restrain the Führer from further adventures for three years or so, and that, finally, the world would realize and acknowledge the solid link between Italy and Germany.[15] To Mussolini, the most important clause in the pact was the one specifying mutual consultation; now he had no longer to fear another fait accompli on the part of the

Reich.[16] He also looked forward eagerly to an alliance with a strong nation which would preclude Italian isolation in Europe, and he gambled heavily upon a verbal stipulation that was not even included in the pact--several years of peace with which to consolidate Italy's strength and position for the war which he saw was inevitable. It was not until after Ciano had signed the pact, though, that Mussolini thought to inform Hitler of the need for peace until 1943;[17] consequently, he covered this oversight by claiming that the secret protocol of the pact contained this clause.[18] Hitler, however, continued to go his own way; within days, he ordered that planning for the invasion of Poland be stepped up and that Italy be kept in ignorance of it. Whatever Mussolini's faith in the pact, others in Italy were less enthusiastic about it. Ciano noted rather pensively that "it is clear to me that the Pact is better liked in Germany than in Italy. . . . We must recognize that hatred for France has not yet been successful in arousing love for Germany."[19]

Considering the ominous tone of the articles of the Pact of Steel, the Anglo-French reaction was subdued. Generally, the alliance was seen as one more step in the subjugation of Italy to the German master. As The Economist noted, Italy was now bound to support

Germany in case of war whether or not it was in her interest to do so.[20] French leaders regarded the cementing of the Rome-Berlin Axis as further proof of Italo-German collusion. Bonnet, however, soon received some reassuring news from Mussolini who sent him a clandestine message saying that the pact precluded war for three years. According to the Italian senator, Puricelli, the conveyor of the message, the Duce currently was busy with plans for an international exposition, and he reassured Bonnet thus: "[s]oyez tranquilles [sic], il n'y a aucun péril de notre côté."[21]

In Rome, Poncet found the terms of the Pact of Steel alarming. To him, the most significant clause was the commitment to a military alliance not only in the case of aggression, but in the case of involvement in any war with another power or powers; the pact was, in short, "une alliance offensive et défensive."[22] The reference in the preamble to the maintenance of peace, Poncet believed, was considerably weakened by other references to the promotion of Italian and German interests and to the current unrest in the world. "Visiblement," he concluded, "le but du pacte italo-allemand n'est pas d'attendre, les bras croisés, le développement des événements."[23] Later, Poncet pondered

upon the ramifications of the pact, especially for Italy.[24] Would one of the signatories proceed with a plan not approved by the other? Would Mussolini still be able to exercise his influence over Hitler if the latter had all Italy's resources at his disposal? Poncet did not think so. The offensive nature of the pact, he ended, which included the strong possibility of aggressive actions, and the rapidly shrinking chances of separating the two dictators, had to force the western powers to look to their defenses. At the same time, however, they should keep open their channels to Hitler and Mussolini, a policy which "auraient au moins l'avantage de les éclairer sur les intentions véritables des dictateurs."[25] In Berlin, Coulondre arrived at many of the same conclusions as Poncet. In particular, he noticed that Rome and Berlin seemed to view the pact in different lights. To Ciano, the alliance was "une communauté d'idéaux et d'intérêts," while to Ribbentrop, it comprised "un instrument de combat."[26] Much as Ciano may have emphasized the peaceful aspect of the pact, however, Poncet found that most of the Italian public feared that a new period of international tension was imminent and that the Pact of Steel had only aggravated things.[27] Italian leaders, though, declared that it would be Germany, not Italy, who would provoke a

conflagration, a war, Poncet believed, which Mussolini hoped could be avoided at the last minute.

* * *

Once the excitement over the signing of the Pact of Steel had abated, Europe settled into a summer of deceptive calm punctuated only now and then by hints of the trouble to come. The German-Polish tension over Danzig remained a source of worry as well as a source of dissension over what to do about it. Meanwhile, the west was forming alliances. France and Britain, in the hope of forestalling the dictators, continued to expend considerable diplomatic energy on conversations for a political agreement with the Soviet Union. These talks would drag on until July with little result, to be replaced in August with negotiations for a military pact and to be ended abruptly with the signing of a Soviet-German non-aggression pact. In May, France also conducted somewhat muddled political and military talks with Poland; but nothing decisive would result until 4 September when a treaty would be signed. Finally, desultory proceedings with Turkey, begun in February, would produce a French declaration of assistance toward the end of June.

At home in France, Reynaud's stringent policies had brought some economic and financial

recovery, and rearmament was progressing. Having received in March the power to govern by decree, Daladier presided over a country almost devoid of parliamentary control but, ostensibly at least, united behind him by the Italian insult and the Italo-German aggressions in eastern and southern Europe. It was under these conditions, the preoccupation with alliance-making and the augmentation of Daladier's power and popularity, that François-Poncet persevered in trying to make heard his pleas for an overture to Italy.

In Rome, the French ambassador had a new British colleague, Sir Percy Loraine, "un Anglais intégral, plein de fierté et de dignité,"[28] as Poncet described him. From the beginning, the two men seemed to have enjoyed a better relationship than that of Poncet and Lord Perth. Although Poncet had hoped that Loraine might have been able to subdue Mussolini to a certain extent, news items about the latter's expertise with dictators had turned the Duce against him.[29] With Ciano, Loraine seems to have had more success; he pleased the foreign minister.[30] Moreover, as Poncet had, the new ambassador found Ciano a much better man than he had expected to from his reputation.[31] Loraine had arrived in Rome with the intention of making every effort to keep Mussolini in the western camp. By the

end of May, though, disillusionment had set in. After reading Italian newspaper articles openly hostile to France and Britain, Loraine was virtually convinced that these indeed expressed the true position of the Italian government. "I fear the die is cast," he reported to Halifax, "and that the only argument is the visibility of overwhelming physical strength."[32]

Poncet did not yet share Loraine's change of opinion. At the end of May, despite the signing of the Pact of Steel and the new wave of hostility in the Italian press directed against the western powers, he seems to have been, if not optimistic, at least not as despondent as Loraine. Once he had re-established contact with the Italian foreign minister, Poncet resolved to maintain the relationship; Ciano, after all, had been congenial enough in their recent meetings. Only too clearly, the ambassador knew that Mussolini's antagonism toward him continued, so he decided that his last resort was to cultivate the son-in-law in an ultimate attempt to influence the Duce favourably.[33] This plan, Poncet carried out; but although it was not to have the desired effect upon the Italian leader, the ambassador and the foreign minister were destined to enjoy a cordial relationship until the end of Poncet's embassy in Rome, that is, until Italy declared war upon

France. Indeed, Poncet became quite fond of Ciano who slowly inspired in him "une réelle sympathie."[34]

From all appearances, the signing of the alliance with Germany had put Mussolini into a bad humour, at least as far as France and Great Britain were concerned. Poncet had reported more than once to the Quai d'Orsay that Italian opinion blamed the western democracies and their alleged encirclement policy for forcing Italy into the arms of Germany. Mussolini, no doubt, shared this opinion, reinforced, in his mind, by France's persistent refusal to make the first move toward opening negotiations with him. On 27 May, Mussolini received Loraine in an audience that Poncet described as "passablement orageuse."[35] What made the interview so uncomfortable for Loraine was Mussolini's indignant query about the value of the Anglo-Italian Agreement now that Italy was being ringed about by the Anglo-Turkish Declaration (of 12 May) and the impending arrangement with the Soviet Union.[36] Loraine gamely responded that the supposed encirclement was meant only to preserve the peace and, besides, had Mussolini not ruptured the status quo in the Mediterranean with his invasion of Albania? Moreover, the British prime minister had overlooked this breach of the agreement in the interests of Anglo-Italian solidarity. The meeting

drew to a close after more heated exchanges on the European scene in general, and Loraine left, Ciano said, looking like a man "who had received a slap in the face."[37] In reality, the British ambassador was not as shaken as Ciano alleged him to be. Nevertheless, the audience with Mussolini must have played a part in augmenting Loraine's misgivings about the efficacy of trying to retain Italy in the western camp. Loraine may well have been justified in his doubts. Ciano's final comment on the interview probably reflected his father-in-law's position: "[i]n my opinion the British-Italian agreement is dead and maybe Chamberlain will die with it."[38]

Unless Mussolini's attack upon Loraine and the British was part of his old policy of never being friendly with both western powers at once, the audience boded ill for Franco-Italian relations. As Poncet declared to Ciano a few days later, the atmosphere between France and Italy was "aujourd'hui . . . encore pire qu'hier."[39] An extremely anti-French pamphlet written by students in Turin was circulating, Italian authorities were refusing passports to citizens wanting to travel to France, and radio broadcasts had informed school children that, by 1940, Tunisia would be Italian. Moreover, in a fit of what could only be called spite,

the Duce had refused France's offer of a piece of the sculpture, Ara Pacis, claiming that the French press would represent him as abandoning Tunisia and Corsica for a piece of stone.[40] For his part, a courteous, but preoccupied, Ciano had complaints to make about France. The French press continued to be hostile toward Italy. He worried mainly, however, about the Franco-British encirclement--the accord with Turkey, the current negotiations with the Russians. Poncet explained, as Loraine had earlier, that these were only defensive moves provoked by Prague and Albania. From Ciano's preoccupation with this situation, Poncet gathered that Franco-Italian relations had taken a back seat, for the time being at least, to wider European problems in the minds of Mussolini and Ciano.[41] Very little was said, then, about Franco-Italian negotiations. According to Poncet, Ciano's opinion was that "il ne saurait être question de négocier tant qu'elle [la querelle franco-italienne] durera et elle durera tant qu'il ne sera pas question de négocier."[42] Indeed, things seemed to have reached an impasse.

Probably for a combination of reasons, Mussolini was irritated with France. For one thing, of course, he had not yet had the satisfaction of seeing the French government make the first move to open

discussions over the Italian claims. In addition, he no doubt was among those Fascists who averred, perhaps with some reason, that it was Anglo-French indifference to Italy that had dictated her adherence to the Pact of Steel. Now the alleged encirclement policy not only worried the Italian leader but, as well, seemed to constitute a personal affront to him and to his country. Charles-Roux at the Vatican, then, could write that the Duce acted "comme s'il désirait garder des prétextes de querelle avec nous."[43] There were indications, unfortunately, that these pretences were increasing. In the Giornale d'Italia, Virginio Gayda, the Italian journalist, declared that the Italian claims against France were now of a territorial order.[44] A few days later, Le Temps carried a new item from Relazioni internazionali reiterating Gayda's statement:

> [p]our le peuple italien, l'espace vital veut dire expansion. . . . La France, croit-elle qu'elle se sauverait et qu'elle sauverait la paix en s'opposant aux aspirations profondes du peuple italien, le jour où, sur un simple ordre du chef, ces aspirations se manifesteraient en plein?[45]

As ominous as this message was, it undoubtedly was much more than mere journalistic patriotism, given the fact that the Italian press was so tightly controlled. For Mussolini, at this time, apparently, ordered plans to be prepared for action against Greece and Turkey and was

considering seizing Tunisia or Algeria. While these last ideas may have been merely rash fancies of the moment, the fact that the Duce considered them at all, combined with the increased hostility of the Italian press, surely may be taken as an index of his attitude in early June.

Poncet and most other observers, though, believed that Italy would not welcome a war just yet. Indeed, Coulondre learned that a source at the Italian embassy in Berlin had declared that if the Franco-Anglo-Soviet pact were concluded, neither Germany nor Italy would think of precipitating a European war because their chances of victory would be far too slim.[46] Corbin, in London, reported that, before Italy could consider a war, her industrial centre in the valley of the Po would have to be removed from the threat of the French airforce and her supply of heavy artillery would have to be augmented.[47] Finally, an evidently confident Ciano told Phillips, the American ambassador, that Europe was beginning a "long period of peace."[48] Poncet, for his part, noticed that the alliance with Germany had not inspired with confidence either Italian officials or public opinion.[49] Indeed, they now followed with trepidation the progress of the Anglo-Soviet talks. "Wait and see," Poncet added, are the

watchwords of the Italian leaders: how far will the policy of encirclement go? But if the conversations with Russia should fail, official circles (and Poncet himself) believed that Germany would not be slow in falling upon Danzig with the likely result that Italy would be dragged into an unwanted war. It was no wonder, Poncet thought, that Mussolini was worried. In all likelihood, this was why the current anti-French press campaign had been slightly abated immediately after his interview with Ciano on 30 May when Poncet had mentioned the obstacle to a Franco-Italian détente presented by the acrimonious presses of both countries.[50] What this small lull meant to the ambassador was that Italy, while awaiting the clarification of the international scene, was not yet ready "de rompre complètement les ponts avec nous."[51]

Whatever the political state of Franco-Italian relations in June, their social aspect was ameliorated a bit in that same month. On 14 June, Mussolini permitted Ciano to dine at the French embassy with François-Poncet.[52] Although the guest of honour said nothing about Franco-Italian matters, he talked about the general European scene in a manner which Poncet found less optimistic than usual. Nevertheless, the evening seems to have passed pleasantly enough. The Duce's

willingness to allow Ciano to accept Poncet's invitation apparently spurred on Guariglia in Paris to invite Bonnet to dine at the Italian embassy.[53] Although, since his arrival in the French capital, Guariglia had seen Bonnet only rarely (due to his lack of instructions from the Chigi Palace), he had never despaired of an improvement in relations between his country and France. With this idea in mind, the Italian ambassador had approached various French politicians in the hope that they would encourage their government to engage in talks with Rome. Nothing came of these attempts, but Bonnet told Guariglia in early June that he wished to have more contact with him.[54] Although the two men met three or four times during June, if Bonnet expected that these meetings might prompt Ciano to make a move, he was mistaken.[55]

Bonnet, however, had more than one iron in the fire. Once again, the British were assisting both him and Poncet. The Foreign Office, even after Daladier's adamant "jamais" in May, had continued to hope for an opportunity to change the mind of the French premier. Not everyone in London, however, agreed with this policy. Oliver Harvey, Halifax's secretary, had warned the foreign secretary in early June that it would be an error to persist in exerting pressure on Daladier whose

hands were tied by the general opposition in France to negotiations with Italy.[56] Earlier in May, Harvey had also protested the British intrigue with the French foreign minister. Bonnet, he said, "is a broken reed and would certainly not stand up for us in the hour of need, whereas Daladier . . . is of straighter material."[57] Nevertheless, despite Harvey's admonitions, it was to the "broken reed" that Halifax and Phipps once again turned. First of all, though, the British needed an inducement to lure Daladier into a better frame of mind about Italy. An idea that Mussolini might agree to decrease substantially the number of his troops in Libya was stillborn, even before Phipps had a chance to approach Daladier with it. Loraine's military attaché had just returned from North Africa where he had discovered that Italian troops there were in poor condition; to ask for their removal would gain nothing for France but might allow the Duce a bartering point.[58] A week later, Bonnet eagerly approached Phipps with a message from Daladier. The premier was considering the postponement of elections (due in May 1940) until 1942 in view of the precariousness of the international situation. Thus, he wished that the British would not announce their own elections because, by doing so, the opponents of

postponement in France would be strengthened in their stand. If Chamberlain acceded to the French premier's request, Phipps thought that it could constitute a quid pro quo for opening talks with Rome.[59] Bonnet also approached the English ambassador about making a démarche to Daladier on the subject, but he insisted that the initiative had to appear as emanating from Chamberlain because the Italian issue "was the one point on which he was in the slightest degree at variance with Daladier."[60] Later, Bonnet said that he would inform Phipps of the right moment to speak to Daladier; it might be best, he added, to wait until the conversations with the Soviet Union ended.[61] As well, the foreign minister told Phipps that the Communists and others on the left hindered him in his efforts to pursue his Italian policy.[62]

At the end of June, Bonnet gave Phipps some information emanating from the counsellor at the Italian embassy in Paris, which probably gave the English added impetus in their efforts to coerce Daladier. Although Bonnet's meetings with Guariglia during June had brought no response from Ciano, it seems not to have been because the Italians were uninterested.[63] They had expected that Paris would have instructed Poncet to make a démarche to Ciano suggesting that conversations be

resumed through conventional diplomatic channels. The inaction of the French, however, had led Rome to believe that Paris continued to oppose talks. Mussolini allegedly was quite eager to reach agreement with France; if she refused to make an overture, he would not try again and would then have to settle affairs with France "by other means."[64] It is difficult to know what to make of this account. If Ciano and Mussolini were actually sincere in their desire to make up with France, it is strange that they never thought to mention the idea to Guariglia in Paris. The ambassador speaks in his memoirs of "l'absence absolu" of any orders or policy statements concerning France.[65] Obviously, then, he knew nothing about the information that Bonnet passed on to Phipps. The only possible answer is that Ciano communicated secretly with the counsellor because he distrusted Guariglia.

