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Philip HEPBURN
Belgrade

BRITAIN AND THE QUESTION OF YUGOSLAV NEUTRALITY 1930—1937

The conclusion, in March 1937, of a treaty between Yugoslavia and Italy had far-reaching consequences for the European balance of power. Formally, the treaty amounted to little more than a non-aggression pact and did not affect Yugoslavia's friendship treaty with France, which was actually renewed at the end of Czechoslovakia and Romania. But the Yugoslav government, had already flatly rejected all French and Czech attempts to turn the Little *Entente* into an effective military alliance which might be used against Germany. The signing, just five months after Mussolini's announcement, of the Rome—Berlin Axis, of an agreement with Italy marked the final withdrawal of Yugoslavia from active participation in the French system of security. The Yugoslavs had originally turned to France for protection against Italy. Now, when the French connexion had become a burden, they loosened the ties.

Still more worrying was the implication that both parties to the agreement had resigned themselves to the inevitability of an Austro-German *Anschluss*. The situation in this respect was still fluid. The sudden improvement in relations between Italy and Yugoslavia might yet enable those countries to resist the *Anschluss*, but in view of Mussolini's new-found admiration for Hitler and the well-known reluctance of the Yugoslav government to take any action against Germany, that did not seem likely. For some time past, those responsible for formulating Yugoslavia's foreign policy had been openly stating their view that the *Anschluss* would have positive advantages for Yugoslavia. Fear that Yugoslavia would cooperate with Germany over this question had impelled Mussolini to accept the fact that Austria was lost and make his own peace with Germany. The agreement with Yugo-

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slavia provided a kind of guarantee, but only because it enabled him to regard the prospect of *Anschluss* with relative equanimity.[1]

Other states in central and south-eastern Europe had already fallen under German influence, or, like Poland, deserted France. But the turning of Yugoslavia was, as the Germans had long recognized, the key to the isolation of Austria and Czechoslovakia. Now, Austria was doomed and the position of Czechoslovakia was looking distinctly uncertain. Spurred on by Hitler's success, and anxious to bury the ignominy of defeat in Austria, Mussolini was preparing to further his revisionist aspirations through alliance with Italy's powerful future neighbour. With Romania following the Yugoslav example and turning its back on Czechoslovakia, the Little *Entente*, if not yet dead, was in a very bad way.

The Yugoslav had obvious reasons for seeking to avoid conflict with either or both of their more poverful neighbours. More surprising, however, is the fact that the British had, for many years, been actively encouraging them to place less reliance on France and to improve their relations with both Italy and Germany. British pressure, confirming as it did the general impression of Anglo-French weakness and discord, had contributed heavily to the collapse of French influence in Yugoslavia. Examination of this question, important in itself, throws considerable light on wider aspects of British foreign policy in the 1930's, and in particular on British attitudes towards French policy in eastern Europe.

The origins of Anglo-French discord: from Paris to Locarno

Britain and France had begun to disagree during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. The central question was, of course, their attitude towards Germany. Abruptly switching from his earlier uncompromising attitude to plead for more generous treatment of the defeated enemy, Lloyd-George had warned that Germany would never accept an unjust peace, bu would acquire new allies with which to wage a war of revenge, as France had done after the humiliation of 1871.[2]

Lloyd-George achieved little on this occasion beyond a few minor alterations to the proposed German-Polish frontier and, ironically, the establishment of the free port of Danzig, but British sympathy for Germany continued to grow. Heavily in-

[1] J. B. Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis, 1934—41*, Stanford 1962, 86. Hoptner's account is rather too sympathetic to Prince Paul, on whose private papers it is principally based. Otherwise it has stood up well to the opening of new archival sources and remains the most lucid account of Yugoslav foreign policy in these years.

[2] P. Mantoux, *Paris Peace Conference*, 1919, Proceedings of the Council of Four, (Geneva, 1964); S. Marks, *The Illusion of Peace*, International Relations in Europe, 1919—1933, 11—12; A. J. P. Taylor, English History, 1914—1945, OUP 1965, 181—5.

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fluenced by such works as Keynes' "The Economic Consequences of the Peace Settlement", British public opinion turned sharply aganst almost every aspect of the "victors" peace, from the impracticability of the reparations clauses to the blatant contradictions between the principle of national selfdetermination and the treatment of Germany and other defeated states. The manifest failure of the "war to end all wars" 'to resolve European problems added to British reluctance to become involved in another Continental bloodbath. Preoccupation with domestic and Imperial problems did the rest. Before long the British were ready to believe that the Germans had not sought war, but that the nations had, in Lloyd-George's phrase, 'slithered over the brink into the boiling caulrdron of war'.[3] The same mistakes must not be repeated. Rigid alliances, secret diplomacy, and the policy of "encirclement" which had so exacerbated German insecurity, were to be avoided at all costs.[4]

The most serious obstacle to a lasting peace was increasingly seen as the impossibility of reconciling Germany to the peace settlement without some revision of the more vindictive clauses of the treaties. It was initially recognized that the French could not easily forego the more concrete guarantees provided by the peace treaties, but the British soon wearied of French intransigence and began to argue that to attempt to hold Germany down forever was both futile and counter-productive. Their refusal to support the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr in 1922 demonstrated that, whatever they thought of the peace settlement, they had no intention of holding Germany to its terms by force. Fear of involvement in an expensive and protracted occupation of Germany would influence British thinking in later years, most obviously when Hitler announced the introduction of conscription in Germany in 1935 and when the German army re-entered the Rhineland in the following year.

The Ruhr crisis led to a substantial reduction and rescheduling of Germany's reparations debts under the Dawes Plan. More significantly, however, it also demonstrated the need for a more positive British policy lest the fiasco be repeated. Britain's foreign minister, Austen Chamberlain, considered reassuring French fears with a British commitment to defend the territorial integrity of France and Belgium, before deciding against a purely "negative" declaration. The failure of Poincare's policy to achieve much more than the painful isolation of France, and the apparent return of stability to Germany under Stresemann, had created possibilities for a more ambitious policy. At Locarno in December 1925 France and Germany were brought together for the first time since the

[3] D. Lloyd-George, *War Memoirs*, Odhams 1934, vol. 1, 32.

[4] M. Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement*, Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1966.

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war. They were treated almost as equals, the neutral, two-way nature of the British guarantee of the Franco-German frontier being emphasized by the inclusion of Italy as a second guarantor. Germany won other important concessions — permission to seek entry to the League of Nations, a speeding up of the Allied withdrawal from the Rhineland, and the transferral of control over German armaments to a League commission which was to prove rather more tolerant of the numerous violations than the previous Anglo-French authorities.[5]

The appearance of Great Power solidarity at Locarno was an empty illusion. For Stresemann, the uneasy truce in the west strengthened Germany's ability to pursue revision of the detested eastern territorial settlement. Mussolini's attitude was similar. The importance of Italy's role in the Locarno agreements provided a favourable opportunity to extend Italian influence in the Danubian region and increase the pressure on Yugoslavia.

The French struggled to repair the damage. Having failed to extend the Locarno agreements to cover Germany's eastern frontier, they went on in the following weeks to sign separate friendship treaties with Poland and Czechoslovakia. Similar arrangements were made in 1927 with Czechoslovakia's "Little *Entente*" allies, Romania and Yugoslavia. With the exception of the continuing hostility between Poland and Czechoslovakia, the major anti-revisionist states of central and eastern Europe had thus been brought into a broad alliance under the leadership of France. But the British response to this development was entirely negative.

Anglo-French conflict in eastern Europe

The British were entirely opposed to French commitments in eastern Europe. Quite apart from their likely effect on Franco-German relations, it could be argued that these alliances were ineffective. Even allowing for the impotence of Germany, a situation which the British considered temporary, there were many questons in which France could do much to help her eastern allies, nor they do much to help France. The Little *Entente*, in particular, had never been intended to deal with threats from any Great Power. These three medium-sized states were united by their common fear of Hungarian revisionism or a Habsburg restoration. Beyond that, each had problems with quite different revisionist powers — Czechoslovakia with Germany, Yugoslavia with Italy and Bulgaria, Romania with the Soviet Union and Bulgaria, France's other ally, Poland, was at least as worried by

[5] S. Marks, *The Illusion of Peace*, International Relations in Europe, 1918—1933, Macmillan, 1976, 55—74.

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the Soviet Union as by Germany, and could not forgive the Czechs for taking advantage of the Russo-Polish war to hold on to a disputed coalfield.

The British felt that French commitments in eastern Europe complicated relations with Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union and other dissatisfied states. Worse still, they feared that the cooperation of the anti-revisionist states and their rigid insistence on adherence to all the terms of the peace treaties could easily drive the revisionist states together. Europe might divide into two sharply antagonistic camps, increasing the danger that minor disputes would rapidly escalate into a general war as states came to the aid of their allies or sought to take advantage of the difficulties of their enemies. To some extent, that was already happening. Germany and the Soviet Union were secretly cooperating. Italy had considerable influence in Hungary and Austria, was winning the struggle for control of Albania and had high hopes of completing the encirclement of Yugoslavia by enlisting Bulgarian support.

Against this dire possibility the British sought to isolate local conflicts and, wherever possible, eliminate them through regional agreements between revisionist and anti-revisionist states. Each state would have less need for support from distant allies and would therefore be able to pursue its own interests untroubled by equally impractical reciprocal commitments. The stability of such agreements would be ensured by the fact that neighbours had a common interest in ensuring that conflicts did not spread to their area and by mutually profitable trade. Locarno was the model. As we shall see, the British supported the idea of a similar agreement between the Balkan states and made repeated efforts to promote a reconciliation between Italy and Hungary and Yugoslavia.

This was an admirably subtle approach to European problems and it might have provided the basis for a stable balance of power but for one fundamental problem — the revisionist states could not be reconciled to the *stutus quo* without major revisions of the peace treaty, but not one of the anti-revisionist states could dare to start the ball rolling by making significant concessions. Secure beyond the English Channel and free from day to day conflicts with any of the revisionist powers, the British could not easily appreciate such problems. Convinced that the French alliance system was, not only an obstacle to reconciliation with Germany, but a disruptive influence in Europe as a whole, they set about reducing its effectiveness.

Nowhere did they have more success than in Yugoslavia, a country which, like Britain, was only indirectly threatened by Germany and which might even see some advantages in a limited revival of German power. The *Anschluss* of Austria would set the German fox among the Little *Entente* chickens. But it would

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also break the Italian encirclement, against which Yugoslavia's existing allies provided little relief. Italy and Hungary would then have to make common cause with Yugoslavia to halt any further German advance. If they did not, Yugoslavia could cooperate with Germany. At all events, Yugoslavia could hardly afford to incur the enmity of both Germany and Italy.

Nevile Henderson and Yugoslavia's role in international affairs

It was not necesary to be pro-German to be against the French system of alliances, but Nevile Henderson, the British Minister in Belgrade from 1929 to 1935, was extravagantly pro-German and anti-French. As the Britisch Ambassador in Berlin from April 1937 until the outbreak of war, Henderson would play a leading part in implementing the policy of 'appeasement'.[6] On one ocasion in 1937 he told his astonished American colleague:

> Germany must dominate the Danube-Balkan zone, which means that she is to dominate Europe. England and her Empire is to dominate the seas along with the United States. England and Germany must come into close relations, economic and political, and control the world.[7]

Henderson later denied that these had been his exact words, but he frequently spoke in a similar vein. A few months earlier he had told one Yugoslav diplomat that Yugoslavia should follow the example of Belgium (which had recently issued a unilateral declaration of neutrality) and seek a position of neutrality, 'neither with Germany nor with France, but avoiding all obligations to Czechoslovakia'.[8]

During his stay in Belgrade Henderson was inclined to attach a rather greater importance to Yugoslavia. His views on other matters changed little. His sympathy for Germany, his belief in the essential harmony of British and German interests, his contempt for the French system of security, and especially for 'those damned Czechs', and his penchant for personal diplomacy were already well-developed. So, also, was the indifference to totalitarian forms of rule which made him blind to the nature of the Nazi regime and its foreign policy aims. A foolish speech, made soon after his arrival in Berlin, about 'the great social

[6] Duff-Cooper complained that British policy during the Munich crisis was based solely on Henderson's advice. Chamberlain could not deny the charge: A. Duff-Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, Hart-Davis, 1953, 227.

[7] M. Gilbert and R. Gott, *The Appeasers*, Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1966, 64.

[8] Državni arhiv Sekretarijata inostranih poslova, Londonsko poslanstvo, report from Belgrade dated 27 April 1937.

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experiment' taking place in Germany provoked questions in parliament about 'Britain's Nazi Ambassador'.[9] Many years earlier, his uncritical support for King Alexander's dictatorship had led the leading British authority on Yugoslav affairs, Robert Seton-Watson, to remark that he 'presumably does not much care what sort of regime he has to deal with'.[10]

In view of Henderson's later activities in Berlin, his annual report for the year 1931 is prophetic. Britain's official representative in Belgrade was already redrawing the map of central Europe. Racial assumptions were never far below the surface. Bulgaria and Austria were to disappear. Several other states would fare little better:

> Of all the new post-war countries formed out of the ruins of the Habsburg Empire, Yugoslavia would appear to be that likely to play the largest role in future international history. For this she is indebted, apart from the inherent vitality and virility of the race, to her geographical position. It can scarcely be doubted that Yugoslavia will ultimately extend from Ljubljana to Bourgas — from Central Europe to the Black Sea. Szechslovakia can at best but constitute a new Switzerland in the middle of Europe. Poland lies between the hammer and the anvil with but a precarious outlet to the Baltic. Roumania's only outlet is the Black Sea, and she will always lie under the shadow of Russia. Hungary is in the same position as Czechoslovakia, and Austria's only hope of salvation would seem to be her ultimate union with Germany... Yugoslavia's only serious menace is the comparatively minor one of Italy. Of all the new states, she is the only one in a position to pursue an entirely independent policy. The others will be forced to rely for their existence on one or other of the greater European Powers.[11]

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that 'one or other of the greater European Powers' usually meant Germany.

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[9] His usual retort to the greeting 'Heil Hitler' was nevertheless 'Rule Britania', Gilbert and Gott (1966), 63—5. Henderson's views found considerable support on the right and he himself believed he had annoyed only the left, R. Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right, British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany*, 1933—39, OUP, 1983, 280—4.

[10] R. W. Seton-Watson to M. Curcin, 23 September 1930; *R. W. Seton-Watson i Jugoslaveni*, Zagreb—London, 1976, vol. 2, 206; Orme Sargent wrote in the Dictionary of National Biography after Henderson's death:

> He had no preconceived dislike of authoritarian government as such, and was therefore ready to believe that Great Britain and Germany could be reconciled even if this meant tacit acquiescence by Britain in the adoption by Germany of the Nazi philosophy of life and system of government as well as the aggrandisement of Germany in Central Europe.

[11] 1931 Annual Report, F. O. 371, 15994, C. 10966.

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Henderson's views on Balkan unity might also have caused alarm to the Greeks. He looked forward to the day when Yugoslavia would have 'outlets on three seas — the Adriatic, the Aegean and the Black Seas'. The economic potential of the new state ('particularly once Bulgaria, after a generation or so... decided to throw in her lot with the other Yugoslav races') would be scarcely, if at all, inferior to Romania, or even Poland. Although regular consultation between all the Balkan states might be desirable, the attitude of the non-Slav peoples was less important.