At any rate, François-Poncet gave no indication in June that he was aware, either of the English manoeuvres with Bonnet or of the Bonnet-Guariglia affair. (There is the possibility, of course, that Bonnet had communicated with him by private letter or by telephone.) His reports during June, moreover, allude less to Franco-Italian issues than to broader European affairs and their implications for Italy. The

Danzig affair continued to worry Italian leaders who searched for a solution to the problem. One solution, Ciano told Poncet, that the Italian government meant to suggest to Berlin, was the digging of a tunnel under the Polish corridor.[66] Such a strange solution surely indicated to Poncet the desperation of the Fascists over this affair. In early June, the Italian "volunteers" finally arrived home from Spain, an event upon which the Italian press capitalized, Poncet noticed. The visit to Rome of Serrano Suñer, General Franco's brother-in-law, had given Mussolini and Ciano reason to hope for an accord with Spain. Word came to Poncet from a "bonne source" that, if his government wished to have good relations with Spain, it had better execute the Bérard-Jordana Accords.[67] On 23 June, the ambassador commented at length upon Italian policy which he found "singulièrement confuse et contradictoire."[68] What he believed, though, was that Italy was intent upon causing as much unrest as possible in the world in order to give herself and her Nazi partner a better chance to realize their goals. Although Italy still did not want war, Poncet added, Mussolini was busy exploiting the threat of it to try to bring others to heel.[69] Gayda's violent anti-French press campaign was aimed directly at keeping open the wound between France and Italy. To come to

terms at this time with her "Latin sister" would not yield Italy enough benefits; besides, Mussolini knew perfectly well that France would not go to war. A related matter worried Poncet. Gradually, he felt, the press campaigns against France were gaining ground: Italian opinion was much less favourable to his country now than it had been in September 1938. In spite, however, of Italy's intensive efforts to rupture the status quo, Poncet concluded, Mussolini seemed convinced that, at the last minute, he and Hitler would be able to extract from the western powers "certains avantages plus ou moins limités mais toujours appréciables."[70] It is significant that, in this dispatch, Poncet made no reference to negotiations with Italy and had not done so for a few weeks. Perhaps he was waiting, as Mussolini waited, for the conclusion of the talks with the Soviet Union to see what Italy would do. More likely, given the current Italian mood, he had now despaired of any amelioration of a situation that seemed only to grow worse. When Poncet asked Ciano, on 5 July, whether he thought a peaceful settlement of Franco-Italian problems was possible, the foreign minister had been non-committal. The ambassador concluded, therefore, that any new initiative by the French government would be received by its Italian counterpart as "une preuve de

faibless."[71]

While Poncet may have been despondent, the English, with a certain eagerness, continued their machinations with Bonnet despite indications that Italian hostility toward Britain matched that held toward France.[72] The Foreign Office, no doubt, kept Loraine in Rome informed of the proceedings with Bonnet, but what he thought of them, given his earlier conviction that only a show of physical force could now give Mussolini pause, is not clear. Possibly he had modified this stand slightly, for he reported to London his impression that Ciano was not ready "to burn his bridges" to England; at the same time, the ambassador noted a gradual increase of anti-German sentiment in Rome.[73] Once again, then, on 7 July, Phipps questioned Bonnet about the opportune moment to approach the French premier. The French foreign minister hoped that in a week or so the time would be ripe.[74] To encourage Daladier to acquiesce, Phipps suggested that the British could assure him that they would obtain Italian affirmation that the claims on France would not be increased.[75] To this, Halifax agreed.

Phipps's <u>démarche</u> to Daladier, on 14 July, took the form of a letter written by Chamberlain to the French premier. In the letter, the British prime

minister outlined the three advantages that would accrue to France upon a settlement of some sort with Italy.[76] First, Mussolini, hopefully, would be encouraged to exert a restraining hand upon Hitler over Danzig. Second, whatever the outcome of a French overture to Italy, the western democracies would gain some time with which to prepare for whatever the future might bring. Finally, an overture would offer proof of the sincerity of the democracies in advising negotiation to solve problems. To give him credit, Chamberlain made only an oblique reference to the concessions on conscription, the guarantee of Roumania, and the French election issue that Britain had made to France as "the collaboration that we have established in many fields . . ."[77] Phipps was somewhat less delicate when he read the letter to Daladier. He openly reminded the French premier of the English concessions and of the vital significance to Halifax of an easing in Franco-Italian relations.[78] Daladier, nevertheless, remained politely but stubbornly against making any approach to Rome. Some weeks ago, the premier added, Ciano had told Poncet that he would ask Mussolini to define the Italian claims and then report back to the French ambassador; but no answer had as yet arrived. Thus, Daladier felt that Phipps's offer to obtain Italian assurance on limiting the extent of

the claims would come to nothing. The English ambassador was not optimistic about the reply that Daladier meant to send to Chamberlain. He observed that, while Bonnet agreed with Chamberlain's view, he was "too frightened of Daladier to back it up" while only Léger, "violently anti-Italian" as he was, had Daladier's ear.[79] From Loraine in Rome came more depressing opinions. He was now virtually certain that it was too late to separate Italy from Germany; nevertheless, he preserved the hope that certain variables, such as the fairly widespread anti-German feeling in Italy, might yet bring Mussolini to terms.[80]

Daladier responded to Chamberlain's letter on 24 July.[81] In a lengthy answer, he once again reiterated the official French position vis-à-vis Italy. It was impossible for the French government to consider making an overture to Italy in view of the Italian attitude toward France over the past many months. The blow to French prestige, especially in North Africa, would be too heavy, and it was likely that Italy would only interpret a French démarche as a sign of weakness. Finally, indeed, there was no assurance that French concessions to Italy would persuade Mussolini to desert Germany in favour of the west. Only, the spectacle of a determined Anglo-French solidarity, Daladier concluded,

might tempt Mussolini to change his mind.

A week or so before Daladier sent his reply to Chamberlain, Poncet had left Rome on his annual month of leave.[82] From what evidence is available, he spent some time in Paris[83] where the Quai d'Orsay probably acquainted him with the arguments of the premier's letter, opinions in which Poncet would now have been much readier to concur. For it seems clear that he had rejected the conviction that he had held for so long, the conviction that Mussolini was susceptible to conciliation, that he could be weaned away from Hitler. At the end of May, Poncet had still been relatively optimistic, despite the Pact of Steel, that negotiations with Rome upon the non-territorial Italian demands were possible, even necessary. Bonnet had agreed with the ambassador, hence his intrigue with the British behind Daladier's back. The premier, however, reinforced in his stand by Léger's Italophobia and viewed by most Frenchmen as "the symbol of national resistance,"[84] stood firm. By the beginning of July, Poncet, a believer in conciliation and reasonable concessions, had moved much closer to Daladier in his judgement of Italy. Two points had helped to convince him that conciliation could not work with Mussolini. First, the anti-French campaign of a tightly controlled Italian press had been

stepped up, and second, the press had begun clamouring for territorial concessions. Combined with Mussolini's war bluffing, these points demonstrated to the French ambassador the complete futility of trying to talk sensibly with the Italian leader. Just as Loraine had changed his mind at the end of May, so had Poncet around the beginning of July. By that time, he had realized that, to Mussolini, a policy of conciliation meant an admission of weakness. Along with Daladier, therefore, Poncet knew that only a show of strength would signify anything positive to the Duce.

Even Chamberlain gradually came to accept this French point of view. On 3 August, he wrote to Daladier expressing his appreciation of the latter's reply. Recent changes in the international situation had led the prime minister to agree with his French colleague that "the time for resuming your initiatives is no longer opportune."[85] So ended, not only the British attempts to persuade Daladier to initiate negotiations with the Italian government, but also those of the French. Bonnet, too, late in July, told the ever hopeful Guariglia that further discussion of the issues dividing their countries would have to wait until Poncet returned to his post after his vacation.[86] As Poncet was not due back until the middle of August, Bonnet, no

doubt, was beginning to realize the futility of any new attempts. Moreover, Guariglia noticed that Poncet had not contacted him at the Italian embassy while he had been in Paris,[87] another indication that the French ambassador now saw virtually no chance for a rapprochement with Italy.

So matters stood until shortly after Poncet's return to Rome on 17 August. By this time, Ciano had had his eye-opening meetings with Ribbentrop at Salzburg (10 August) and with Hitler at Berchtesgaden (12 and 13 August). He had gone to the meetings armed with counsels of moderation from Mussolini and had been rudely shaken by the realization that the Germans intended to go right ahead with their plans to invade Poland. Though Hitler had assured Ciano that the war with Poland would be localized, the foreign minister believed that the Führer was again "acting in bad faith."[88] Immediately upon Ciano's return to Rome, the Italian press had taken on "un ton nouveau": it had begun to demand large Polish concessions to Germany, and Italian public opinion was increasingly hostile both toward Germany and toward the thought of a generalized war.[89] For the west, and indeed, for Italy, there was worse to come. Four days after Poncet's arrival back in Rome, the Anglo-French-Soviet military talks were

suspended, and on 23 August, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact. The day after, Ciano could not hide from Poncet his anxiety about this new setback, although Loraine already had assured him that it did not change the English determination to stand by Poland, and soon after, Poncet echoed Loraine's statement in the name of the French government.[90]

On 28 August, the two western ambassadors discussed the crisis.[91] Poncet questioned Loraine about the advisability of asking Mussolini to intervene with Hitler; in his opinion, the French government would consider making concessions to Italy in the interests of obtaining the Duce's help.[92] The same day, Anatole de Monzie, French minister of public works, and Jean Mistler, chairman of the Chamber Foreign Affairs Committee, saw Guariglia and emphasized to him the importance of Mussolini's interceding with Berlin to save the peace.[93] In his memoirs, Poncet recalls how he, too, suggested to Ciano that the Duce approach Hitler.[94] On 31 August, Attolico's alarming news from Berlin, that the invasion of Poland could be expected at any hour, further convinced the Italian leaders of the value of mediation with Hitler.[95] Later that same day, Poncet informed the Quai d'Orsay of Mussolini's offer, contigent upon the agreement of France and Britain, to

invite Hitler to a conference "with the object of examining the clauses of the Treaty of Versailles which are the cause of the present trouble."[96]

Paris received the conference idea with mixed emotions. While Bonnet welcomed it, Daladier and Léger shunned it, the latter exclaiming: "Voilà bien le piège. Je l'attendais!"[97] But early on 1 September, Germany invaded Poland, and Daladier quickly changed his mind. The same day, Poncet carried the French assent to Ciano who, although pleased with the French reply,[98] was now uncertain whether or not the conference idea was still viable.[99]

The conference, of course, was never held. For the British and French governments stipulated that Hitler remove his troops to the Polish frontier, a condition with which he refused to comply. When the French and British ultimatums expired on 3 September, a new world war began. What was so remarkable about the conference idea, as it pertained to Franco-Italian relations, was the alacrity with which French leaders accepted Mussolini's offer when the cards were really down. At last the German menace had reached proportions large enough to unite, at least fleetingly, the "Latin sisters" in the face of the common enemy.

In the end, of course, Mussolini did not stand

firmly with Germany. His declaration of non-belligerence on 1 September, while ostensibly to gain time to complete military preparations, at least relieved the democracies for a time of the prospect of facing both dictators. Ciano's words to François-Poncet probably revealed the truth behind Italy's decision not to go to war in September 1939. Italy, in her traditional manner, was waiting to see which side, the German or the Anglo-French, would be the stronger: "[r]emportez des victoires et nous serons avec vous. Dans le cas contraire, nous serons contre vous!"[100]

Unfortunately, however, France did not obtain the desired victories, and on 10 June 1940, Italy declared war upon the French Republic and Great Britain. The months between September 1939 and June 1940 were difficult ones for François-Poncet. After the beginning of the war with Germany, the French government, to Poncet's satisfaction, decided upon a policy directed at leading Italy to alter her stance of non-belligerence to one of declared neutrality.[101] For a few months, although French efforts were unsuccessful, relations between France and Italy did not deteriorate to a marked degree, for Mussolini knew how unprepared his country was for war. After the new year, however, foreseeing an imminent German invasion of the west, the Duce once

again resumed his pro-German and anti-French press campaign; and his slide to the declaration of war against France and Britain recommenced more certainly than ever. When Hitler invaded Belgium on 10 May, Ciano, who now feared the worst, said to Poncet, "[s]oyez vainqueurs! La conduite de l'Italie dépendera des événements militaires."[102] But France was not a victor, and Mussolini decided to jump into the foray for the prizes that he expected to extract from a German victory. On 10 June 1940, Ciano, already arrayed in an airforce uniform, summoned Poncet to the Chigi Palace to deliver to him the Italian declaration of war. "It is a dagger-blow at a man who has already fallen," replied an anguished Poncet, a blow, however, that he had expected ever since Germany and Italy had signed the Pact of Steel.[103] Ciano, though, assured the ambassador that the war would not be long and that they would soon meet again. "A condition . . . que vous ne soyez pas tué," answered François-Poncet with more prescience than he realized at the time.[104] Thus, the Rome embassy of André François-Poncet came to an end.

Conclusion

The Limits of Conciliation

In late June 1939, André François-Poncet presided over the awards ceremony of the lycée Chateaubriand in Rome, an event that was held in the salle d'Hercule of the Farnèse Palace. In a short speech that he delivered to the assembled company, he expressed the hope that the students would be back for the beginning of the new term in October when:

> [p]uissent les destins de la France et de l'Italie ramener nos deux pays sur les voies parallèles de bon voisinage et de l'estime réciproque, où ils chemineront côte à côte! Tels sont les voeux que nous formons tous d'un même coeur. 1

The optimism of Poncet's words was not altogether contradicted. At least, his country and Italy would not be at war in October 1939. Neither, though, would they be exactly "d'un même coeur." Although the two "Latin sisters" did not settle their quarrel in the summer of 1939, Mussolini's chosen policy of non-belligerence pleased Poncet and Georges Bonnet who tended to take for France the credit for bringing Mussolini to this decision:

> . . . nos laborieux efforts ne seront pas perdus puisque le ler septembre 1939, à la grande déception d'Hitler, l'Italie refusera d'entrer en guerre aux côtés de l'Allemagne. 2

On the contrary, Poncet avers that it was Ciano's

persistent endeavours that kept the Duce from declaring war in September. He does say, though, that he felt that the declaration of non-belligerence meant that his mission in Rome had not been completely futile, and "j'en éprouve, dans mon for intérieur, un soulagement."[3] Poncet's policy of conciliation toward Italy, therefore, had not been without merit. His reserved evaluation of his mission provides an effective basis for an assessment of his embassy in Rome.