> The only Balkan union which can ever be truly effective is the unity of the South Slav races, and once that is accomplished there is little more to be said. It is, moreover, likely to be the only means by which a Russian occupation of Constantinople can ultimately be prevented. In his regard Yugoslav unity should be recognised as definite object of purely British policy.[12]

This bright future was by no means secure. Yugoslavia, Henderson complained, was more than ever 'a satellite of the French planet':

> Some restlessness is felt here at this excessive dependence on France... it is recognised in many quarters that the financial pressure which France can and does exert is too often applied for political and other purposes which are in themselves little beneficial to purely Yugoslav interests... So long as the Italian menace endures, and so long as France remains the only country to which Yugoslavia can turn for financial assistance, this state of affairs is likely to continue.[13]

Henderson's fear was that Yugoslav 'dependence' on France could lead to conflict with Germany. That summer, to his great alarm, the Yugoslav Foreign Minister, Vojislav Marinković, had given 'the full support of his Government to his ally (Czechoslovakia —P.H.) of the *Petite Entente* and to France' when they objected to the Austro-German proposals for a customs union, and 'the controlled press had vigorously condemned the proposals and applauded their ultimate abandonment'.

[12] *Ibid*, Early South Slav nationalists, and also Mazzini, had looked forward to the unification of the Bulgars with the other South Slav nations, but these hopes were buried by the creation of a separate Bulgarian state in 1878, and the Serbo-Bulgarian wars of 1885 and 1913. The Croat leader, Stjepan Radić, advocated a Confederal state of Bulgars, Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in the early 1920's. Stojadinović, of whom more later, may have had certain ambitions to create such a union, and Stalin is believed to have toyed with the idea of a 'Balkan Federation', including also Albania, after the Second World War.

[13] *Ibid*.

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Fortunately, however, Yugoslavia sought no guarrel with Germany:

> There is a considerable body of opinion here which is inclined to regard the *Anschluss* as calculated in the long run to benefit rather than to prejudice Yugoslavia, both politically and economically. The King himself is inclined to hold this view. It is true that M. Marinkovitch asserts his belief in the possibility of a future reincarnation of the German "Drang nach Osten", but there is little general apprehension here of its likelihood. Yugoslavia is beginning to feel more confidence in her own strength. And, on the other hand, a German *bloc*, comprising Austria and stretching out towards Trieste, would have the obvious advantage of providing a check on Italian ambitions, and as definitely beneficial from a Yugoslav trade point of view.[14]

Henderson's sympathy for Germany and hostility to France were extreme, but his negative view of the French alliance system met with few objections in the Foreign Office. Indeed, the divergence of Anglo-French interests was particularly acute over the precise role of Yugoslavia in preserving the balance of power. Less immediately concerned with the balance of power in central Europe, the British feared that Yugoslav commitments to Czechoslovakia and France would merely increase the risk that central European conflicts would spread to the Balkans and thus endanger British Imperial interests in the eastern Mediterranean. In so far as the British attached any importance to Yugoslavia, they saw her role as being to resist the encroachment of any other Great Power into the Balkans. Yugoslavia should therefore avoid 'unnecessary' and 'impractical' commitments to France and Czechoslovakia, and concentrate on improving relations with her immediate neighbours. Thus strengthened, Yugoslavia might actually be in a better position to provide real help to her old allies if the need arose. But even if war could not be prevented, it should at least be diverted away from areas where vital British interests were at stake.

Partly because of this conflict of Anglo-French interests, partly because the British were not greatly concerned by developments in Yugoslavia until at least 1933, Henderson's reports escaped closer scrutiny, and were often highly praised for their clarity and comprehensiveness. But Henderson went much further in his efforts to 'loosen the ties' between France and Yugoslavia than the Foreign Office could ever have imagined or applauded. He rarely missed an opportunity to criticise France and Czechoslovakia for their 'selfishness' in political and economic matters

[14] *Ibid.*

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or to gloat over the signs that King Alexander was coming to share his view that Yugoslavia's interests were ill-served by the alliances with those countries. He had also already acquired the habit of pursuing his own ideas with little regard to the views of his superiors, as often as not without keeping them fully informed.

British efforts to promote Italo—Yugoslav reconciliation, 1930—1932

Convinced that Yugoslavia's 'excessive dependence' on France resulted from the need for protection against Italy and the fact that France was the only country to which Yugoslavia could turn for financial assistance, Henderson was already making determined efforts to reduce these problems. Throughout 1930 he struggled to secure British financial backing for Yugoslavia and to silence the damaging criticism of the Royal dictatorship which was making his task more difficult. In a letter to Seton-Watson, he frankly admitted his reasons. Should they fail to get money from Britain, he wrote, the Yugoslavs would be forced to turn to France with perhaps 'incalculable political results'. Seton-Watson was appalled. He thought the idea of playing the France and Britain against each other 'thoroughly unsound. French and British interests in Yugoslavia are really identical, though Paris does not seem to see it always, nor London either.' By the end of the year the British loan had fallen through.[15]

The fundamental problem was the Yugoslav fear of Italy and, to a lesser extent, of Bularia. In Henderson's remarkably prejudiced view, the Italian menace was the major cause of Yugoslavia's reliance on France for financial as well as for diplomatic support:

> But were that danger eliminated, the Yugoslav government might be less inclined to pay its insurance premium to France, or to expend unnecessarily large amounts of money on the organisation of an army which is merely destined, in the view of France, to uphold as long as possible the political system which she has created in Europe principally for her own security and to be employed, if necessity arise, against Germany.[16]

'Italy,' Henderson insisted in his 1930 report 'remains the one really difficult and dangerous problem. Its solution would constitute the only real insurance policy for peace and stability

[15] Seton-Watson to M. Curcin, 21 November 1930. Seton-Watson's correspondence with Henderson and Curcin is in, *R. W. Seton-Watson i Jugoslaveni*, vol. 2, 200—213.

[16] 1931 Annual Report.

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in Central and South-Eastern Europe.' Encouraging signs of an improvement in relations between Yugoslavia and Italy had come to nought. Grandi and Marinkovic had talks in Geneva in May and again in September, but relations had been soured by the trial and subsequent execution of four Yugoslav terrorists in Trieste. The electoral advances of the Nazis and the Heimwehr had exacerbated Yugoslav fears that Germany and Austria would move closer to Italy, and the betrothal of the Bulgarian King Boris to an Italian princess was seen in Belgrade as 'a purely political marriage and was firmly believed to have been accompanied by a secret military agreement'. But 'the two chief obstacles in the way of an Italo—Yugoslav settlement' were Italian influence in Albania and Yugoslav relaince on France:

> Yugoslavia is forced to cling to her French alliance by fear of Italian aggression. Albania submits to a form of Italian protectorate out of fear of Yugoslav aggression or interference in her internal affairs. Italy's hostility to Yugoslavia is exacerbatd by the latter's dependence on France and by her belief that she is a mere French satellite who would attack her in the back if she found herself involved with her Latin sister.[17]

In this respect Henderson thought that 1931 could be 'a good year', because both the Pact of Tirana (between Italy and Albania) and the Franco—Yugoslav Treaty would come up for renewal during 1932. The most satisfactory arrangement for the Yugoslavs would be a tripartite agreement between Italy, France and Yugoslavia, but Henderson did not believe that this suited French purposes. Since fear of Italy made Yugoslavia 'a mere pawn in a French arrangement of Europe', France could be counted upon to do her utmost to prevent a rapprochement between Yugoslavia and Italy.

The Foreign Office was equally intent on a rapprochement between Italy and Yugoslavia. Henderson appealed to Vansittart to ask the British Ambassador in Rome 'to do a little honest brokerage in the matter'. Graham duly asked Grandi what Italy wanted from Yugoslavia:

> I had heard that they insisted that there could be no Italo—Yugoslav friendship unless the Yugoslavs abandoned their friendship for France. This seemed to me a great deal to ask, in fact too much. Grandi replied that Mussolini did, indeed, insist on this; but he was not himself in agreement. He thought with me that this was too much to ask.[18]

[17] 1930 Annual Report, F. O. 371, 15273, C. 1538.

[18] Henderson to Vansittart, 20 November 1930; Graham to Vansittart, 8 December 1930, F. O. 371, 14440, C. 8647, C. 9005.

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In September 1932, possibly on British advice, Alexander resorted to direct negotiations with Mussolini. The initiative failed and Henderson lost much of his former credit with the King.[19] Italo—Yugoslav relations were further soured by a series of unpleasant incidents. By December Mussolini was again rattling the sabre. Referring to what he called 'acts of barbarism perpetrated in Dalmatia against works of art which bore the mark of Italian civilisation and genius', he accused the Yugoslavs of attempting to use foreign diversions to create cohesion at home where none existed.[20]

Yet Mussolini himself was doing all in his power to exacerbate Yugoslavia's internal problems. Alexander told Henderson that he could only explain the break-down of negotiations on the ground that 'Mussolini had been persuaded to believe in the imminent possible collapse of Yugoslavia'. Italy had been financing the Croat Ustasha separatist organization since its formation in 1930 and a group of Ustasha had chosen that very moment to launch an armed raid into Yugoslavia (the so-called 'Lika rebellion'). Italy was also giving aid to Macedonian separatists of the older Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. Compared to this, Henderson pointed out, the Dalmatian incidents were a minor irritation. To Henderson, Italy's policy towards Yugoslavia was 'a sterile policy', and it was also based on a miscalculation of the strength of the Yugoslav state. 'Yugoslavism,' he wrote, 'existed before 1918 — especially in that part of the country (Croatia — P.H.) which is most vocal in its discontent'.[21]

The Foreign Office, however, was too obsessed with the idea of a Franco—Italian rapprochement to worry much about Yugoslavia. Hearing that the Franco—Yugoslav Friendship Treaty had been renewed for another five years, Orme Sargent hoped at least that the official announcement of its extension would be delayed. There was nothing unusual about the renewal of the treaty, but this was 'hardly the best moment to announce it to the world':

> Mussolini has just said, when pressed to respond to Herriot's blandishments, that he wants "deeds not words". Well, it looks as though the first deed will be the renewal of a treaty which Mussolini has always declared to be directed against Italy. In fact Mussolini decribed it when it was first signed as a "pistol aimed at the heart of Italy".[22]

[19] 'He has discussed foreign affairs with me less freely than he did before and by a natural reaction more freely with the French Minister... As a result of Mussolini's rebuff Yugoslavia is again entirely reliant on France...', Henderson to Vansittart, 9 April 1934, F. O. 371, 18453, R. 2295.

[20] "The Times", 15 December 1932.

[21] Henderson to Simon, 19 December 1932, F. O. 371, 15994, C. 10898

[22] Sargent to Seymour, 8 December 1932, F. O. 371, 15994, C. 10208.

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Britain and the rise of German influence in Yugoslavia, 1933—1935

During 1933, the year of Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of Germany, British influence in Yugoslavia was at a low ebb. Spurred on by the menacing developments in Germany, the Foreign Office pushed harder than ever for rapprochement with Italy, but the Yugoslavs felt that, even were such a rapprochement to be arranged, they could place little faith in Mussolini's word. If forced to choose between the Great Powers, they could choose only between France and Germany. And if France followed the British lead in relation to Italy, then there would be no choice at all.

It was a bad time to be out of touch. Under heavy pressure from Italy, Hungary, and, potentially, from Bulgaria, King Alexander had no intention of adding to Yugoslavia's problems by incurring the enmity of a powerful and bitterly revisionist Germany for the sake of his French and Czech allies. In February 1933 the bilateral treaties between the Little *Entente* states were consolidated by a general agreement providing for regular mutual consultation. But the response of the Western Powers was worse than disappointing. In a desperate effort to save the disarmament conference, Britain suggested the Four Power Pact. Mussolini made more concrete proposals. France weakly accepted an agreement which completely ignored the interests of her eastern allies.

By April the Yugoslavs were in full retreat. Approaches were made to Hungary with a view to exploring Italian ideas of "a second line" of defence against Germany (Rome—Belgrade—Budapest). Even this was merely to see how far Budapest was already working with Berlin. (The Yugoslavs did not trust Mussolini.) Fearing that Germany would cooperate with Italy and Hungary to destroy the Little *Entente,* King Alexander was already seeking to extricate Yugoslavia from Great Power conflicts and turning his attention to the Balkans. He visited Germany in August to assure Hitler that Yugsolavia would have nothing to do with any anti-German alliance. On his return he told the French Minister that Germany was preparing to make peace with Poland and move against Austria. The worst was to be feared, but he did not think that the Little *Entente* could oppose the *Anschluss.* That would merely drive Germany towards Italy.[23] By the end of the year Yugoslavia, Rumania, Greece and Turkey had signed various bilateral agreements which were consolidated in February 1934 by the creation of the Balkan Pact. This "Balkan *Entente*" was widely seen as a complement to the Little *Entente,* as a new antirevisionist alliance directed against Bulgaria, but the year had also seen a significant improvement in relations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Taken together these developments marked the

[23] V. Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Mađarska, 1933—1941,* Beograd 1976, 22.

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first stage in the mellowing of Yugoslavia's hitherto rigid opposition to all revisionism and the disengagement of Yugoslavia and Rumania from Czechoslovakia.

In December 1933 Henderson reported that Yugoslavia might be preparing to turn towards Germany. "Many influential people" had nothing against the *Anschluss* and the King was "an enhtusiastic Hitlerite".[24] But Henderson himself was remarkably unconcerned by this possibility. He thought that Yugoslavia had made great progress in external affairs during 1933, for she had "broken the ring which her own and Italian policy had drawn around her":

> The reorganisation of the Little *Entente,* the Balkan bilateral pacts and the rapprochement with Bulgaria have completely modified for the better her political position. Though M. Benes and M. Titulescu by their personalities attract the eye and the attention of Europe to their countries and enhance their importance on that account, Yugoslavia in 1933 emerges as the leading Power in the Balkans, if not potentially the most solid factor in the *Entente.* It is, for instance, no longer the tension between her and Italy which is the most urgent problem facing the diplomacy of the *Entente;* the more immediate danger today is Czechoslovakia and Germany.[25]

Despite this optimistic assessment, it is not difficult to detect a note of criticism of the policies of Benes and Titulescu. In truth, Henderson had little regard for the Little *Entente,* except in so far as it might enable the member states to place less reliance on France:

> It has one obviously good point, namely that, in the event of any one of the three component parts contemplating rash action, the two others will certainly act as a brake on the third. (But) can the Little *Entente* as thus constituted long survive the growing divergence of the international or even economical interests of its members? What is the real stability of its component parts? What is its true effectiveness in view of its lack of geographical identity? Is an economic *Entente* also possible? How can the whole be regarded as an independent unit in view of the previous position of its members as satellites of the French planet?[26]

Henderson's enthusiasm for the Balkan bilateral treaties and the partial rapprochement with Bulgaria was less ambiguous. Like the Little *Entente,* he wrote, the bilateral treaties were intended

[24] Henderson to Simon, 23 December 1933, F. O. 371, 18452.
[25] 1933 Annual Report, F. O. 371, 18455, R. 488.
[26] Ibid.

http://www.balcanica.rs

to promote peace and the maintenance of the territorial *status quo*, but they had a further implication: that the Balkans should be for the Balkan States alone. They amounted to the creation of a "Balkan Union" and went as far as was possible at that time towards "outlawing war in that other cockpit of Europe, the Balkans". "The complete Balkan Locarno" could not yet be attained, partly because of Italian influence in Albania, and partly because Bulgaria was not yet ready to renounce her revisionist aspirations, nor Yugoslavia "to be the first to remove a brick of the revision wall". Henderson was nevertheless hopeful that the improvement in Yugsolav-Bulgarian relations would continue.