In his diplomatic missions in both Rome and Berlin, Poncet subscribed to one general and overriding principle: that willingness to conciliate be a part of diplomatic activity. Two other associated principles governed his embassy in Rome. The first was that France had to preserve her dignity, her integrity, and her strength. The second was that the French government should maintain an open channel to Mussolini so that, if he decided to desert Hitler and turn to the west, he could do so without losing face. These two principles not only complemented his first principle but also reinforced its balanced nature: Poncet believed that neither a slavish kowtowing to the dictators nor an intransigent suspension of all contact with them would be of any benefit to his own country with respect to either Italy or Germany.

Upon his arrival in Rome in November 1938, Poncet had been quite confident that, by applying his principle of conciliation, he would have been able to bring about a détente between his country and Italy and to win Mussolini to the side of the west. For was his appointment to Rome not a clear indication to Italy that the French government had been ready to practise conciliation with her? There had been, moreover, reasons to believe that this policy and Poncet's attempts to realize his goals would have been successful. To begin with, France, albeit belatedly, had recognized the Italian Empire, a gesture that should have pleased the Italians. As well, Poncet knew that the Rome-Berlin Axis had not been as advantageous to Italy as it had to Germany. Italy, for instance, had had to acquiesce in the Anschluss, an accession which sharply curtailed her own freedom in foreign policy. Furthermore, Poncet had noticed at the Munich conference that Hitler still held Mussolini in awe to a certain extent. Although he might not have been able to draw the Duce completely into the western camp, the ambassador had believed that, at least, he could have influenced the Italian leader to have a deterrent effect upon the Führer. Finally, like the British, he did not believe that the two dictators worked as closely

together as French leaders generally thought they did.

Despite these factors pointing to the conclusion of a successful mission, Poncet had soon encountered some formidable obstacles. No doubt the ambassador had realized, even before he had gone to Rome, that all might not run smoothly. He was, after all, familiar with the course, not only of Franco-Italian relations, but of Fascist foreign policy. He knew, for example, that the Ciano-Blondel conversations in the spring of 1938 had foundered, to a considerable degree, upon the reefs of the Spanish Civil War. As well, if he had not recognized it explicitly, he would have sensed Mussolini's tendency not to be amicable to both western powers at the same time; and soon after Poncet had arrived in Rome, the Anglo-Italian Agreement had been brought into force. Of course, Poncet had been assured by Ciano, in their first interview, that, except for Spain, only "mosquitoes" separated France and Italy. Mussolini may have felt otherwise. Unquestionably, the Spanish conflict was a formidable barrier, but, for the Italian leader, other factors seem to have loomed almost as large. Else, why did he decide to stage the demonstration in the Italian Chamber on 30 November 1938 and implicitly indicate the demands upon France that he had formulated? Obviously, he had chosen to insult

France in the presence of her ambassador. Just as obviously, he had hoped to extract some concessions while his French neighbour was crippled by the general strike, as he had expected she would have been. Not only had the incident in the Fascist Chamber struck a decisive blow at the French decision to approach Rome, but it had also constituted a serious setback to Poncet's attempt to adhere to his principles. Could he advise conciliation with a power that had just insulted the dignity of his own country, indeed, had shown an intention, however veiled, of interfering with the integrity of the French Empire?

Poncet's initial optimism had been further shaken by the Italian denunciation of the Laval-Mussolini Accords of 1935. The ambassador, however, had detected in the letter of denunciation a suggestion that Italy had not foresworn all negotiations with France. But his request that his government not close all doors to Italy had fallen on deaf ears in Paris. During January and February, Poncet had indeed been pessimistic about the chances for conciliation. He had worried that Mussolini's lack of profit from the Rome-Berlin Axis, rather than turning the Duce toward the west, might result in an aggression against France as compensation. Many times Poncet experienced doubts about the wisdom of

trusting Mussolini, and sometimes he had actually despaired of making any progress; yet he had continued to hope that an amelioration of Franco-Italian relations was possible. The German seizure of Prague, on 15 March 1939, had proved to be another landmark for Poncet; he could see clearly that the Duce had been hurt by Hitler's action and his failure to forewarn him. In fact, Mussolini's feelings certainly had been ruffled. His speech of 26 March had signified to the ambassador the Duce's willingness to negotiate with France over the Italian claims which Ciano had defined to Paul Baudouin. Already Poncet had begun his appeals to the Quai d'Orsay for conciliation with Italy. To shut out Italy entirely, he believed, would soon push her into the arms of Hitler's Reich. Unfortunately, the evidence indicates that Poncet was correct in his appraisal. His authorization to resume contact with the Italian government had not only come too late but had been actually only half-hearted. As the English had soon found in their endeavours to reconcile the "Latin sisters," Bonnet had still been willing, but Daladier certainly had not been, despite the occasional bit of wavering, as in the Baudouin affair. Even after the signing of the Pact of Steel in May, which had seemed to spell an irrevocable end to Poncet's mission, the

ambassador had not succumbed to despair. Soon, however, the Italian press had begun its clamouring for territorial concessions, and by the end of June, Ciano had become quite gloomy over the prospect of any amelioration in Franco-Italian relations, indeed, even over discussion of the matter. Hence, Poncet had finally given up the hope of carrying out his mission in Rome.

Overall, therefore, François-Poncet clung to a policy of conciliation with Italy, at least until he was convinced that the situation had reached the point where any overture by France would be taken as a sign of weakness by Mussolini. Included in Poncet's policy was a willingness to discuss some reasonable concessions to Italy. For the claims that Ciano had defined, first to Baudouin and then to Poncet on 25 April--a free zone in the port of Djibouti, a share in the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway, adjustments in the tariffs and the administration of the Suez Canal, and an extension of the 1896 Conventions on Tunisia--were not essentially unreasonable. They were points of friction that could have been settled amicably around a conference table, and their resolution would not have endangered the integrity of the French Empire. It was only at the end of May, when Italian territorial demands had been

advanced, that Poncet had balked. To agree even to conciliation on such unreasonable demands would have compromised the ambassador's tenet that France had to maintain her integrity and strength.

Probably the most important issue that Franco-Italian relations in 1938 and 1939 illustrate is the formulation of French foreign policy. French attempts to win Mussolini to France's side had never been entirely whole-hearted even in the days before the demonstration in the Fascist Chamber of Deputies. Always there had been an element in the French government made up, particularly, of those on the left, that deplored any conciliation of the dictators, either German or Italian. Then it is virtually certain that the humiliation felt by many French leaders over the part that France had played at the Munich conference conditioned the response to Italy. At Munich, the French had succumbed to Hitler who, they feared, was almost invincible, but when Mussolini, on 30 November, had threatened the very empire that had become so vital to them as a result of Munich, most Frenchmen had rallied to the flag in defense of their country and in defiance of an Italy that they had been wont to view with contempt. In essence, then, this reinvigorated French patriotism, which overcame French domestic

disunity, was based in great part upon what might be termed a whim of Mussolini. What the Duce had failed to take into account was the extent of French shame over Munich and the fact that the checking of the general strike had strengthened Daladier's position, which would be further reinforced by a gradual easing of financial and economic difficulties and the Anglo-French staff talks that began after Prague. The tempest in a teapot that Mussolini had released in France had soon turned into a full-sized tornado directed against Italy.

When Edouard Daladier had come to power in April 1938, France had been at a low ebb, divided and dispirited. In foreign policy, he had let Bonnet have his way, if only to avoid a ministerial crisis. The betrayal of Czechoslovakia, as the premier saw it, had only exacerbated the situation. The Italian insult, then, had come almost as a godsend to him. For the first time in years, the French nation had rallied behind its government; left and right factions had joined in the defense of the French Empire. How could Daladier resist the opportunity to keep his country united even if it meant sacrificing the chance for a rapprochement with Italy? After all, however important Italy might have been as an ally, it was a united France that Daladier had needed to prepare to face the

overriding German threat.

Other factors had dictated Daladier's policy of intransigence, too. The Quai d'Orsay was traditionally anti-Italian, especially under the secretary general, Alexis Léger. To him, the course of Franco-Italian relations had been a series of French approaches and Italian rebuffs, and he had feared that the latest Italian action was nothing but a trap to extract as many concessions as possible from France. Perhaps, though, Léger and the Quai, stuck in their traditional antipathy and convinced that Hitler and Mussolini were in collusion, were unable to see some genuine signs, as Poncet saw them, that Italy would have welcomed an excuse to separate herself from the German dictator. Whatever the legitimacy of Léger's stance, it was to the secretary general that Daladier had turned increasingly in 1939 for advice. Then there was the British influence upon French foreign policy. Although France may not have been as slavishly subservient to British foreign policy as has been frequently claimed, there is certainly no doubt about the value put on Britain as an ally by virtually every French government in the interwar years. However much Daladier may have cherished the English connection, when it was a matter of uniting against the overwhelming German menace,

he may also have resented being forced to follow the British lead. In the less important matter of Italy, then, the French premier could be firm, if only to show the British that he retained a certain amount of independence in foreign policy. So for various reasons, some of which had little to do with Italy, Daladier had decided upon a policy of firmness with that country.

As united behind Daladier as most Frenchmen were, though, there was a small group that persevered in its belief that agreement with Italy could and should be reached. François-Poncet and Bonnet belonged to this group, although there was a considerable difference in the methods which each man employed to try to gain the common end--an agreement of some sort with Mussolini. Unfortunately, for their cause, Bonnet already had been receiving criticism for his conduct of foreign policy when the Italian issue had arisen. Then he had been severely scolded in the Chamber over the matter of the Italian denunciation of the 1935 accords in December. So although he had continued to advocate negotiations with Italy, his advocacy had been tainted by his past record and then by the scandal over the Baudouin mission. His growing unpopularity, however, had not stopped him from intriguing with the British behind Daladier's back in the spring and early summer. By this

time, of course, Daladier's political position was even stronger, domestic affairs were looking brighter, and Léger's influence upon the premier was in its ascendancy, so Daladier had been able to reject Chamberlain's request for an overture to Italy with impunity.

Other matters, too, played a role in the formulation of French foreign policy toward Italy. In the winter of 1939, François-Poncet had worked in isolation, ignored by both his own government and that of Italy. Mussolini's quarantine of him had resulted in his being forced to rely upon what information he could glean from his foreign colleagues in Rome. Even more detrimental to Poncet's mission had been the way that his own foreign ministry had kept him in the dark on its Italian policy and had turned a deaf ear to his requests to resume contact with the Italian government as well as to his rationale for making these requests. His reports had frequently gone unacknowledged, whether because of their very volume (a total of 6,000 telegrams in 1939 alone[4]) or because they did not say what the Quai had wished to hear. The Documents Diplomatiques Français[5] contain very few communications from Bonnet to the ambassador in Rome;[6] poor communications between ministry and embassy, therefore, may well have hindered

what chances there were for a rapprochement with Italy. They also weakened Poncet's position in Rome, as well as hindering the ambassador in his duties. Although the formulation of foreign policy was not properly the preserve of ambassadors, their observations and opinions frequently played an influential part in policy making. Poncet, however, complained more than once that the Quai d'Orsay ignored, and even failed to acknowledge, his advice on Italy.[6]

The Baudouin affair illustrates another aspect of foreign policy formulation in France, that is, the use of secret diplomacy and the adverse effects it could generate. Bonnet and Daladier had soon experienced the dangers of secret diplomacy when they sent Baudouin on his mission to Rome. The result had been a red-faced French government which had quickly denied the whole affair, the implications of which had been especially deleterious to Bonnet's policy. But the Baudouin mission had had further ramifications. It had detracted from Poncet's influence and even his own self-respect, for he rightfully felt that he, in his official capacity, had been ignored again by his government. The Baudouin mission also shows how other interests could affect the course and formulation of foreign policy. Although approved by Daladier and Bonnet for

political reasons, the mission seemingly had originated in the concern of French and Italian businessmen that continuing tension between their countries would prove detrimental to their commercial activities. Diverse factors, then, had acted upon the making of foreign policy toward Italy, pushing it sometimes in the direction in which Poncet and Bonnet wished it to go, but more often pulling it in the course upon which Daladier and Léger insisted.

The question, of course, has to be asked: who was right--Daladier and Léger, in their policy of intransigence, or François-Poncet, Bonnet, and the British, in their pursuit of conciliation? In fact, was there a chance to separate Mussolini from Hitler, or had the Italian leader already decided before the demonstration of 30 November that he was finished with France and the west? While most authorities on Italian foreign policy at least imply that Mussolini's hostility to France had been ingrained for some time,[7] their evidence for this view is sometimes questionable. A great deal depends upon the veracity of Ciano's diaries and, of course, upon the mood of the foreign minister when he made the various entries that pertain to Mussolini's statements on his goals for Italy. Moreover, Mussolini was a man sometimes given to

flamboyant rhetoric with little real substance behind it.[8] And even though the diaries and other sources indicate that Mussolini's attitude was virtually set, this information was not available to the men of 1939. In the end, Daladier and Léger probably came nearer to the truth than Poncet and the English. Even Bonnet, after the fact, of course, and probably as a sort of apologia for the failure of his Italian policy, as much as admits that the matter was hopeless from the beginning.[9] The Anglo-Italian Agreement, he says, settled some of Mussolini's Mediterranean problems thus making an accord with France less necessary. Then the ideological differences between France and Italy were exploited by the presses of both countries so much so that agreement was hindered. Finally, Bonnet concludes, the course of international events, such as German rearmament and the Anschluss, precluded a return to the Stresa Front. Bonnet's points make good sense; but the last one could very well be reversed and, thereby, become a good reason for Mussolini to desire a renewed Stresa Front.

To avoid the hindsight to which Bonnet falls prey, as do some modern historians, it is probably best to return to Poncet's oft-repeated lament: what will Mussolini do now? Poncet, after all, was on the spot,

where Daladier, Bonnet, and the others were not. He observed at first hand the state of domestic affairs in Italy and heard Italian opinion expressed. He realized that Mussolini's foreign policy could not be separated from his domestic policy, that it was the imperatives of the domestic situation in Italy that would determine the course that the Duce took.[10] Because the French ambassador could not read the mind of the Italian leader and because much of the latter's policy was decided on the spur of the moment anyway, he was much of the time perplexed about the direction that events would take. In other words, it was not foreordained, in Poncet's mind, that Mussolini would refuse an offer from France for conciliation nor that he would not welcome an opportunity to escape the clutches of Germany, at least if he were given a chance to preserve both his national and his personal bella figura.

Under these circumstances, therefore, there was little that Poncet could do but to try to resume and then to maintain what communication he could with the Italian government. In his memoirs, the ambassador freely admits that he was wrong in his estimation of the Duce's purpose.[11] The western powers "et moi avec eux" should have been able to read the signs indicating that Mussolini was already bound to Hitler; but, accustomed

as they had become to Mussolini's excesses in his speeches and lulled by the Duce's role at Munich into believing that he really desired peace, they continued to hope that he could be won to the side of the west.[12] Here, of course, even Poncet used a little hindsight: by the time he wrote his memoirs, the Italian tragedy had been played out in the theatre of World War Two. In 1939, he was still convinced that there was a chance, however small, for a diplomatic success with Italy. To ignore this chance would be foolish. It is worth repeating his words on the value of conciliation:

> les contacts humains sont riches en surprises. Sait-on jamais ce qu'ils peuvent apporter? Le rôle de la diplomatie, son devoir, est d'empêcher que ne se crée l'irrémédiable. Un échange de vues aurait au moins l'avantage de nous renseigner sur la nature et l'étendue des revendications italiennes. Enfin, Mussolini était capricieux, sujet à des sautes d'humeur. Sa politique étrangère n'avait jamais été très cohérente. On ne pouvait poser en principe qu'elle échapperait, désormais, à tout revirement. 13

Poncet, then, was correct in pursuing his object of conciliation with Italy according to his principles. Without his efforts, "l'irrémédiable" might have been created in September 1939; instead it was delayed until June 1940. It was only a small and fleeting victory, but it gave France nine months of peace in the Mediterranean. In so far as credit for that little triumph can be assigned, one must agree with D. C. Watt

that "it is at least arguable" that it was the softer approach of the British and of André François-Poncet that "tipped the scales" toward Mussolini's declaration of non-belligerence.[14]

Notes

Commonly used abbreviations:

DBFP - Documents on British Foreign Policy

DDB - Documents Diplomatiques Belges

DDF - Documents Diplomatiques Français

DDI - I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani

DGFP - Documents on German Foreign Policy

FRUS - Foreign Relations of the United States

J O, Chamber or Senate - Journal Officiel de la République Française

PRO, Conf. - Great Britain, Public Record Office, Miscellaneous Confidential Print Series

Notes to Introduction

1 Roselyn Solo, "André François-Poncet: Ambassador of France" (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1978).