The only real threat to peace in the Balkans could come from outside, more particularly from Italy, Germany and the Soviet Union. Temporarily at least, Henderson ruled out any danger from the Soviet Union, which was too preoccupied with its own affairs. Nor, however, did he take the German danger all that seriously. He explained at length why the existing Yugoslav regime might turn to Germany for protection against Italy without once suggesting that the cure might be worse than the illness — if indeed it were a cure at all:

> While there is apprehension here at the prospect of having Germany as a second big neighbour... recent events in Germany have been viewed here with no little sympathy. Hitler, for obvious reasons, is popular in the highest circles. The *Anschluss* itself is regarded with mixed feelings, and in many quarters would actually be welcomed. It is assumed... that the menace of Germany would first be felt by Italy as regards Trieste, rather than by Yugoslavia. Consquently, an appreciation in this country of Germany's possible value as a counterpoise to Italian intrigues and interference in the Balkans is beginning to gain ground. Germany is not bound, as England and France are, by the decision of the Ambassadors' Conference of 1921 respecting Albania. She might well prove a more useful and willing friend than the two Western Powers. And it must never be forgotten that Albania is just as much the supremely vital question for Yugoslavia as the Low Countries were for many years for England. She must always be definitely and irreconcilably hostile to any outside Power which seeks to exercise political influence in the Balkans, where lies her own future. To-day that power is Italy — via Albania.[27]

Still more astonishing was Henderson's sanguine assessment of the likely consequences of the "marked advance towards a closer understanding between Yugoslavia and Germany", which, it seemed to him, only French and Czech influence could avert·

[27] Ibid.

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> If it takes place it will extend to economic as well as political questions. British trade may suffer somewhat in consequence, but the great loser... will be Italy... For this she will have none but herself to blame.[28]

Henderson was not totally oblivious of the dangers inherent in German expansion, but, like his Foreign Office superiors, he still thought the problem should be solved by Italo-Yugoslav rapprochement rather than direct British involvement. Unfortunately, whereas it now seemed to him that Italy had at last recognized the need for Yugoslav friendship, the Yugoslavs no longer desired Italian friendship. Yugoslavia's position in the Balkans was stronger than before. She also saw "in a revolutionised Germany the possibility of acquiring a more trustworthy and less immediately dangerous friend than Italian foreign policy makes it possible that Italy would ever be". Finally, King Alexander was still "hot with resentment" over Mussolini's rebuff of the previous autumn.

Henderson had not given up hope that Alexander's attitude would change, and had already sketched an ambitious plan for rapprochement between Yugoslavia, Italy and Hungary. Italy must recognize that her ambitions in Albania were a threat to the integrity of the Balkans and also return Fiume (Rijeka) to Yugoslavia. Hungary should receive a free zone there and a railway connexion through Croatia. Fiume, Henderson believed, was "the link between Italy, Yugoslava and Hungary, which, if the former could see it and be wise enough to take advantage of it, might unit the three countries in a common opposition to excessive German expansion".[29]

Drummond, the British Ambassador in Rome, curtly rejected the proposal that Italy should give up Fiume without compensation, and also Henderson's view that Italian interests in Albania were a threat to Balkan security. Nor could he agree that Mussolini's hostility to the Franco-Yugoslav alliance was entirely ill-founded.[30]

Vansittart asked Henderson to take the German problem more seriously and suggested that the blame for bad relations between Italy and Yugoslavia should be shared more equally. Henderson replied that he fully recognized the German danger and had been the first to see it. He had latterly refrained from pressing for reconciliation with Italy after a heated argument with the King in January, only because it was useless to waste breath. He would do all he could to this end, but admitted that the chances were slim. Two years earlier Yugoslavia would

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Drummond to O'Maley, 3 February 1934, F. O. 371, 18452, R. 780.

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have been willing to make an agreement with Italy alone, but the only chance now was for an Italo-Franco-Yugoslav agreement, and the French Minister, Naggyar, doubted that the Yugoslavs would want even that. Henderson thought it might still be possible, especially if the British government gave support, but emphasized that Yugoslavia would never trust Italy by herself. He rejected Vansittart's view that the blame for bad relations could be shared equally. Yugoslavia "shared in the stupidities", but the major blame belonged to Italy. Italy had "never appreciated that it was in her long-term interest to have a strong Yugoslavia". Her obvious policy had been and was the disruption of Yugoslavia.[31]

Vansittart put the idea of a tripartite agreement to the Italian under-secretary of state for foreign affairs, Suvich, then on a visit to London. Suvich was evasive and referred to the fact that "internal conditions in Yugoslavia were very uncertain". Vansittart asked, Corbin, the French Ambassador if fear of German influence in Yugoslavia might make Italy less apt to reject "the very reasonable French offer of a tripartite agreement which we have for years believed to be the right solution". To his surprise, "the same idea was on Corbin's mind and he suggested that France might easily renew the rejected offer".[32] But in the meantime Henderson had spoken to the Yugoslav Foreign Minister, Jevtic, and been told that Yugoslavia would not join such an agreement if it were directed against Germany. Yugsolavia wanted to maintain complete freedom of action *vis* a *vis* all the greater Powers. All of which, Henderson admitted, tended to indicate something in the nature of at least much more intimate relations with Germany than heretofore.[33]

Whether as a result of Vansittart's promptings or of King Alexander's increasingly frank admissions, Henderson was at last waking up to the reality of German influence in Yugoslavia. He suddenly found himself in full agreement with his French colleague as to the dangers of Yugoslavia's "flirt" with Germany. Nothing was likely to happen yet. Temporarily, the French alliance and the Little *Entente* were "an insuperable obstacle ... but circumstances alter rapidly sometimes and there is no doubt in my mind that Yugoslavia is preparing to reinsure with Germany".[34]

The possibility that Yugoslavia would take out "reinsurance" with the worst enemies of her current insurers had risen sharply after the conclusion of the "Rome Protocols" between Italy and her Austrian and Hungarian clients. Henderson had hoped that the negotiations between these countries would merely confirm their existing economic cooperation, or even mark the start of

[31] Henderson to Vansittart, 9 April 1934, F. O. 371, 18453, R. 2295.
[32] Vansittart's memorandum, 25 April 1934, F. O. 371, 18453, R. 2496.
[33] Henderson to Simon, 26 April 1934, F. 371, 18456, R. 1828.
[34] Henderson to Vansittart, 9 April 1934.

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closer economic cooperation throughout the region. He now feared that they would give Yugoslavia the impression of a rival central European bloc to the Little *Entente* and encourage her to draw closer to Germany. He told the King that he would regard any alliance with Germany as "a deplorably bad thing for the whole of Europe". Alexander had not disagreed, but had admitted that Mussolini's constant intrigues might force him to seek German friendship. He assured Henderson that he would go very slowly. "He wanted to keep out of all entanglements whatsoever and leave his hands free in all directions." Henderson believed that Alexander "realised the danger of yielding to German blandishments", and that Yugoslav government would pursue for the moment a "wait and see policy."[35]

But the Yugoslav government had already seen and waited enough. Two weeks later Yugoslavia signed a trade agreement with Germany which provided for outstanding balances to be reduced by clearing rather than payment in hard currency — a method used by the Third Reich to reduce several south-east European countries to a state of complete economic dependency. Other details reaching the Foreign Office confirmed that Yugoslavia was "turning her flirtation with Germany to profit". Jevtic told Henderson that Yugoslavia had not made political concessions. King Alexander was more open. He admitted his belief that Germany would dominate central Europe. He could fight Italy, but not Germany, and he therefore needed German friendship. Hitler offered integrity and stability. Mussolini would destroy Yugoslavia.[36]

In vain the British pleaded with Italy to make an agreement with Yugoslavia before Germany did. Yugoslav fears reached fever pitch after Mussolini's successful intervention in Austrian affairs that summer and there were border incidents in the following months. The Yugoslavs were also alarmed by the French policy of attempting to bring them into an anti-German alliance with Italy and the Soviet Union. While it was reasonable to suppose that France might buy Italian friendship at Yugoslav expense, King Alexander remained bitterly hostile to the Soviet Union — to which Yugoslavia had still not granted official recognition — and was not totally unsympathetic to the view that Hitler had saved Germany and Europe from communism. Alexander and Jevtic did not hide their view that the *Anschluss* would be infinitely preferable to Italian control of Austria. In October 1934 Alexander visited France in the hope of persuading his ally to make peace with Germany. Germany would then be in a better position to deal with the Soviet Union, while France and Yugoslavia kept Italy under control. Within minutes of his arrival in Marseilles

[35] Ibid.

[36] Henderson to Simon, 6 May 1934, F. O. 371, 18453.

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he was assassinated. The French Foreign Minister, Louis Barthou, was also killed.[37]

Sections of the Italian press justified the assassination by reference to the resentment of the Croats and others of the commonly alleged Serb domination of the Yugoslav state, and it soon transpired that the assassin, though a Macedonian, was one of a group of mainly Croat terrorists who had been trained in a secret camp in Hungary. In Belgrade, there were serious rumours of a war with Italy. British diplomacy worked tirelessly to halt the press war between the three countries concerned. The Yugoslavs could not be dissuaded from making a formal complaint to the League of Nations, but all mention of Italy was omitted. The final resolution was vague enough to be acceptable to even the Hungarian representative.[38]

The Foreign Office still believed in the possiblity of Italo-Yugoslav rapprochment and Vansittart was becoming increasingly irritated by Henderson's unconcealed sympathy for the Yugoslav of Italy. He took strong exception to the letter which Henderson, on his own initiative, had recently addressed to the newly installed Prince-Regent Paul. Henderson explained that te invariably advanced the view of Vansittart and Drummond in conversations, but gave the Yugoslav view in his reports:

> It distresses me that you, as I gather you do, should even imagine that I take any other line with the Yugoslavs. I can assure you that the words which you say "convey beyond all reasonable doubt that H.M.G. are convinced that Italy has pursued and is pursuing a discruptive policy towards Yugoslavia, etc..." certainly did *not* convey that view to Prince Paul. His complaint to me always is that H.M.G. and incidentally myself fail to be convinced that this is Italy's policy.[39]

Still pursuing the fruitless search for accommodation with Italy, Britain continued to ignore all the signs of Italy's hostile intentions towards Yugoslavia. They were joined in this by Barthou's successor, Pierre Laval, who was willing to go to even greater lengths to win Italian support against Germany. With both Western Powers demonstrating indecent haste in their efforts to brush the assassination quietly under the carpet, Germany

[37] D. Lukač, *Treći Rajh i zemlje jugoistočne Evrope, 1933—1936*, Beograd, 1982, 209—211; The Soviet historian, V. Volkov, *Atentat Kralja Aleksandra, Hitlerova zavera*, Beograd 1983, argues that the assassination was planned in Berlin. Germany, as the British had always argued, was certainly gained most from Italo—Yugoslav conflict.

[38] V. Vinaver (1976), 83—90.

[39] Henderson to Vansittart, 4 February 1935, and also Henderson to Simon, 7 February 1935, F. O. 371, 19576, R. 860, R. 850.

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would thus encounter few difficulties as it made a determined play for Yugoslav friendship. It seemed indeed that the Yugoslavs had no one but Germany to turn to for protection.

As Henderson had repeatedly warned, Italy was driving Yugoslavia "into the arms of Germany". Failure to recognize this fact could only hasten the result, but it was hard to take Henderson's warnings seriously when he himself showed so little concern for the "German problem". Nor could his habitual exaggeration of the attraction of Germany to the Yugoslavs evoke the sympathy of a Germanophobe like Vansittart. To understand the Vansittart's mistrust one need look no further than the review of Yugoslav foreign policy which Henderson had written shortly after King Alexander's assassination. The eccentricity of his views on Germany and many other matters was more pronounced than ever. He argued that Yugoslavia's only permanent interest was to resist Great Power interference in the Balkans. The first essential was rapprochement with the kindred Bulgarians. Bulgaria had to be to Yugoslavia "what Austria was to Germany before 1918." The "Balkan League", since it had still to be completed by the addition of Bulgaria and Albania, was now only the second plank of that policy. The third plank, the Little *Entente*, would "probably survive as long as this menace (revisionism) endures". He saw little reason for change, especially with respect to Romania since Romania was a member of the Balkan Pact, although the situation with Czechoslovakia was "more delicate":

> Future events in Germany may be too strong for Yugoslavia in this respect, just as they may be as regards Austria. Yugoslavia's best interests require the preservation of both Austrian and Czechoslovakian independence. Yet their loss constitutes, except from the long point of view, no insuperable danger to the principle of "The Balkans for the Balkan peoples".[40]

Henderson suggested that Yugoslav foreign policy might take a still sharper turn in the near future. In the eyes of the late King, he explained, the French alliance and the Little *Entente* had been 'temporary measures' to meet the Italian threat. They would be necessary until Yugoslavia 'put her relations with Italy and Germany on a more definite footing'. While Italian policy remained overtly aggressive, Germany', if her advances were 'somewhat heavily obvious ... offered reinsurance against Italy'. Yugoslavia wanted to pursue an independent policy and was therefore unlikely to seek a binding alliance with Germany. Discussing the possibility of an Italo-Yugoslav rapprochement, Henderson cast the usual doubts on French willingness to coun-

[40] Henderson to Simon, 1 November 1934, F. O. 371, 18457, R. 6368.

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tenance such a deal, but insisted that the French alliance would not stop Yugoslavia from concluding a treaty with Italy. 'Nor would the latter prevent her from making another with Germany, or, finally, a fourth wiht Russia.' He did not hide his sympathy for this attitude. The French connexion, he maintained, 'would have a higher value in the eyes of the Yugoslavs if it were looser... Once France had recovered from the shock of seeing one of her worshippers paying attention to the shrine of some other Great Power'.[41]

The realignment of Yugoslav foreign policy, 1935—1937

The assassination led indirectly to a sudden increase of British influence in Yugoslavia. Of the threre Regents who were to exercise for the next seven years the extensive powers bequeathed by Alexander, only the strongly Anglophile Prince Paul would really matter. The oportunity was squandered. While Britain and France failed to halt Italian aggression or the rise of German power, British advice amounted to little more than telling the Yugoslavs to adopt a policy of wisdom rather than valour. In such circumstances this was not difficult advice to follow. Problems would only arise if Britain changed her tune or came into serious conflict with Germany. Then it would be seen that Paul's love of Britain was less important than his disregard for France and his fear of Germany and Italy. Personally weak, morbidly anti-communist, and, despite liberal professions, no democrat, Prince Paul was not to prove an entirely reliable friend. But Britains's failure to provide leadership to those who were more than willing to follow helped to place him and his country in an almost impossible predicament.

The writing was already on the wall. Paul rejected advice to seek a reconciliation with Italy. He was, Henderson reported, not averse to the idea of an agreement with Germany, though only as a last resort. The Yugoslavs would not enter into any multilateral agreements which did not include Germany. They had no desire to combine with Germany against any other group. German revisionism was directly apposed to Yugoslavias anti-revisionist interests and the Yugoslavs wished to avoid all Great Power entanglements. But the possibility of an agreement with Germany could not be ruled out. It would be enhanced if Italy waited too long, or if the Yugoslavs really lost faith in the efficacy of French support, or if matters were postponed until Germany had definitely recovered her military strength.[42]

Every aspect of this grim prophecy was speedily fulfilled. The British response was, again, woefully inadequate. Following

[41] Ibid.