2 Franklin L. Ford, "Three Observers in Berlin: Rumbold, Dodd, and François-Poncet," in The Diplomats, 1919-1939, vol. II, ed. Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1953; New York: Atheneum, 1974), p. 471.

3 Anthony P. Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War. (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1977), p. 152; and "Bonnet, Daladier and French Appeasement, April-September 1938," International Relations III (April 1967): pp. 233-234.

4 Rapport fait au nom de la commission chargée d'enquêter sur les événements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945, Testimony, III, François-Poncet, p. 760. (Hereafter cited as Evénements, Testimony or Report.)

5 Ibid., p. 762. Poncet believed that it was these repeated warnings that were the cause of his internment by the Nazis during the war. See his Carnets d'un captif (Paris: Librairie Arthême Fayard, 1952), p. 10.

6 Maurice Vaïsse, "Against Appeasement: French Advocates of Firmness, 1933-8," in The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Lothar Kettenacker (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), p. 228.

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8 Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott, The Appeasers (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963, 1967), pp. 5-6.

9 Keith Eubank, Munich (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), p. 17.

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13 William R. Rock, Appeasement on Trial--British Foreign Policy and Its Critics, 1938-1939 (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966), p. 337.

14 Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, La Décadence, 1932-1939 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1979).

15 Anthony P. Adamthwaite, "French Foreign Policy, April 1938--September 1939, with Special Reference to the Policy of M. Georges Bonnet" (Ph. D. dissertation, School of History, University of Leeds, 1966), pp. 80-81.

16 Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Lothar Kettenacker, eds., The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983).

17 Ibid., p. x.

18 Ibid.

19 Bernd-Jürgen Wendt, "'Economic Appeasement'--A Crisis Strategy," in Mommsen and Kettenacker, p. 157.

20 Denis Mack Smith, "Appeasement as a Factor in Mussolini's Foreign Policy," in Mommsen and Kettenacker, p. 258.

21 Rock, p. 338.

22 For instance, François Bédarida, "La 'gouvernante anglaise,'" in Edouard Daladier, chef du gouvernment (avril 1939--septembre 1939). Colloque, Paris, 1975 (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1977), p. 228.

23 Robert J. Young, In Command of France: French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933-1940 (London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 7.

24 René Massigli, La Turquie devant la guerre--Mission à Ankara (Paris: Plon, 1964), p. 21.

25 France, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Documents Diplomatiques Français, second series (1936-1939). (Hereafter cited as DDF, etc. All references are to the second series.)

26 Great Britain, Public Record Office, Miscellaneous Confidential Print Series, Further Correspondence Respecting France, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, Parts XI and XII. (Hereafter cited as PRO, Conf., XI or XII.)

27 Léon Noel, La guerre de 39 a commencé quatre ans plus tôt (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1979); Jean Daridan, Le chemin de la défaite (1938-1940) (Paris: Plon, 1980); and Armand Bérard, Un ambassadeur se souvient, vol. I: Au temps du danger allemand (Paris: Plon, 1976).

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Colloque Franco-Allemand. La France et l'Allemagne (1932-1936) (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1980); Edouard Daladier, chef du gouvernement (avril 1938 - septembre 1939). Colloque, Paris, 1975 (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1977); Munich 1938: Mythes et Réalités, Colloque, Paris, 1978, Revue des études slaves 52 (1979) (Paris : Institut national d'études slaves, 1979); and La perception de la puissance en Europe occidentale à la vieille de la seconde guerre mondiale. Colloque des 14-17 avril 1982, Sèvres, Université de Paris-X-Nanterre. (Unpublished)

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Denis Mack Smith, Mussolini (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982); and Georges-Henri Soutou, "La perception de la puissance française par René Massigli en 1938," Relations Internationales 33 (Spring 1983): pp. 11-22.

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François Bédarida, La stratégie secrète de la Drôle de guerre. Le conseil suprême interallié, septembre 1939 - avril 1940 (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques and Editions du CNRS, 1979); Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, La Décadence, 1932-1939 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1979), and L'Abîme, 1939-1945 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1982); Robert J. Young, In Command of France: French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933-1940 (London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), and "French Military Intelligence and the Franco-Italian Alliance 1933-1939," to be published in the Historical Journal, 1985; and Elisabeth du Réau, "Enjeux stratégiques et redéploiement diplomatique français: novembre 1938, septembre 1939," Relations Internationales 35 (Autumn 1983): pp. 319-335, and "L'information du 'décideur' et l'élaboration de la décision diplomatique française dans les dernières années de la IIIe République," Relations Internationales 32 (Winter 1982): pp. 525-541.

32

René Girault, "The Impact of the Economic Situation on the Foreign Policy of France, 1936-9," pp.

209-226; Maurice Vaïsse, "Against Appeasement: French Advocates of Firmness, 1933-8," pp. 227-235; Robert Frankenstein, "The Decline of France and French Appeasement Policies, 1936-9," pp. 236-245; and Anthony p. Adamthwaite, "France and the Coming of War," pp. 246-256, in The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Lothar Kettenacker (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983).

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MacGregor Knox, "Conquest, Foreign and Domestic, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany," Journal of Modern History 56 (March 1984): pp. 1-57, and Mussolini Unleashed 1939-1941--Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Pierre Milza, "Fascisme et relations internationales," Relations Internationales 21 (Spring 1980): pp. 23-42; and Paul Stafford, "The Chamberlain-Halifax Visit to Rome: A Reappraisal," English Historical Review XCVIII (January 1983): pp. 61-100.

Notes to Chapter I

1 Noel to Flandin, 22 February 1936, DDF, I, no. 212, p. 310.

2 Solo, pp. 2-3. For much of this biographical information on Poncet, I am indebted to Solo who had the good fortune to interview the ambassador.

3 Martha Dodd, Through Embassy Eyes (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939), p. 327.

4 Bella Fromm, Blood and Banquets--A Berlin Social Diary (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1942), pp. 31, 78.

5 Jérôme Carcopino, Souvenirs romains (Paris: Hachette, 1968), p. 14; and Albert Lebrun, Témoignage (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1945), p. 150. An archicube refers to a graduate of l'Ecole Normale Supérieure.

6 Paul Stehlin, Témoignage pour l'histoire (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1964), p.32; and Solo, p. 93, from a taped interview with Stehlin, 29 June 1973.

7 André François-Poncet, The Fateful Years--Memoirs of a French Ambassador in Berlin, 1931-1938, trans. Jacques le Clercq (New York: Howard Fertig, 1972), p. x.

8 Dodd, Through Embassy Eyes, p. 330.

9 Ibid.; and André François-Poncet, Au Palais Farnèse. Souvenirs d'une ambassade à Rome, 1938-1940 (Paris: Librairie Arthême Fayard, 1961), p. 71. Poncet and his wife had five children.

10 Solo, p. 20. Most of this information is from Solo.

11

Jacques Baeyens, Au bout du Quai: souvenirs d'un retraité des postes (Paris: Librairie Arthême Fayard, 1975), p. 229.

12

François-Poncet, The Fateful Years and Au Palais Farnèse.

13

William I. Shorrock, in Biographical Dictionary of Internationalists, ed. Warren F. Kuehl (Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 273.

14

André François-Poncet, Au fil des jours, propos d'un libéral 1942-1962 (Paris: Flammarion, 1962). As well, François-Poncet's postwar career included some six years as French High Commissioner to West Germany (1949-1955) and work with the International Red Cross Organization.

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André François-Poncet, "Hitler et Mussolini," Historia 105(1955): pp. 121-130.

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André François-Poncet, Carnets d'un captif (Paris: Librairie Arthême Fayard, 1952).

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Most men aspiring to be diplomats had studied at the Ecole libre des sciences politiques and had then written the formidable grand concours. For successful candidates, a period of probation at the foreign ministry was followed by further examinations. The reward for passing the latter was a junior posting. See, Robert J. Young, French Foreign Policy 1918-1945. A Guide to Research and Research Materials (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1981), p. 23.

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19 Elizabeth Cameron, Prologue to Appeasement: A Study in French Foreign Policy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1942), p.6.

20 Young, In Command of France, p. 115; and Geoffrey Warner, Pierre Laval and the Eclipse of France (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1968), p. 130.

21 Nathanael Greene, Crisis and Decline--The French Socialist Party in the Popular Front Era (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969) p. 90.

22 Adamthwaite, France and the Coming, pp. 38-40.

23 Young, In Command of France, p. 124.

24 Peter J. Larmour, The French Radical Party in the 1930's (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1964), p. 238.

25 Edouard Daladier, "Munich," Candide, 7-14 September 1961, p. 12. The Radicals had ten portfolios. Apparently the absence of the Socialists was due to Daladier's offer to them of only five portfolios out of a possible seventeen. See Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, "L'influence de la politique intérieure sur la politique extérieure de la France--l'exemple de 1938 et 1939," in Les relations franco-britanniques, 1935-1939. Colloques Anglo-Français, 1971, 1972 (Paris: Editions du centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1975), p. 233.

26 Daladier, "Munich," p.12.

27 Ibid.

28 Yvon Lapaquellerie, Edouard Daladier (Paris: Flammarion, 1940), p.33; and Oscar Ray, The Life of Edouard Daladier (London; Pilot Press, Ltd., 1940), p. 26.

29 Pierre Cot, Triumph of Treason, trans. Sybille and Milton Crane (Chicago and New York: Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., 1944), pp. 270-271.

30 Bédarida, La Stratégie secrète, p. 53.

31 Eubank, Munich, p. 39.

32 Quoted in Pierre Lazareff, De Munich à Vichy (New York: Bretano's Inc., 1944), p. 31.

33 Larmour, p. 241, notes that circumstances helped to dictate the choice of Daladier as premier: Chautemps had lost credibility over the Anschluss; Bonnet's attempt to form a government on 14 January 1938 had failed; Edouard Herriot decreasingly reflected Radical policy; and Albert Sarraut seems to have been out of the picture entirely.

34 Adamthwaite, France and the Coming, p. 5.

35 S. B. Butterworth, "Daladier and the Munich Crisis: A Reappraisal," Journal of Contemporary History 9 (July 1974): pp. 194, 198.

36 For a detailed account of Paul-Boncour's meeting with Daladier, see Joseph Paul-Boncour, Entre deux guerres--Souvenirs sur la IIIe République, vol. II: Sur les chemins de la défaite 1935-1940 (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1946), pp. 96-101.

37 Phipps to Halifax, 11 April 1938, Phipps Papers, from Anthony P. Adamthwaite, "Reactions to the Munich Crisis," in Troubled Neighbours: Franco-British Relations in the Twentieth Century, ed. Neville Waites (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), pp. 175-176.

38 Georges Bonnet, Dans la tourmente: 1938-1948 (Paris: Fayard, 1971), p. 13.

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45 Quoted in Lazareff, pp. 31-32.

46 Quoted in ibid., pp. 32-33.

47 Georges Bonnet, Le Quai d'Orsay sous trois républiques 1870-1961 (Paris: Librairie Arthême Fayard, 1961), p. 183.

48 Jean Zay, Carnets secrets de Jean Zay (de Munich à la guerre). ed. Philippe Henriot (Paris: Les Editions de France, 1942), pp. 19-20.

49
Butterworth, p. 208.

50
See, for example, Robert J. Young, "French Policy and the Munich Crisis of 1938. A Reappraisal," The Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers, 1970, p. 32. The reports of the military situation given to Daladier in September 1938 were "not of the sort to counsel resistance."

51
Gilbert and Gott, p. 29; and Solo, p. 392.

52
François-Poncet to Laval, 2 January 1936, DDF, I, no. 3, p. 9.

53
François-Poncet to Laval, 16 January 1936, DDF, I, no. 73, p. 105.

54
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 14 June 1938, DDF, X, no. 23, p. 50.

55
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 16 June 1938, DDF, X, no. 45, p. 87; and François-Poncet to Bonnet, 23 June 1938, DDF, X, no. 84. p. 160.

56
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 16 June 1938, DDF, X no. 45, p. 87; and François-Poncet to Bonnet, 5 July 1938, DDF, X, no. 150, p. 283.

57
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 15 August 1938, DDF, X, No. 386, pp. 676-677.

58
Phipps to Halifax, 3 September 1938, in, Great Britain, Foreign Office, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, third series, vol. II, no. 807, pp. 269-270. (Henceforth cited as DBFP, etc. All references are to the third series.)

59
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 6 September 1938,

DDF, XI, no. 22, p. 32.

60 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 13 September 1938, DDF, XI, no. 116, p. 189.

61 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 27 September 1938, DDF, XI, no. 385, p. 589.

62 Bonnet to François-Poncet, 28 September 1938, DDF, XI, no. 413, p. 629.

63 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 30 September 1938, DDF, XI, no. 485. p. 722.

64 Fromm, p. 79; and William E. Dodd, Ambassador Dodd's Diary 1933-1938, ed. William E. Dodd, Jr. and Martha Dodd (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1941), p. 347. Dodd, it seems, was violently opposed to the Nazi government. William Bullitt, the American ambassador in Paris, had received complaints about him from both François-Poncet (whom Dodd had scolded for inviting German officials to the French embassy) and Bernardo Attolico (the Italian ambassador in Berlin) who had claimed that Dodd's behaviour was prejudicing American attempts to promote peace. Bullitt to President Roosevelt, 23 November 1937, in, Orville H. Bullitt, ed., For the President--Personal and Secret--Correspondence Between Franklin D. Roosevelt and William C. Bullitt (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1972), p. 235.

65 Armand Bérard, "Témoignage," in Munich 1938: Mythes et Réalités, Colloque, Paris, 1978 (Paris: Institut national d'études slaves, 1979), p. 220; and Un ambassadeur se souvient, vol. I, p. 406. Poncet's younger brother was killed in the First World War.

66 Stehlin, p. 85.

67 Galeazzo Ciano, Ciano's Hidden Diary 1937-1938, ed. Malcolm Muggeridge; trans. Andreas Mayor (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1953), 30 September

1938, p. 168.

68 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 4 October 1938, in The French Yellow Book: Diplomatic Documents, 1938-1939 (New York: Raynal and Hitchcock, 1940), p. 18.

69 Eubank, Munich, p. 228.

70 France, Assemblée Nationale, Journal Officiel de la République Française, Chambre des Députés, débats parlementaires et documents parlementaires, 4 October 1938, pp. 1526, 1554. (Henceforth cited as J. O., Chamber or Senate.)

71 Quoted in Albert Carl Gay, "The Daladier Administration, 1938-1940" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1970), p. 273.

72 Serge Berstein, "La perception de la puissance par les partis politiques en 1938-39--Rapport de synthèse," in, Colloque, Sèvres, p. 1.

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1 Duroselle, La Décadence, p. 389.