[42] Henderson to Simon, 21 February 1935, F. O. 371, 19576, R. 1093.

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Germany's overwhelming victory in the Saar plebiscite, Hitler announced the introduction of conscription. Britain and France could do no better than seek Italian support. But scarcely had these three formed the 'Stresa Front' than Sir John Simon went to Germany to reassure Hitler of British good will. The Anglo-German naval agreement of 1 June gave official blessing to German rearmament in one area, but implicitly in all others. The return of the German army to the Rhineland in March 1936 finally overthrew the fragile balance of power by effectively curtailing any ability the French might have had to provide effective assistance to their eastern allies. Once again Britain did not react. France had already begun to give up to the struggle.

In relations with Italy the Western Powers excelled even this high standard of weakness and inconsistency. Having gone to extreme lengths to secure Mussolini's support, they proceeded to estrange him for all time by imposing economic sanctions against Italy in The League of Nations during the Abyssinian crisis. The Yugoslavs loyally supported the League action, but received little response from Britain and France to their appeals to make good some of the losses to Yugoslav trade. Germany stepped in to acquire complete dominance over Yugoslav external trade. In July 1936, to the intense fury of the Yugoslavs, the Western Powers insisted on bringing sanctions to a hasty and undignified end.

While France, even more than Britain, was leaving no stone unturned in her bid for Italian friendship, Germany deliberately wooed the Yugoslav regime. After the assassination, frightened that Germany's success in Yugoslavia would pose a far more potent threat to Italian influence and ambitions in the Danubian region than France had ever done, Mussolini changed tack and sought French support. Various projects for a 'Danubian Pact' were mooted during the early months of 1935, but met with little response in Belgrade.[43] In June Prince Paul replaced Jevtic, who had recently added the Presidency to his portfolio of Foreign Affairs, with Milan Stojadinovic, whose pro-German sympathies were notorious, indeed almost unique among leading Yugoslav politicians. Stojadinović soon made his position clear to the new British Minister, Sir Ronald Campbell. (After playing a major role in Stojadinovic's appointment Henderson had departed for Buenos Aires in July.)[44] Yugoslavia, he said, needed peace for

[43] Mussolini was especially concerned that his forthcoming Abyssinian adventure would create an opportunity for Germany, but lost interest in Yugoslavia after Stresa, V. Vinaver (1976), 102—8.

[44] Henderson did not mention his part in the appointment of Stojadinović in his communications to Hoare, 24 June 1935, and Vansittart, also 24 June, F. O. 371, 1975, R. 4023, R. 4220. In his memoirs, *Water Under the Bridges* Hamish Hamilton 1941, 172, he claimed credit for much of Stojadinović's later success and suggested that the latter would not have

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internal consolidation. While he welcomed the idea of a Danubian Pact, he insisted that nothing should interfere with Yugoslavia's determination to oppose a Habsburg restoration. Nor would Yugoslavia risk incurring German resentment by entering any combination to which Germany was not herself a party[45]

The implication that Yugoslavia would, far from opposing Germany, actually welcome the *Anschluss*, was clear enough. Campbell soon encountered other problems. Immensely as he trusted and even admired Paul he could not ignore the one alarming flaw in the Prince Regent's otherwise impeccable character, his 'anti-communist mania'. Paul refused even to consider recognition of the Soviet Union and relations with Yugoslavia's old allies, France and Czechoslovakia, sharply deteriorated as a result of their treaties with the Soviet Union and the formation of the Popular Front government in France. Paul equated the Popular Front with communism and was receptive to Nazi propaganda which depicted Czechoslovakia as the advance guard of the Soviet Union in central Europe.[46]

In August 1936 J. Balfour reported that official circles in Belgrade generally welcomed the prospect of an *Anschluss*. Although there were some fears, particularly among army leaders, that Germany could cooperate with Italy, others expected that the *Anschluss* would revive their rivalry. At all events, the Yugoslavs were convinced that they could no longer rely on the system which had hitherto guaranteed their security. Prince Paul was bitter at the League capitulation to Italy and criticised British policy from the Hoare-Laval Pact onwards as characterised by weakness and divided counsels. There was little confidence in France. Prince Paul was deeply critical of Benes and Titulescu, especially of any tendency on their part to work with the Soviet Union, and it was suggested that the Little *Entente* would no longer be necessary once Germany had eliminated the danger of a Habsburg restoration. Balfour thought that Yugoslavia was 'beginning to fend for herself in an uncertain world and at odds with her old friends' but doubted that she would 'throw herself into the arms of the German bridegroom'. Yugoslavia did not want 'to repeat the past'. Also, unlike France, Germany was a potential neighbour with revisionist ambitions

gone off the rails if he had remained in Belgrade. M. Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt*, Buenos Aires 1963, 296—297, 330—331, fully acknowledged the part played by Henderson, and also by the German Minister Heeren and Reichsmarshall Goering. It was widely believed that Prince Paul was completely under Henderson's influence, I. Stojkov, *Vlada Milana Stojadinovića*, Beograd 1986, 36—38.

[45] Campbell to Hoare, 22 August 1935, F. O. 371, 19580, R. 5178.

[46] 1935 Annual Report, F. O. 371, 19576, R. 6197, paragraph 10. This was to prove Paul's over-riding obsession, Campbell to Edin, 20 November 1936, F. O. 371, 20436, R. 7105; 8 November 1937, F. O. 371, 21197, R. 7514; 31 January 1938, F. O. 371, 22476, R. 960, etc.... etc....

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which conflicted with Yugoslavia's interest in preserving the Balkans for the Balkan peoples. Prince Paul was pro-German. He considered the Nazi regime a bulwark against communism in Europe and thought it 'better to be dominated by Germany than overrun by Italy via Albania or left to the tender mercies of the Communists'. Stojadinovic was pro-German for economic reasons. But Yugoslavia feared all foreign entanglements and alliance with Germany would be only a last desperate resort for Prince Paul or Stojadinovic. It was unlikely therefore that there would be any departure from the role of passive spectator.[47]

Balfour concluded his report by emphasizing that British prestige had not suffered as much as French. The Yugoslavs respected Britain more than any other Power and looked to her 'for guidance in the troubled sea of international affairs'. In fact, Prince Paul had little confidence in Britain. In October he visited Hitelr to assure him that Yugoslavia would not oppose German aims in central Europe. As he told one confidant, he loved the British and hated the Germans, but he could not deliver fifteen million souls into certain catastrophe merely to please the friends. Britain was 'an empty gun'.[48]

It was no surprise when, that summer, Yugoslavia rejected Franco-Czech proposals for a mutual defence pact. In the Foreign Office there was some sympathy for Blum's courageous effort to repair the damage caused by Laval's pro-Italian policy, but no one was ready to waste breath trying to persuade Prince Paul to accept the French offer. Nor was it in line with British views. When Prince Paul came to London Eden 'gave the authorised French version', but remarked that Yugoslavia was in some respects in the same position as Great Britain. Britain was 'against the formation of blocs', and did not wish 'to uphold either ideology', but only 'to live in peace'. Paul heartily agreed and assured Eden that Britain need have no doubts as long as he was Regent.[49]

Blocs were nevertheless being formed and the question of ideology could no longer be ignored. That was the main reason for Paul's visit. Mussolini had announced the formaton of the Rome-Berlin Axis in October. But before allowing the *Anschluss* he needed an agreement with Yugoslavia. Additional pressure was to be brought to bear on Yugoslavia with the conclusion in January of the Anglo-Italian 'Gentlemen's Agreement' on the naval balance in the Mediterranean. Paul told Eden that it might be foolish to refuse Mussolini's advances and suggested that Yugoslavia might sign 'some non-aggression pact, or other harmless

[47] Balfour to Eden, 6 August 1936, F. O. 371, 20436, R. 4727.