2 Adamthwaite, "French Foreign Policy," p. 234; and Phipps to Halifax, 3 November 1938, DBFP, III, no. 288, p. 257.

3 Bonnet, Le Quai, p. 247.

4 Pierre Laval, The Diary of Pierre Laval (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 165.

5 Bonnet, Tourmente, p. 79.

6 Le Temps, 4 October 1938, p.3.

7 Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 4 October 1838, p. 173.

8 Mackensen to the Foreign Minister, 6 October 1938, in, Germany, Auswärtiges Amt, Documents on German Foreign Policy, series D (1937-1945), vol. IV, no. 335, p. 435. (Henceforth cited as DGFP, etc. All references are to series D.)

9 Of Guariglia's mission in Paris, Ciano said that Guariglia "had received instructions to 'wait and see'. He is a shrewd official, who will tie up the ass where the master tells him to. But it will go against the grain, because he is a democrat and therefore at heart a Francophile." Diary 1937-1938, 8 November 1938, p. 191.

10 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 7.

11 André François-Poncet, "J'ai assisté à la conférence de Munich," Historia 142 (1958): p. 248.

12 Phipps to Halifax, 1 November 1938, DBFP, III, appendix II, p. 621.

13 Le Temps reported that Poncet had interviews with both Bonnet and Daladier, 1 November 1938, p. 6; 6 November 1938, p. 6.

14 L. R. Pratt, East of Malta, West of Suez: Britain's Mediterranean Crisis, 1936-1939 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 108.

15 Alan Cassels, Fascist Italy (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1969), p. 2.

16 Robert Gilbert Vansittart, The Mist Procession (London: Hutchinson, 1958), p. 502, claims that Mussolini usually remained seated to hide his shortness of stature.

17 Norman Kogan, The Politics of Italian Foreign Policy (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), passim.

18 Ibid., p. 4. Kogan bases his argument to some extent on Edwin C. Banfield's (The Moral Basis of a Backward Society (New York: The Free Press, 1958) idea of "amoral familism" in which southern Italians "maximize the material short-run advantage of the nuclear family; [and] assume that all others will do likewise." (Banfield, p. 83.) (Thus Italian men assiduously guard their women against the advances of other men but think nothing of going after women outside the family.) Therefore, suspicion of others outside the family plays a big part. Banfield cites other traits of the Italian personality also: materialism, lack of trust in others, distrust of those in authority, and the idea that political leaders act only in their own interests. Although I think that Banfield has exaggerated the degree and universality of these traits (his study, for instance, concerns only southern Italians), a study I did myself on Italians in Transcona bears out some of his findings to a certain degree. The idea of the supremacy of the family unit, the emphasis on

materialism, and a certain machismo were evident in many of the people whom I interviewed.

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20 Piero Melograni, "The Cult of the Duce in Mussolini's Italy," Journal of Contemporary History 11 (October 1976): p. 229; and Milza, "Fascisme et relations internationales," p. 23.

21 Knox, "Conquest," p. 57.

22 Carlo Sforza, Europe and Europeans--A Study in Historical Psychology and International Politics (London: George G. Harrop and Co. Ltd., 1936), p. 122.

23 Alan Cassels, Mussolini's Early Diplomacy (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 13-14.

24 Mack Smith, Mussolini, p. 97.

25 Angelo Del Boca, The Ethiopian War 1935-1941, trans. P. D. Cummins (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 8.

26 Denis Mack Smith, Mussolini's Roman Empire (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), pp. 16, 21.

27 George W. Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 41.

28 Cassels, Fascist Italy, p. 84.

29 Quoted in Edouard Herriot, Jadis, vol. II: D'une guerre à l'autre, 1914-1936 (Paris: Flammarion,

1952), p. 626, from Mussolini's Pontinia speech of December 1935.

30 Quoted in Paul-Boncour, vol. II, p. 82. (My translation.)

31 Quoted in Sforza, p. 127.

32 Baer, p. 64.

33 Maxwell H. H. Macartney and Paul Cremona, Italy's Foreign and Colonial Policy 1914-1937 (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 47. Article XIII of the Treaty of London is as follows: "In case France and Great Britain increase their colonial domains in Africa at Germany's expense, these two Powers recognize in principle that Italy may claim equitable compensations, notably in the settlement in her favour of the questions concerning the frontiers of the Italian colonies of Eritrea, Somaliland and Libya and of the neighbouring colonies of France and Great Britain."

34 At a meeting in Paris in December 1935, Sir Samuel Hoare, the British foreign secretary, and Pierre Laval, the French foreign minister, drew up a plan to settle the Ethiopian crisis which would have allowed Italy to take over a large part of Ethiopia. British newspapers, however, learned about the plan and published its details. The result was a public outcry against rewarding the Italian aggressor. In the ensuing upoar, the plan was denied by the British government, and Hoare was forced to resign. See, F. D. Laurens, France and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1935-1936 (Paris and The Hague: Mouton, 1967), pp. 274-285.

35 R. A. C. Parker, "Great Britain, France and the Ethiopian Crisis, 1935-1936," English Historical Review 89 (1974): pp. 298-299.

36 In May 1936, Sarraut and Pierre-Etienne Flandin, for example, urged that an attempt be made to obtain Italy's support on Austria. See Wladimir d'Ormesson, France, trans. J. Lewis May (London:

Longmans, Green and Co, 1939), p. 188.

37 Jacques Droz, "Le parti socialiste français devant la montée du nazisme," in Colloque Franco-Allemand. La France et l'Allemagne (1932-1936)(Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1980), p. 176. The socialist deputy, Giacomo Matteotti, was assassinated on 10 June 1924 by certain prominent Fascists. He had written a book exposing a great deal about Fascist acts of violence.

38 Macartney and Cremona, p. 323.

39 John Dreifort, Yvon Delbos at the Quai d'Orsay: French Foreign Policy during the Popular Front, 1936-1938 (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1973), p. 154.

40 Evénements. Testimony, I, Blum, p. 220.

41 Ibid.

42 John F. Coverdale, Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 413-414.

43 Paul Reynaud, La France a sauvé l'Europe, vol. I (Paris: Flammarion, 1947), p. 177.

44 Mack Smith, Roman Empire, pp. 92-93; and Mack Smith, Mussolini, p. 225.

45 Evénements, Report, deuxième partie, p. 248.

46 Jérôme Carcopino, Souvenirs de sept ans: 1937-1944 (Paris: Flammarion, 1953), pp. 8, 41.

47 Lowe and Marzari, p. 183.

48 William I. Shorrock, "France and the Rise of Fascism in Italy, 1919-1923," Journal of Contemporary History 10 (October 1975): p. 604.

49 Quoted in ibid.

50 Quoted in ibid., p. 606.

51 Quoted from Le Temps, 13 December 1927, in Lowe and Marzari, p. 215.

52 Hubert Lagardelle, Mission à Rome, Mussolini (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1955), p. 7.

53 Cameron, Prologue, p. 36.

54 Quoted in ibid., p. 68, from a speech by Mussolini delivered at Milan, 6 October 1934.

55 Furnia, pp. 121, 126.

56 Quoted from Le Populaire, 25 August 1933, in Droz, p. 176. Blum, of course, was referring to the assassination of the Italian socialist.

57 Baer, p. 74.

58 Bonnet, Le Quai, p. 136.

59 Mussolini to Laval, 25 December 1935, quoted in Laurens, p. 407.

60 Laval, pp. 19-20. In 1912, Marshal Lyautey was appointed resident-general in Morocco where he governed wisely and restored stability and order.

61
W. Greg Perett, "Naval Policy in French Foreign Affairs 1930-1939," Proceedings of the Western Society for French History 4 (1976): p. 435. Since the end of World War One, French naval planning had been predicated upon a hostile Italo-German combination. At the Washington Naval Conference (1921-1922), France had been forced to accept parity with Italy on capital ships, but, with no limitations having been placed upon auxiliary vessels, France was still able to build up a substantial navy aimed predominantly at Italy in the Mediterranean. At the London Naval Conference in 1930, France had been successful in having the Washington treaty extended in the face of the Italian proposal for further parity with France and the Anglo-American attempt to impose ratios upon non-capital ships. See, Joel Blatt, "The Parity that Meant Superiority: French Naval Policy towards Italy at the Washington Conference, 1921-22, and Interwar French Foreign Policy," French Historical Studies XII (Fall 1981): passim.

62
Young, "French Military Intelligence," p. 24. See also, Young's article, "Soldiers and Diplomats: The French Embassy and Franco-Italian Relations, 1935-6," The Journal of Strategic Studies 7 (March 1984): pp. 81-82.

63
Quoted in ibid., p. 32, from Colonel Buisson's note, "L'Alliance France-Italie," 13 March 1938. Colonel Buisson was a member of Daladier's cabinet militaire.

64
From a speech to the House of Commons on 2 May 1938, in Neville Chamberlain, In Search of Peace (Freeport, N. Y.: Books for Librairies Press, 1971), p. 105.

65
Donald C. Watt, "Britain, France and the Italian Problem, 1937-1939," in Les relations franco-britanniques, 1935-1939. Colloque, p. 279.

66
Ibid., pp. 278, 280.

67
Frederick L. Schuman, Europe on the Eve:

The Crisis of Diplomacy, 1933-1939 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939), pp. 565-571, contains the text of the Anglo-Italian Agreement.

68 Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 13 April 1938, p. 100.

69 Anthony Eden, The Eden Memoirs, vol. III: The Reckoning (London: Cassell and Co. Ltd., 1965), pp. 14-15.

70 Duroselle, La Décadence, p. 389; and Harvey, Diary, 20 June 1938, p. 155. Both Eden and Oliver, secretary to the new foreign minister, Lord Halifax, thought that the Easter Accords should not be ratified until France had secured a similar accord. Eden was certain that Mussolini was set upon separating Britain and France.

71 Massigli to Blondel, 7 April 1938, DDF, IX, no. 129, p. 248.

72 Blondel to Bonnet, 14 April 1938, DDF, IX, no. 180, p. 373.

73 Jules Blondel, Ce que mes yeux ont vu de 1900 à 1950. Récit d'un diplomate, vol. II (Arras: Imprimerie Centrale de l'Artois, n.d.), p. 119.

74 Young, "French Military Intelligence," p. 24.

75 Soutou, p. 19.

76 Note de la Direction politique, négociations avec l'Italie, 11 April 1938, DDF, IX, no. 160, p. 327.

77 See Bonnet's instructions, Bonnet to Blondel, 21 April 1938, DDF, IX, no. 214, pp. 445-447.

78 Alexander Werth, France and Munich--Before and After the Surrender (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1939; New York: Howard Fertig, 1969), p. 144.

79 Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 22, 30 April 1938, pp. 105, 107.

80 Ibid., 11 May 1938, p. 114.

81 Ibid., 14 May 1938, p. 116

82 Blondel to Bonnet, 18 May 1938, DDF, IX, no. 369, pp. 783-784.

83 Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 30 May 1938, p. 123.

84 Quoted from Le Temps, 5 August 1938, in Werth, France and Munich, p. 209.

85 The New Statesman and Nation, XVII, 4 February 1939, p. 163.

86 Frederick L. Schuman, War and Diplomacy in the French Republic: An Inquiry into Political Motivations and the Control of Foreign Policy (New York and London: Whittlesey House, 1931), p. 21.

87 Ibid., p. 29.

88 For a good description of the development and structure of the Quai d'Orsay, see Young, French Foreign Policy, 1918-1945. A Guide to Research and Research Materials, pp. 1-20.

89 John E. Howard, Parliament and Foreign Policy in France (London: Cresset Press, 1948), p. 152.

90 Georges Dethan, "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs since the Nineteenth Century," in The Times Survey of Foreign Ministries of the World, ed. Zara Steiner (London: Times Books, 1982), p. 208.

91 For example, see Paul Gordon Lauren, Diplomats and Bureaucrats--The First Institutional Responses to Twentieth-Century Diplomacy in France and Germany (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), p. 231.

92 For a good discussion of complaints (for instance, deficiencies in organization and staffing and delayed communications) about the Quai's methods, see Adamthwaite, France and the Coming, pp. 139 ff.

93 Noel, La guerre de 39, p. 66.

94 Viscount Templewood, Nine Troubled Years (London: Collins, 1954),p. 305.

95 Anthony Eden, The Eden Memoirs, vol II: Facing the Dictators (London: Cassell and Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 232.

96 Quoted in du Réau, "L'information du 'décideur,'" p. 534.

97 Olivier Poydenot, Mémoires (unpublished), p. 67.

98 Elizabeth Cameron, "Alexis Saint-Léger Léger," in The Diplomats, vol. II, ed. Craig and Gilbert, p. 392.

99 Butterworth, p. 214.

100 Bonnet, Tourmente, p. 23.

101 Harvey, Diary, 2 July 1938, p. 157.

102 Adamthwaite, "French Foreign Policy," p. 18.

103 René Girault, "La décision gouvernementale en politique extérieure," in Edouard Daladier, chef du gouvernement (avril 1938-septembre 1939). Colloque, Paris, 1975, pp. 219-220.

104 du Réau, "L'information du 'décideur,'" p. 528.

105 P. Bernus, "La grande crise de la diplomatie française," Revue des Deux Mondes (August 1940): p. 262.

106 Ibid.

Notes to Chapter III

1 Mackensen to the Foreign Minister, 6 October 1938, DGFP, IV, no. 335, p. 435.

2 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 11.

3 Therefore the announcement of Poncet's arrival was relegated to a few lines in the inner pages of Italian newspapers. Evénements, Testimony, III, François-Poncet, p. 777.

4 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 52.

5 Ibid., p. 58.

6 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 9 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 287, p. 505.

7 Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 5 November 1938, p. 190.

8 Ibid., 8 November 1938, p. 191.

9 Edda Mussolini Ciano, My Truth, as told to Albert Zarca, trans. Eileen Finletter (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), p. 152.

10 Mack Smith, Roman Empire, p. 95.

11 F. W. Deakin, The Brutal Friendship--Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), p. 44.

12 André François-Poncet, "Ciano et les derniers jours de l'avant-guerre," Le Figaro, 17 July 1945, p. 1.

13
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 10 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 288, p. 511.

14
Ibid.

15
Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 9 November 1938, p. 192.

16
Guérin to Bonnet, 12 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 299, pp. 548-550. The DDF editors claim that Hubert Guérin, the chargé d'affaires, wrote this because his initials appear at the top of the document, but the first sentence, "J'ai analysé dans ma dépêche no. 511 du 9 de ce mois . . . " refers to one written by Poncet.

17
Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 10 November 1938, p. 192.

18
Mack Smith, Roman Empire, p. 135.

19
Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 14 November 1938, p. 194. See also the letter to Grandi, 14 November 1938, in Galeazzo Ciano, Ciano's Diplomatic Papers, ed. Malcolm Muggeridge, trans. Stuart Hood (London: Odhams Press Ltd., 1948), pp. 250-251. In this letter, Ciano told Grandi that changed Italian conditions precluded future talks with France on the former basis. The Rome Accords of 1935 no longer applied to Tunisia because Italy meant to make many social changes there: "[i]t is not a case of claiming purely and simply the cession of territory . . . " Grandi had to hint of these matters to the British government in order to prepare it.

20
Weizsäcker to Welczeck, 25 October 1938, DGFP, IV, no. 343, p. 441.

21
Memorandum by the State Secretary, 8 November 1938, DGFP, IV, no. 348, p. 447.

22
Ibid.

23
Chamberlain's speech to the House of Commons, 2 November 1938, in Chamberlain, In Search, pp. 221-225.

24
Pratt, East of Malta, p. 151.

25
Cab 23/96, 26 October 1938, in Ian Colvin, The Chamberlain Cabinet--How the Meetings in 10 Downing Street, 1937-9 led to the Second World War told for the first time from the Cabinet Papers (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1971), p. 172.

26
Winston S. Churchill, The Gathering Storm (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1948), p. 334.

27
Harvey, Diary, 4 October 1938, p. 209.

28
Phillips to the Secretary of State, 13 October 1938, in, United States, Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1938, vol. I, no. 297, p. 248. (Henceforth cited as FRUS, 1938 or 1939, etc.)

29
Katherine Duff, "Italy," in Survey of International Affairs 1939-1946, vol. I: The World in March 1939, ed. Arnold Toynbee (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 196.

30
Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 16 November 1938, p. 195; and Perth to Halifax, 17 November 1938, DBFP, III, no. 456, pp. 458-459.

31
Welczeck to the Foreign Minister, 18 November 1938, DGFP, IV, no. 354, p. 454.

32
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 16 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 319, pp. 617-618; and François-Poncet to Bonnet, 20 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 339, pp. 658-662.

33 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 19 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 330, p. 642.

34 Harvey, Diary, 24 November 1938, p. 223.

35 Chamberlain's diary, 6 November 1938, quoted in Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: Macmillan, 1947), p. 389.

36 Harvey, Diary, 24 November 1938, p. 233; and David Dilks ed., The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938-1945 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), 24 November 1938, p. 126.

37 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 25 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 403, p. 802.

38 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 22 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 356, pp. 707, 708.

39 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 23 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 379, p. 743.

40 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 24 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 384, p. 751.

41 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 23 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 379, p. 746.

42 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 23 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 380, p. 748.

43 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 28 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 419, p. 822.

44 François-Poncet, Farnèse, pp. 16-17. Ciano's wife, Edda, claims that Poncet incurred Mussolini's anger by telling the ambassador of Uruguay

that the Duce was "completely decadent intellectually." See Ciano, My Truth, p. 157.

45 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 29 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 433, p. 843.

46 Ibid., p. 844.

47 Ibid., p. 845.

48 Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 29 November 1938, p. 200.

49 Ibid.

50 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 29 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 435, p. 846.

51 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 29 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 451, p. 869. A name that would appear not infrequently in Poncet's reviews of the Italian press was that of Virginio Gayda, a prominent journalist. His articles, which generally were hostile to France and to French foreign policy, appeared in such Italian periodicals as Giornale d'Italia, Voce d'Italia, and Relazioni internazionali. Just as Gayda was known to be a semi-official mouthpiece for the Italian government, so "l'inspiration officieuse" of Relazioni internazionali, as Poncet noted, "ne saurait faire de doute." François-Poncet to Bonnet, 9 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 287, p. 504.

52 Ibid., p. 870.

53 Quoted in Werth, France and Munich, p. 398. The emphasis is his.

54 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 1 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 1, p. 2.

55 Time, 12 December 1938, p. 19.

56 Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 30 November 1938, p. 200.

57 Frederick T. Birchall, The Storm Breaks--A Panorama of Europe and the Forces That Have Wrecked its Peace (New York: The Viking Press, 1940), p. 345.

58 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 4 December 1938, DDF, XII, no. 29, p. 51.

59 Carcopino, Sept Ans, p. 80.

60 John W. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich--Prologue to Tragedy (London: Macmillan, 1948, 1963), p. 310.

61 For example, see René Pinon, "La déclaration franco-allemande et la politique Européene," Revue des Deux Mondes (15 December 1938) : p. 963.

62 The Economist, CXXXIII, 17 December 1938, p. 584.

63 Bonnet, Le Quai, p. 248.

64 The New Statesman and Nation, XVI, 10 December 1938, p. 952.

65 Werth, France and Munich, p. 399; and André Simone, J'Accuse. The Men Who Betrayed France (New York: Dial Press, 1940), p. 29.

66 Bonnet also requested the new Italian ambassador in Paris, Raffaelo Guariglia, to come to see him about the demonstration. Bonnet claims in Défense de la paix, vol. II: Fin d'une Europe (Geneva: Constant Bouquin, 1948), p. 64, that Guariglia "était désolé de cet incident" and that the Italian government had no

part in the affair. Raffaelo Guariglia, La diplomatie difficile--Mémoires 1922-1946, traduit de l'Italien par Louis Bonalumi (Paris: Plon, 1950), pp. 90, 88, claims that he was indeed "désolé," but that he knew nothing about it. Poor Guariglia was accused of signalling to Rome that the French general strike was plainly going to succeed and this, added to what else Mussolini knew about French weakness, made the Italian leader decide on the demonstration. Guariglia denies all this but claims that Mussolini had been planning the incident since the beginning of November at almost the same time that France recognized the Italian Empire and sent an ambassador to Rome. This information, Quariglia says, he discovered later.

67 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 3 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 15, pp. 27-29.

68 Ibid., p. 29.

69 Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 2 December 1938, p. 202.

70 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 1 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 9, p. 13.

71 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 3 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 17, p. 31.

72 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 5 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 33, p. 55.

73 Charles-Roux to Bonnet, 6 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 40, p. 84; and François-Poncet to Bonnet, 7 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 47, p. 92.

74 Perth to Halifax, 30 November 1938, DBFP, III, no. 461, p. 463.

75 Felix Gilbert, "Two British Ambassadors: Perth and Henderson," in The Diplomats, vol. II, ed.

Craig and Gilbert, p. 545.

76 Halifax to Perth, 3 December 1938, DBFP, III, no. 469, p. 467.

77 Cadogan, Diary, 2 December 1938, p. 126.

78 Perth to Halifax, 3 December 1938, DBFP, III, no. 473, pp. 469-470.

79 Perth to Halifax, 5 December 1938, DBFP, III, no. 474, pp. 470-473.

80 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 4 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 28, p. 50. In a footnote, DBFP, III, p. 473, it says that the Foreign Office was not "entirely satisfied that [Perth's] interpretation would prove, in fact, to be correct."

81 Quoted in Toynbee, ed., Survey, 1938, vol. I, p. 167.

82 Quoted in Ibid., p. 167; p. 168.

83 The Times (London), 17 December 1938, p. 15.

84 Coulondre to Bonnet, 9 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 77, p. 150.

85 Coulondre to Bonnet, 10 December 1938, DDF, XII, no. 87, p. 169.

86 Jacques Dutard, French Consul at Naples, to Bonnet, 11 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 93, p. 174.

87 Mario Toscano, The Origins of the Pact of Steel, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, Md.: The John Hopkins Press,

967), p. 98.

88 Bonnet, Défense de la paix, vol. II, p. 37.

89 Memorandum by an Official of the Foreign Minister's Secretariat, 6 December 1938, DGFP, IV, no. 370, p. 472.

90 Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 5 December 1938, pp. 202-203.

91 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 7 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 54, pp. 101-102.

92 Bonnet to François-Poncet, 12 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 98, p. 180.

93 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 14 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 109, p. 206.

94 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 14 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 130, pp. 262-263.

95 Reynaud, La France a sauvé, vol. I, p. 181.

96 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 9 November 1938, DDF, XII, no. 287, p. 506.

97 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 17 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 166, p. 322.

98 Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 17 December 1938, p. 206.

99 J. O., Chamber, 19 December 1938, p. 1944.

100 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 23 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 215, p. 397.

101 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 37.

102 François-Poncet to Ciano, 25 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 223, pp. 410-411.

103 Perth to Halifax, 26 December 1938, DBFP, III, no. 483, p. 492.

104 Candide, 7 December 1938, from Pierre Milza, L'Italie Fasciste devant l'opinion française 1920-1940 (Paris: Armand Colin, 1967), p. 220; Time, 19 December 1938, p. 17; Le Temps, 9 December 1938, p. 8.

105 J.O., Chamber, 29 December 1938, p. 2179. The deputy speaking was Louis Sibué, a Socialist.

106 Ibid., p. 2180.

107 Quoted in du Réau, "Enjeux stratégiques," p. 328.

108 Phipps to Halifax, 19 December 1938, DBFP, III, no. 479, p. 480.

Notes to Chapter IV

1 Quoted in Frederick L. Schuman, Night over Europe: The Diplomacy of Nemesis, 1939-1940 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), p. 37, from a speech made by Poncet at the French Embassy to members of the French colony on New Year's Day, 1 January 1939.

2 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 29 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 248, p. 457.

3 One example was Pope Pius XI. Charles-Roux to Bonnet, 28 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 238, p. 433.

4 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 29 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 248, p. 458.

5 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 31 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 256, p. 472.

6 Ibid., p. 474.

7 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 6 January 1939, DDF, XIII, no. 307, pp. 554-555.

8 For example, Roland de Marès, "La déclaration commune franco-allemande," Mercure de France CCLXXXIX (1 January 1939), p. 248.

9 Colonel W. Fraser to Sir E. Phipps, 22 December 1938, enclosed in Phipps to Halifax, 28 December 1938, PRO, Conf., XI, no. 2, p.5.

10 Galeazzo Ciano, Ciano's Diary 1939-1943, ed. Malcolm Muggeridge (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1947), 1 January 1939, p. 2. Apparently Mussolini feared a French attack. See Ibid., 5 January 1939, p. 5.

11 de Montbas, Chargé d'affaires, to Bonnet, 29 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 249, p. 461.

12 Kerchove to van Langenhove, 15 January 1939, in, Belgium, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Documents Diplomatiques Belges, 1920-1940, vol. V: 1938-1940, no. 46, p. 142. (Henceforth cited as DDB, V, etc.)

13 de Montbas to Bonnet, 29 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 245, pp. 447-448.

14 Edouard Daladier, In Defense of France (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., Inc., 1939), p. 154.

15 Quoted in Werth, France and Munich, p. 408.

16 Daladier, Defense, p. 172.

17 Arnold J. Toynbee, ed., Survey of International Affairs 1938, vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 176.

18 Berstein, p. 28.

19 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 7 January 1939, DDF, XIII, no. 310, p. 558.

20 Daniel J. Grange, "La propaganda arabe de Radio Bari (1937-1939)," Relations Internationales 5 (1976): p. 93.

21 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 7 January 1939, DDF, XIII, no. 310, p. 558.

22 Colvin, p. 177.

23 Times (London), 10 January 1939, p. 13.

24
Quoted in Stafford, p. 77.

25
Rock, Appeasement on Trial, p. 187.

26
Mack Smith, Roman Empire, p. 138.

27
Mackensen to the Foreign Minister, 3 January 1939, DGFP, IV, no. 376, p. 488.

28
Colvin, p. 176.

29
Harvey, Diary, 29 December 1938, pp. 233-234.

30
Ibid., 4 January 1939, p. 235.

31
Corbin to Bonnet, 9 January 1939, DDF, XIII, no. 328, pp. 590-593. A few days earlier, Halifax had informed Phipps that he had told Corbin that neither he nor Chamberlain intended to mediate and that it was essential that Rome saw that the Anglo-French entente was as strong as the Rome-Berlin Axis. Halifax to Phipps, 5 December 1938, DBFP, III, no. 490, p. 508.

32
Corbin to Bonnet, 9 January 1939, DDF, XIII, no. 328, p. 593.

33
Pierre Renouvin, "Les relations de la Grande-Bretagne et de la France avec l'Italie en 1938-1939," in Les relations franco-britanniques, 1935-1939. Colloque, p. 307.

34
Bonnet to François-Poncet, 11 December 1938, DDF, XIII, no. 336, p. 605.

35
Time, XXXIII, 23 January 1939, p. 19.

36 For entertaining and informative accounts of the visit, see Harvey, Diary, pp. 238-243; and Cadogan, Diary, pp. 135-139.

37 Earl of Halifax, Fulness of Days (London: Collins, 1957), p. 202.

38 The New Statesman and Nation, XVII, 21 January 1939, p. 79.

39 For complete accounts of the talks between Mussolini and Chamberlain, as well as those of Halifax and Ciano, see, DBFP, III, no. 500, pp. 517-530.

40 Ibid., p. 524.

41 Feiling, p. 396.

42 See, Brauer to the Foreign Minister, 14 January 1939, DGFP, IV, no. 378, p. 489: ". . . Chamberlain has loyally kept his promises and was not drawn into discussions but recommended that Rome undertake direct Franco-Italian negotiations. Thus the Entente Cordiale emerges stronger from the Rome conversations. . . "

43 Ciano, Diary 1938-1943, 12 January 1939, p. 10; and 11 January 1939, p. 10.

44 Harvey, Diary, 14 January 1939, p. 243. The emphasis is his.

45 Werth, France and Munich, p. 414.

46 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 13 January 1939, DDF, XIII, no 359, pp. 640-641; and ibid., no. 360, p. 642.

47 Ibid., no. 360,, p. 642.

48 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 13 January 1939, DDF, XIII, no. 364, pp. 648-649; and ibid., 14 January 1939, no. 367, pp. 653-655.

49 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 18 January 1939, DDF, XIII, no. 387, p. 693.

50 J O, Chamber, 13 January 1939, pp. 40-41.

51 Ibid., 19 January 1939, p. 94.

52 Ibid., 20 January 1939, p. 146.

53 Ibid., 26 January 1939, p. 234.

54 Ibid., 26 January 1939, p. 248.

55 Times (London), 27 January 1939, p. 12.

56 Le Temps, 28 January 1939, p. 8.

57 The Economist, CXXXIV, 4 February 1939, p. 240. Bonnet also told the German ambassador in Paris that he was "still prepared to resume negotiations based on the Laval agreement, but for that a different 'climate' would certainly have to be created . . ." From Welczeck to the Foreign Minister, 24 January 1939, DGFP, IV, no. 380, p. 492.

58 Memorandum--the Foreign Minister's Conversation with the French Ambassador, 6 February 1939, DGFP, IV, no. 382, p. 493.

59 Memorandum by the State Secretary, 9 February 1939, DGFP, IV, no. 386, p. 496.

60
The Times (London), 30 January 1939, p. 12.

61
The New Statesman and Nation, XVII, 4 February 1939, p. 157. Le Temps, 31 January 1939, p. 8, carried the denial of the Quai d'Orsay: "Contrairement à une information donnée ce matin par un journal étranger, le ministre des affaires étrangères n'a fait, samedi dernier, aucune déclaration à la presse sur les problèmes de politique extérieure."

62
Bullitt to the Secretary of State, 30 January 1939, FRUS, 1939, I, no. 165, p. 9; and Harvey, Diary, 6 February 1939, p. 250.

63
Bullitt to the Secretary of State, 6 February 1939, Bullitt, ed., For the President, pp. 309-310.

64
Coulondre to Bonnet, 12 January 1939, DDF, XIII, no. 348, pp. 625-626.

65
Coulondre to Bonnet, 26 January 1939, DDF, XIII, no. 432, p. 784.

66
Memorandum by the State Secretary, 27 January 1939, DGFP, IV, no. 381, p. 492.

67
Memorandum--Conversation between the Foreign Minister and Count de Brinon on 6 February 1939, 7 February 1939, DGFP, IV, no. 384, p. 495.

68
Edda Ciano, My Truth, p. 157. Poncet seems to have been correct in his assessment of the Duce's feelings for him. He ignored Poncet at formal gatherings, and Ciano remarked in his diary that "the French Ambassador makes no progress at all; the Duce hates him." Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 13 January 1939, p. 11.

69
François-Poncet, Farnèse, pp. 45-46.

70
Duroselle, Décadence, p. 392. Apparently Hubert Lagardelle, on 30 January 1939, wrote from Rome that Poncet and Perth were not on very friendly terms and accused the British of secrecy.

71
François-Poncet, Fateful Years, p. 253.

72
Donald T. Rotunda, "The Rome Embassy of Sir Eric Drummond, 16th Earl of Perth, 1933-1939," Ph. D. dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London, 1972, p. 392.

73
Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 13 January 1939, p. 12.

74
For example, see, François-Poncet to Bonnet, 19 January 1939, DDF, XIII, no. 398, pp. 19-20. Charles-Roux, at the Vatican, supported Poncet here. The British were terribly naive to put any faith in Mussolini, he said, and this only encourages him. Charles-Roux to Bonnet, 30 January 1939, DDF, XIII, no. 459, p. 830.

75
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 26 January 1939, DDF, XIII, no. 434, p. 789.

76
François-Poncet to Bonnet, ibid., p. 793.

77
It is possible that the rumour of a German invasion in the west persuaded Daladier to reconsider his stand against Italy. For an example of the rumour, see, Clive to Janson, DDB, V, no. 50, p. 152.

78
William Shirer, The Collapse of the Third Republic--An Inquiry into the Fall of France in 1940 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), p. 557. As well, see, Eli-Joseph Bois, Truth on the Tragedy of France, trans. N. Scarlyn Wilson (London: Hodder and Stoughton,

1940), p. 56 and p. 244, where he claims that Baudouin had become "leader of a kind of neo-catholicism which aimed at the moral regeneration of France."

79 For a discussion of the complicated relations of these companies with Italy, see, Alberto Sbacchi, "Toward the Recognition of the Italian Empire: Franco-Italian Negotiations, 1936-1940," Africa. Rivista mensile di Studi . . . dell'Institutio Italo-Africana 30 (1975): passim.

80 Guariglia, p. 103.

81 Paul Baudouin, "Un voyage à Rome: février 1939," Revue des Deux Mondes (1 May 1962): pp. 72-73.

82 Ibid., p. 74.

83 Evénements, Testimony, VII, Baudouin, p. 2058.

84 For example, Georges Bonnet, De Munich à la guerre--Défense de la paix (Paris: Plon, 1967), p. 248.

85 Evénements, Testimony, IX, Bonnet, p. 2658.

86 Baudouin, "Un voyage," p. 74. Apparently the Duce still hoped "for crumbs from the negotiating table"; but he also believed that a Franco-Italian war was inevitable in the future. See Knox, Mussolini Unleashed, p. 39.

87 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 81.

88 Evénements, Testimony, VII, Baudouin, p. 2060.

89 For a complete account of the Ciano-Baudouin conversation, see, Baudouin, "Un voyage," pp.

74-79; or DDF, XIV, no. 46, pp. 75-82.

90 Baudouin, "Un voyage," p. 80.

91 Interestingly enough, Le Temps makes no mention at all of the Baudouin mission.

92 Mackensen to Ribbentrop, 4 February 1939, DGFP, IV, no. 447, p. 577.

93 Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, pp. 312-313.

94 Bonnet to Corbin, 5 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 37, p. 64. Moreover, only two days later, Bonnet declared in the Senate that "[n]ous entendons tout d'abord sauvegarder notre territoire et notre empire." Then he repeated the statement he had made in the Chamber on 19 December 1938 about France being determined to cede not an inch of territory to Italy. France, Assemblée Nationale, Journal Officiel de la République Française, Sénat, Débats parlementaires et documents parlementaires, 7 February 1939, p. 103.

95 Baudouin, "Un voyage," p. 80.

96 Guariglia, p. 83.

97 Ibid., pp. 100-101.

98 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 83.

99 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 28 January 1939, p. 17.

100 Robert Coulondre, De Staline à Hitler: souvenirs de deux ambassades, 1936-1939 (Paris: Hachette, 1950), pp. 233-234.

101 Bonnet to François-Poncet, 21 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 159, p. 279.

102 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 89.

103 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 3 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 26, p. 49.

104 Perth to Sir Alexander Cadogan, 4 February 1939, DBFP, IV, no. 324, pp. 305-306.

105 Corbin to Bonnet, 6 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 50, p. 87.

106 Perth to Halifax, 6 February 1939, DBFP, IV, no. 328, p. 308.

107 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 6 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 51, p. 88.

108 The Times (London), 9 February 1939, p. 14.

109 Coulondre to Bonnet, 8 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 80, p. 144.

110 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 10 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 93, pp. 167-170.

111 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 16 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 130, p. 229.

112 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 14 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 112, p. 192; and ibid., 15 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 120, p. 215.

113 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 16 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 130, p. 230.

114
Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 19 February 1939, p. 31.

115
Halifax to Perth, 15 February 1939, DBFP, IV, no. 336, p. 317.

116
Perth to Halifax, 19 February 1939, DBFP, IV, no. 340, p. 320.

117
Gamelin, Servir, II, p. 390.

118
Bullitt to the Secretary of State, 8 February 1939, FRUS, 1939, I, no. 245, p. 13; Bonnet to Général Noguès, Rabat, 2 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 11, p. 21.

119
Perth to Halifax, 6 February 1939, DBFP, IV, no. 327, pp. 307-308.

120
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 9 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 82, p. 148.

121
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 15 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 121, p. 216.

122
General J. Armengaud, "Sécurité de notre Afrique du Nord," Revue des Deux Mondes (1 February 1939): p. 564. Armengaud also emphasizes Italian military and naval weakness in the Mediterranean.

123
Perth to Halifax, 27 February 1939, DBFP, IV, no. 346, p. 325.

124
Cadogan, Diary, 27 February 1939, p. 154.

125
Enclosure in Phipps to Halifax, 8 March 1939, DBFP, IV, no. 365, pp. 341-342.

126
Halifax to Phipps, 11 March 1939, DBFP, IV, no. 366, pp. 342-343.

127
Minute by Sir A. Cadogan, 2 March 1939, DBFP, IV, no. 357, p. 334. Le Temps, 23 February 1939, p. 8, reported that there were rumours in English diplomatic circles of Chamberlain's readiness to make a proposal to Italy of a peaceful solution for the Italian claims on France.

128
Harvey, Diary, 12 February 1939, p. 252.

129
Werth, France and Munich, p. 415; and The New Statesman and Nation, XVII, 4 February 1939, p. 163.

130
Quoted from a letter, Coulondre to Bonnet, in Bonnet, Tourmente, p. 93.

131
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 9 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 87, pp. 156-160.

132
J O, Senate, 7 February 1939, p. 104.

133
Georges Bonnet, "Léon Bérard diplomate," Revue des Deux Mondes (1961): p. 608.

134
Anatole de Monzie, Ci-devant (Paris: Flammarion, 1941), p. 90.

135
The Economist, CXXXIV, 11 February 1939, p. 285; and 25 February 1939, p. 386.

136
Le Temps, 2 March 1939, p. 2.

137
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 24 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 199, pp. 354-355.

138 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 27 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 222, p. 398. France's sending of Marshal Pétain to Burgos as ambassador did not please the Italian leader either. See ibid., 2 March 1939, no. 247, pp. 446-447.

Notes to Chapter V

1 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 28 February 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 231, pp. 413-414.

2 Ibid., p. 414.

3 Weizsäcker to Mackensen, 5 March 1939, DGFP, IV, no. 456, p. 585.

4 Mackensen to Weizsäcker, 10 March 1939, DGFP, IV, no. 458, p. 588.

5 Enclosure from a confidential agent in Rome in ibid., p. 588.

6 Memorandum by an Official of the Foreign Minister's Personal Staff, 11 March 1939, DGFP, IV, no. 461, p. 589.

7 Corbin to Bonnet, 8 March 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 281, pp. 510-511.

8 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 1 March 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 238, p. 425.

9 Bonnet to François-Poncet, 6 March 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 266, p. 481. Apparently, French nationals working for the railway were being mistreated by Italian officials.

10 From Berlin, Coulondre indicated much the same feeling in Germany except that the German press was not nearly so peevish about it as was the Italian press. Coulondre to Bonnet, 2 March 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 252. p. 456.

11 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 14 March 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 326, p. 580.

12 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 4 March 1939, p. 39. According to Poncet, Ciano's excuse was "l'état actuel des relations entre les deux pays." See, Farnèse, p. 92.

13 Phipps to Halifax, 13 March 1939, PRO, Conf., XI, no. 24, p. 63.

14 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 5 March 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 261, p. 470.

15 Footnote to ibid., DDF, XIV, no. 261, p. 470.

16 Bédarida, "Gouvernante anglaise," p. 233.

17 The Times (London), 16 March 1939, p. 15.

18 JO, Chamber, 17 March 1939, p. 1028.

19 The Times (London), 16 March 1939, p. 15.

20 JO, Chamber 17 March 1939, pp. 1029, 1031.

21 Ibid., p. 1040.

22 Mack Smith, Roman Empire, p. 141. Richard Collier, Duce!: The Rise and Fall of Benito Mussolini (London: William Collins, 1971; Fontana Books, 1972), p. 162, says Hitler was too preoccupied. The Italian Consul-General, Guiseppe Renzetti, learned about Prague while dining at Goering's house and demanded that the Germans inform Mussolini.

23 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 15 March 1939, p. 46.

24 Ibid., 20 March 1939, p. 52.

25 Ibid., 19 March 1939, p. 51.

26 Phillips to the Secretary of State, 17 March 1939, FRUS, 1939, I, no. 91, p. 47.

27 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 15 March 1939, DDF, XIV, no. 346, p. 603.

28 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 16 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 10, p. 9.

29 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 17 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 30, p. 45.

30 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 18 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 44, p. 62. Perth tended to agree that France was threatened. He cabled to Halifax that "it would I feel be a grave error to believe that if Mussolini gave orders for Italian people to march against France he would not command absolute obedience." Perth to Halifax, 21 March 1939, DBFP, IV, no. 377, p. 351.

31 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 95. Poncet's request of 22 March 1939 was not reproduced in DDF. See footnote 3 to DDF, XVI, no. 43, p. 105.

32 Gentizon to François-Poncet, 21 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 110, pp. 154-155.

33 Ibid., p. 155.

34 Laval, Diary, p. 234.

35 Toscano, p. 180.

36 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 20 March 1939, p. 52.

37 Baudouin, "Un voyage," pp. 82-83.

38 Daladier to Baudouin, 20 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 91, pp. 124-125.

39 Ibid., p. 125.

40 Footnote to François-Poncet to Bonnet, 26 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 162, p. 224.

41 Ibid., p. 225.

42 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 27 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 166, pp. 229-230.

43 The Economist, CXXXV, 1 April 1939, pp. 1-2.

44 Cadogan, Diary, 26 March 1939, p. 163.

45 de Montbas to Bonnet, 27 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 168, p. 231.

46 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 20 March 1939, p. 52.

47 For the text of this meeting, see, Toscano, pp. 181-185.

48 Record of Conversations between British and French Ministers in London, 23 March 1939, PRO, Conf., XI, no. 26, p. 73.

49 Phipps to Halifax, 27 March 1939, PRO, Conf., XI, no. 28, p. 75.

50 Halifax to Phipps, 28 March 1939, DBFP, IV, no. 381, p. 353.

51 Phipps to Halifax, 28 March 1939, DBFP, IV, no. 382, pp. 354-355.

52 Le Temps, 23 March 1939, p. 8.

53 Ibid.

54 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 96. Bonnet, while he was in London, mentioned to Halifax the approaches from the Italians "by persons claiming to be in Signor Mussolini's confidence." Perhaps this was a reference to Lagardelle. The French government, however, had not received these unofficial intermediaries because if Mussolini had been in earnest, he should have used proper channels. See, Record of Conversations between British and French Ministers in London, 23 March 1939, PRO, Conf., XI, no. 26, p. 73.

55 This account of the meetings is taken from, Zay, 27, 29 March 1939, pp. 50-54.

56 Ibid., 27 March 1939, p. 51.

57 See, Daladier, Defense, pp. 203-215, for the text of his speech.

58 Ibid., p. 212.

59 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 30 March 1939, p. 58.

60 Corbin to Bonnet, 30 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 201, p. 294.

61 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 30 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 202, p. 294.

62 Le Temps, 30 March 1939, p. 1.

63 Note de M. Nac informateur du Quai d'Orsay, 29 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 193, pp. 268-271. "M. Nac" was the pseudonym of a professor from Strasbourg who often met with political personalities.

64 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 29 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 196, p. 283.

65 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 28 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 175, p. 241.

66 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 30 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 211, p. 319.

67 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 7 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 294, p. 497.

68 Perth to Halifax, 31 March 1939, DBFP, IV, no. 386, pp. 358-359.

69 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 31 March 1939, p. 60.

70 de Vaux Saint-Cyr to Bonnet, 4 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 251, pp. 374-375.

71 de Vaux Saint-Cyr to Bonnet, 6 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 283, p. 479.

72 Perth to Halifax, 2 April 1939, DBFP, IV, no. 387, p. 359.

73 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 30 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 204, p. 298.

74 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 13 March 1939, DDF, XV, no. 212, pp. 320-321.

75 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 6 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 286, p. 485.

76 Bérard, Un ambassadeur se souvient, vol. I, p. 407.

77 For example, see, ibid.; Perth to Halifax, 3 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 68, p. 117; and Bullitt to the Secretary of State, 17 March 1939, FRUS, 1939, I, no. 498, p. 49.

78 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 101.

79 For the motion of the Albanian Assembly offering the crown of Albania to the king of Italy, see, Arnold J. Toynbee, ed., Documents on International Affairs 1939-1946, vol. I: March-September 1939 (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 135.

80 The Economist, CXXXV, 13 May 1939, p. 366.

81 F. S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant--Britain among the Great Powers 1916-1939 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p. 581.

82 Cadogan, Diary, 7 April 1939, p. 170 (". . . this proves Musso a gangster as Czecho proved Hitler."); and Harvey, Diary, 7 April 1939, p. 276 (". . . Mussolini is just as evil as Hitler . . .")

83 Perth to Halifax, 7 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 82, p. 128. As usual, Perth was optimistic. After all, Italy had always had special interests and rights in Albania. Kerchove to Soudan, 13 April 1939, DDB, V no. 58, p. 173.

84 Halifax to Perth, 7 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 83, p. 129.

85 Halifax to Perth, 9 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 109, p. 153.

86 Phipps to Halifax, 9 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 106, pp. 151-152.

87 Bullitt to the Secretary of State, 9 April 1939, FRUS, 1939, I, no. 686, p. 120.

88 Douglas A. Bedford, "Towards La Guerre Totale: Anglo-French Strategic Planning Between Two Wars, 1919-1939," M. A. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1978, p. 108.

89 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 9 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 312, p. 516.

90 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 11 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 342, p. 548.

91 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 12 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 362, pp. 581-582. Nevertheless, in his memoirs, Farnèse, p. 102, Poncet is more optimistic. To him, the Albanian coup appeared to be a demonstration, on Mussolini's part, of his independence of Germany. As well, see Evénements, Testimony, III, François-Poncet, p. 779.

92 Ibid., p. 582.

93 Phipps to Halifax, 9 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 103, p. 148.

94 Perth to Halifax, 6 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 73, p. 124. Unfortunately, Perth neglected to mention who the special messenger was. Perhaps it was Lagardelle.

95 Ibid.

96 Halifax to Phipps, 6 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 79, pp. 126-127; and Phipps to Halifax, 7 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 85, p. 130.

97 Perth to Halifax, 11 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 132, p. 172. There is no trace of this order in the DDF.

98 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 14 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 396, pp. 639-641.

99 Charles-Roux to Bonnet, 15 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 412, pp. 663-664.

100 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 15 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 409, p. 660.

101 Ibid., p. 661.

102 Phipps to Halifax, 17 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 194, p. 222.

103 For Loraine's account of his interview with Bonnet, see enclosure in Phipps to Halifax, 7 April 1939, DBFP, V, Appendix I, pp. 795-797. In La Turquie devant la querre, p. 122, René Massigli says that Bonnet met with Loraine "en grand mystère."

104
Harvey, Diary, 20 April 1939, p. 282.

105
Perth to Halifax, 19 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 214, p. 237.

106
Perth to Halifax, 20 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 228, p. 252.

107
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 17 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 430, pp. 692-695.

108
Ibid., p. 694.

109
Charles-Roux to Bonnet, 19 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 445, p. 714.

110
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 21 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 463, p. 748. For a description of some of Germany's economic activities in eastern and south-eastern Europe, see, David E. Kaiser, Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War--Germany, Britain, France, and Eastern Europe, 1930-1939 (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 263-273.

111
de Vaux Saint-Cyr to Bonnet, 25 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 485, pp. 794-795.

112
Bédarida, "Gouvernante anglaise," p. 233.

113
Halifax to Perth, 20 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 235, p. 256.

114
Halifax to Phipps, 20 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 238, p. 259.

115
Halifax to Perth, 20 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 235, p. 256. In his instructions to Phipps, Halifax

used the same words but substituted "Rome" for "Paris."

116 Phipps to Halifax, 22 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 255, pp. 277-278.

117 Phipps to Halifax, 27 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 298, p. 347.

118 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 26 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 489, pp. 803-804. Poncet was pleased with the meeting. Ciano had been very friendly and said that he and Poncet should see each other frequently.

119 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 25 April 1939, p. 77.

120 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 24 April 1939, DDF, XV, no. 480, p. 788.

121 Halifax to Phipps, 26 April 1939, DBFP, V, no. 296, p. 346.

122 Grigore Gafencu, Last Days of Europe. A Diplomatic Journey in 1939, trans. E. Fletcher-Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), pp. 153-154.

123 Ibid., p. 154.

124 Ibid., p. 160.

125 Ibid., p. 165.

126 Ibid. As well, see François-Poncet to Bonnet, 4 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 35, p. 94. Gafencu reported to Poncet that Mussolini twice insisted that Italy had no military alliance with Germany, "jusqu'à maintenant du moins!"

127
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 4 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 35, p. 94.

128
Bonnet to François-Poncet, 3 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 21, pp. 46-47.

129
Ibid., p. 46.

130
Note du Ministre, 5 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 76, p. 150. There had been speculation, in early April, that Daladier might remove Bonnet from the Quai d'Orsay. Times (London), 3 April 1939, p. 13.

131
Ibid. Bonnet declared that, in order to negotiate with the Italian government, he had decided "à lutter contre toutes les difficultés de politique intérieure . . . "

132
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 4 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 43, pp. 105-106.

133
Ibid., p. 106.

134
François-Poncet to Bonnet, 11 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 136, pp. 285-287.

135
Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 10 May 1939, p. 85. Ciano must have mistaken the date, which should have been 11 May 1939.

136
Quoted in Bonnet, Tourmente, p. 95.

137
Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 12 May 1939, p. 86.

138
Bullitt to the Secretary of State, 9 May 1939, FRUS, 1939, I, no. 914, p. 183.

139
Phipps to Halifax, 8 May 1939, DBFP, V, no.

418, p. 467.

140 François Charles-Roux, Huit ans au Vatican, 1932-1940 (Paris: Flammarion, 1947), p. 317. See also, Note du Department, 8 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 107, pp. 236-237, in which the reasons for France's declining of the Pope's invitation are given. There was some thought, too, that the Italian government might be behind the conference idea.

141 Loraine to Halifax, 9 May 1939, DBFP, V, no. 430, p. 477.

142 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 15 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 190, p. 367.

143 Conversations between Halifax, Daladier and Bonnet, 20 May 1939, DBFP, V, no. 570, pp. 611-614.

144 Earlier in May, for instance, Halifax had had a talk with Dino Grandi, the Italian ambassador in London, who had just returned from Rome. Grandi told him that Mussolini was looking forward to conversations with France. Halifax to Phipps, 2 May 1939, DBFP, V, Appendix I, V, p. 800.

145 Compte rendu--Notes prises au cours de l'entretien franco-britannique du 20 mai 1939 entre M. Daladier, M. Georges Bonnet et lord Halifax de passage à Paris se rendant à Genève, DDF, XVI, no. 243, p. 485.

Notes to Chapter VI

1 Quoted and translated from Gazzetta del Popolo, in Le Temps, 5 February 1939, p. 2.

2 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 1 January 1939, p. 2.

3 Evénements, Testimony, III, François-Poncet, p. 779.

4 Lowe and Marzari, p. 331; and Phillips to the Secretary of State, 17 May 1939, FRUS, I, 1939, no. 196, p. 188.

5 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 8 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 102, pp. 229-230.

6 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 11 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 136, pp. 285, 287.

7 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 14 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 181, p. 357.

8 Footnote to ibid., DDF, XVI, no. 181, p. 357.

9 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 18 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 223, p. 433.

10 Coulondre to Bonnet, 15 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 189, pp. 365-366.

11 Bérard, Un ambassadeur se souvient, vol. I, p. 410; and François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 108.

12 Apparently, in his inimitable way, Mussolini first considered calling it the "pact of blood." Mack Smith, Mussolini, p. 231.

13 For the text of the Pact of Steel, see, Elizabeth Wiskemann, The Rome-Berlin Axis--A History of the Relations between Hitler and Mussolini (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 350-352.

14 Quoted in Schuman, Night over Europe, p. 169.

15 Toscano, p. 397.

16 André François-Poncet, "Hitler et Mussolini," Historia 105 (1955): p. 128.

17 Mussolini to Hitler, 30 May 1939, in, Italy, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani, eighth series (1935-1939), vol. XII, no. 59, p. 49. (Henceforth cited as DDI, etc. All references are to the eighth series.)

18 Mack Smith, Mussolini, p. 232.

19 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 24 May 1939, p. 91.

20 The Economist, CXXXV, 27 May 1939, p. 484.

21 Bonnet, Tourmente, p. 121.

22 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 22 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 249, p. 496.

23 Ibid.

24 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 24 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 265, pp. 524-527.

25 Ibid., p. 527.

26 Coulondre to Bonnet, 23 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 258, p. 513.

27 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 25 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 282, p. 558.

28 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 75.

29 Gordon Waterfield, Professional Diplomat: Sir Percy Loraine of Kirkharle Bt. 1880-1961 (London: John Murray, 1973), p. 230. It had been the announcement of Loraine's appointment to Rome, on 2 January 1939, that had inspired the news items declaring his competence in dealing with dictators. As well, Ciano claims that, in December 1939, Loraine had said some "disagreeable things" about Italy, so Mussolini had had anonymous letters sent to the Englishman containing "carefully chosen insults." Ciano, Diary 1937-1938, 16 December 1938, p. 206.

30 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 3 May 1939, p. 82.

31 Waterfield, p. 229.

32 Loraine to Halifax, 28 May 1939, DBFP, V, no. 653, p. 707. One of the statements which Loraine may have read was by Virginio Gayda, an influential Fascist journalist. Gayda's statement declared that "[t]he conflict is between the vital needs of Italy and Germany for territory and a regime of superfluous territory of Great Britain and France." Quoted in Schuman, Night over Europe, p. 172.

33 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 109.

34 Ibid., p. 84.

35 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 30 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 312, p. 604.

36 For Loraine's reports of his audiences with Mussolini, see, Loraine to Halifax, 28 May 1939, DBFP, V, no. 651, pp. 703-704, and no. 652, pp. 704-706.

37 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 27 May 1939, p. 94.

38 Ibid., pp. 94-95.

39 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 31 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 314, p. 609.

40 For the story of the Ara Pacis affair, see, Carcopino, Souvenirs de sept ans, pp. 88-100.

41 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 31 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 316, pp. 615-616.

42 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 31 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 314, p. 610. Ciano noted that he and Poncet had agreed that it was "preferable to wait until the situation develop[ed]." Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 30 May 1939, p. 95.

43 Charles-Roux, Huit ans, p. 311.

44 Le Temps, 31 May 1939, p. 1.

45 Ibid., 5 June 1939, p. 1.

46 Coulondre to Bonnet, 1 June 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 328, p. 639.

47 Corbin to Bonnet, 14 June 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 415, p. 798.

48 Phillips to the Secretary of State, 9 June 1939, FRUS, I, 1939, no. 219, p. 192.

49 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 3 June 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 342, p. 653.

50 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 31 May 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 314, p. 609.

51 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 3 June 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 342, p. 655.

52 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 15 June 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 432, p. 823.

53 Guariglia, p. 111.

54 Guariglia to Ciano, 6 June 1939, DDI, XII, no. 128, p. 111.

55 Although Ciano corresponded with his ambassadors elsewhere, the only communication he seems to have made during June to Guariglia in Paris was a circular on matters in the Far East. DDI, XII, no. 330, pp. 267-268.

56 Harvey, Diary, 8 June 1939, p. 296.

57 Ibid., O. H. to Halifax, 3 May 1939, p. 434.

58 Loraine to Sargent, 5 June 1939, DBFP, V, no. 717, p. 774.

59 Phipps to the Prime Minister, 13 June 1939, DBFP, V, no. 46, p. 62.

60 Phipps to Halifax, 13 June 1939, DBFP, VI, no. 48, p. 64.

61 Phipps to Halifax, 28 June 1939, DBFP, VI, no. 162, p. 185.

62 Phipps to Halifax, 22 June 1939, DBFP, VI, no. 132, p. 150.

63 Enclosure in Phipps to Sargent, 30 June 1939, DBFP, VI, no. 195, p. 221. This enclosure comprises the record of a conversation between the counsellor of the Italian embassy in Paris and "a sort of Frenchman," as Phipps termed him. Bonnet did not inform Phipps of the man's identity.

64 Ibid.

65 Guariglia, p. 114.

66 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 17 June 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 464, p. 881.

67 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 17 June 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 466, p. 885.

68 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 23 June 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 521, p. 969.

69 Italians visiting in Paris told Guariglia much the same thing. Mussolini was bluffing, partly to conceal Italy's military weakness. Guariglia, p. 115.

70 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 23 June 1939, DDF, XVI, no. 521, p. 971.

71 Renouvin, "Relations avec l'Italie," p. 313.

72 Loraine to Halifax, 4 July 1939, DBFP, VI, no. 228, p. 253. Loraine reported how shocked he was about the anti-British hostility now so evident in the Italian press. Moreover, the day before, Mussolini had ordered the Fascist press to emphasize "complete solidarity with Germany on [the] question of Danzig." Frank Rosengarten, The Italian Anti-Fascist Press (1919-

1945)--From the Legal Opposition Press to the Underground Newspapers of World War II (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968), p. 30.

73 Loraine to Halifax, 6 July 1939, DBFP, VI, no. 248, p. 274. The Belgian ambassador in Rome saw Ciano on 6 July and later declared that "[r]arement j'ai entendu le Conte Ciano employer un langage aussi catégoriquement apaisant et pacifique . . ." Kerchove to Pierlot, 6 July 1939, DDB, V, no. 77, p. 223.

74 Phipps to Halifax, 7 July 1939, DBFP, VI, no. 273, p. 302. By that time, Bonnet hoped that the talks with the Soviet Union would be over.

75 Halifax to Phipps, 10 July 1939, DBFP, VI, no. 288, p. 317.

76 Letter, Chamberlain to Daladier, 13 July 1939, DBFP, VI, no. 317, pp. 350-352.

77 Ibid., p. 350.

78 Phipps to Chamberlain, 14 July 1939, DBFP, VI, no. 326, p. 357.

79 Ibid., p. 358.

80 Loraine to Halifax, 21 July 1939, DBFP, VI, no. 396, pp. 444-445.

81 Letter, Daladier to Chamberlain, 24 July 1939, DBFP, VI, no. 428, pp. 471-474. The first draft of this letter was apparently rather flexible, but Daladier modified it. du Réau, "Enjeux," p. 538.

82 Bérard, Un ambassadeur se souvient, vol. I, p. 415.

83 Guariglia to Ciano, 25 July 1939, DDI, XII, no. 673, p. 508.

84 du Réau, "Enjeux," p. 538; and Phipps to Halifax, 13 July 1939, Enclosure no. 5, PRO, Conf., XII, no. 5, p. 28.

85 Letter, Chamberlain to Daladier, 3 August 1939, DBFP, VI, no. 536, p. 587.

86 Guariglia to Ciano, 25 July 1939, DDI, XII, no. 673, p. 508.

87 Ibid.

88 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 12 August 1939, p. 124. On 19 August, Loraine told Poncet that he had seen Ciano recently and had found him "extrêmement inquiet." François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 125. See also Loraine to Halifax, 18 August 1939, DBFP, VII, no. 59, p. 60.

89 Bérard, Un ambassadeur se souvient, vol. I, p. 415.

90 Ibid.; and François-Poncet, Farnèse, pp. 126-127.

91 Loraine to Halifax, 29 August 1939, DBFP, VII, no. 452, p. 349-350.

92 Ibid., p. 350. The concessions that Poncet mentioned were "certain Suez directorships, a [text uncertain] about Tunis and, he even hinted, the cession of Jibuti."

93 Guariglia to Ciano, 29 August 1939, DDI, XIII, no. 405, p. 253.

94 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 128.

95 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 31 August 1939, p. 140.

96 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 31 August 1939, French Yellow Book, no. 306, p. 349.

97 Monzie, 31 August 1939, p. 147.

98 For the text of the French reply, see, François-Poncet to Ciano, 1 September 1939, DDI, XIII, no. 537, pp. 333-334.

99 François-Poncet to Bonnet, 1 September 1939, French Yellow Book, no. 332, p. 369.

100 François-Poncet, "Hitler et Mussolini," p. 130.

101 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 139.

102 Ibid., p. 171.

103 Ciano, Diary 1939-1943, 10 June 1940, p. 263.

104 François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 178. The two men never met again; Ciano was executed in 1943.

Notes to Conclusion

1
Quoted in Le Temps, 24 June 1939, p. 2.

2
Bonnet, Le Quai, p. 252.

3
François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 135.

4
Duroselle, L'Abîme, p. 37.

5
The reason for this lacuna may be the vagaries of selective editing; more likely it is due to the vast destruction, during the war, of documents pertaining to the 1930s. See the introduction to the Documents Diplomatiques Français, second series, by Pierre Renouvin, DDF, I, pp. vii-viii.

6
For instance, see, François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 38. After the Italian denunciation of the Laval-Mussolini Accords, when Poncet advised the Quai d'Orsay to approach the Italians to find out exactly what they wanted, his "avis ne furent pas écoutés."

7
For instance, see, Mack Smith, Mussolini, p. 225; Cassels, Mussolini's Early Diplomacy, p. 374; and Knox, Mussolini Unleashed, pp. 38-39.

8
Bédarida, in "La gouvernante anglaise," p. 236, says that all documents that have become available since 1945 show that most contemporaries (especially the English) were wrong in their belief that Mussolini might be propitiated. These documents, of course, were not available in 1939.

9
Bonnet, Le Quai, p. 251.

10
Knox, in, "Conquest," p. 57, would agree with Poncet.

[11] François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 32.

[12] Ibid. P. Guiral, in "Le diplomate et le journaliste dans la politique étrangère," in Centre des sciences politiques de l'institut d'études juridiques de Nice, Les affaires étrangères (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), p. 187, argues that Poncet's position was similar to that of Prince Bülow, the German diplomat, at the beginning of World War One. Neither man could halt Italy's course. Her destiny had already been decided, in 1915, just as it was decided, in 1939, by the many sacrifices which Mussolini had made to the Rome-Berlin Axis--too many for him to admit that he had been deceived.

[13] François-Poncet, Farnèse, p. 37.

[14] Watt, "Britain, France, and the Italian Problem," p. 294.

Photographic Credits

André François-Poncet: Dodd, Through Embassy Eyes, facing p. 150.

Farnèse Palace and ambassador's office: Jean-Claude Allain, Joseph Caillaux, vol. II: L'oracle 1914-1944 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1981), pp. 54, 183.

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