[48] I. Meštrović, *Uspomene na političke ljude i događaje*, Rijeka 1970. 255.

[49] Eden to Campbell, 17 November 1936, F. O. 371, 20436, R. 6890.

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if ineffectual declaration' with Italy. He had no intention of making an alliance. He asked if Eden agreed. Eden told him of the British negotiations with Italy and agreed that it would be wrong to make an alliance. He was convinced that rivalry between Germany and Italy in central Europe was inevitable. They might both seek to divide the Little *Entente,* but Yugoslavia would be in a strong position as long as she did not join any party.

There was no question as to which party Prince would join if forced to choose. While admitting that British prestige had recovered somewhat since the Abyssinian crisis, he ranted and raved against France and Czechoslovakia, especially on account of their recent pacts with the Soviet Union, and did his bit for Anglo-German relations:

> Indeed, dislike of the Soviet Government and all its doings was perhaps the most oft repeated theme in Prince Paul's discourse. He regarded that country as the greatest danger at the present time... It was clear that Prince Paul would regard the weakening or even dismemberment of Russia, were such a thing possible, with equanimity, if not with enthusiasm... He was convinced that Hitler himself would not willingly embark on war, particularly in the west, because he realised that the only sequel to war would be communism, and the German Chancellor's loathing of communism was sincere. He had irrefutable evidence that Hitler had been disturbed by the danger of war between Italy and Great Britain, which was not consistent with the role which has often been attributed to Hitler in this country.[50]

Campbell, though still an admirer of Prince Paul and Stojanovic, was beginning to have doubts about both men. He warned that Stojadinovic was gaining increasing influence over Prince Paul and might already be the dominant partner in their relationship. At all events, Yugoslavia was moving towards the Axis and was now buying her arms from Germany. He cast doubt on the sincerity of Mussolini's advances and suggested that British and Italian Mediterranean interests were irreconcilable. He thought Mussolini's main aim was to detach Yugoslavia from Britain.

Orme Sargent considered that Campbell was unduly suspicious. In his view Mussolini sought merely to end a 'sterile quarrel' with Britain so as to consolidate his position in Abyssinia. He wanted to hold his position in central Europe, by cooperating with Germany, but without being completely overshadowed. His aim was to detach Yugoslavia from Germany rather than from Britain. 'I doubt this', added Vansittart, now fully recovered

[50] Ibid.

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from his former illusions concerning Italy, 'Italy and Germany are working together here.'[51]

So it proved. In the following months Yugoslavia signed friendship treaties with Bulgaria and Italy. The latter fell far short of the more extensive agreement which the Italians had sought, but still marked the abandonment of Yugoslavia's old system of security based on the French alliance, the Little and Balkan *Ententes* and the League of Nations. Stojadinovic confounded his critics by citing the 'Gentlemen's Agreement'.[52]

There were still a few loose ends to be tied up. Germany had actively encouraged the Italo-Yugoslav rapprochement, but Goering paid an impromptu visit to Prince Paul at the beginning of May to make absolutely sure that it would not prove an obstacle to the *Anschluss*. He returned satisfied, no doubt overjoyed by the impotent French and Czech protests his visit had provoked.[53]

Conclusion

Diplomacy is the art of reducing the number of possible enemies and increasing the number of reliable friends, but it should never be forgotten that 'a friend of all is a friend of none'. During the 1930's haunted by the fear of conflict with Germany, Italy and Japan, the British ignored the interests of their most reliable friends in a vain search for agreement with countries which showed little indication of a genuine desire for peace. The result in Europe was utterly disastrous. While Britain's future enemies grew stronger, countries which might have been willing to follow a strong Anglo-French lead were divided and demoralized.

British prestige would reach its nadir after 1937 when the Chamberlain government adopted a politicy of wholesale appeasement of Nazi Germany, but Chamberlain's policy was only the last act in a policy which had been characterized from the first by weakness and illusion. By 1937 Britain's failure to support France even in western Europe had enabled Germany tto break out of a position of military inferiority and diplomatic isolation to pursue her revisionist aspirations in the east from a position

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[51] Campbell to Eden, 20 November 1936, F. O. 371, 20436, R. 7105.

[52] The speeches by M. Stojadinović and the opposition spokesman, K Kumanudi tc the National Assembly, in the budget debate (The annual budget was virtually the only opportunity to discuss foreign policy presented to the unrepresentative and generally moribund parliament established by King Alexander in 1931 and denuded by Stojadinović of what little significance it ever had.), *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine, 1936—7*, II, 803—812.

[53] M. Stojadinović (1963), 494—5; Ž. Avramovski, *Velike sile i balkanske zemlje, 1935—1937*, Beograd 1968, 311.

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of strength. Nor was British weakness towards Germany the only problem. Those, like Vansittart, Sargent and Eden, who had fewer illusions about Nazi Germany and would later become famous as 'anti-appeasers', were all the more determined to enlist Italian support against Germany. To this end they ignored all the signs of Italian hostility towards Yugoslavia and pressed Yugoslavia to seek reconciliation with Italy. Nowhere was there any desire to confront both Germany and Italy, or to undertake far-reaching military commitments in any part of Europe.

In such circumstances there is little need to dwell on the subsequent course of Yugoslav foreign policy. As French power failed and Laval turned towards Italy, Yugoslavin found herself, as Stojadinovic put it, 'like a mouse betwen two cats' whose alliance might easily be cemented 'on the back' of Yugoslavia. There seemed then little alternative to Stojadinovic's policy of accomodation with the dictators. If Stojadinovic's own inclinations were increasingly open to question, the British provided to real alternative. Indeed, conscious of their own weakness and hoping to avoid giving the Yugoslavs any reason to move even further towards the Axis, the British supported a policy which might yet prevent war spreading to the Balkans.

British policy was not simply a retreat into a less than splendid isolation. Increasingly concerned by developments in Europe, the British sought to create a new balance of power which would contain Germany more effectively than the French system of alliances. This positive aspect of British policy can be seen especially clearly in the case of Yugoslavia because of the central role of that country in putative regional agreements such as the 'Balkan Locarno' or the 'Danubian Pact'. But there was never much chance of success. Tensions between the revisionist and anti-revisionist states were too great for it to be possible to create stable combinations between them. Germany threatened the interests of all, but it was difficult for Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria to abandon their own revisionist aspirations and virtually impossible for the smaller states of Europe to band together to defy Germany, still less Germany and Italy. Nor was it remotely realistic to expect that Germany would ever be satisfied by such an arrangement of Europe.

Desperate for peace, anxious above all that any stronger policy would bring them into conflict with both Germany and Italy, Britain and Yugoslavia followed remarkably similar courses during the 1930's. Even more than the British appeasers Stojadinovic could claim that his was the only realistic policy for a small country such as Yugoslavia. The problem was that Britain's desire for peace and Yugoslavia's search for neutrality were doomed to failure in a Europe which was becoming increasingly divided into two armed camps. On the eve of the Italian treaty

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Kosta Kumanudi summed up the futility of Stojadinovic's policy of 'making new friends while preserving the old'. His words have more than a passing relevance to British foreign policy:

> Perhaps such methods might be possible in some abstract, imaginary world, where there was neither rivalry, nor conflicting interests, nor agressive ambitions, especially where there was no chaos like that ruling in Europe today — with divisions into spheres of interest, revisionist activity, divisive alliances directed against each other, and the desire for revenge of those who, in losing the war, have lost territory and colonies... a Europe of Bolsheviks, of Hitler, of Mussolini and of left-wing Popular Fronts... a Europe which is democratic and reactionary. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is usually regarded as a great realist, but in this respect he seems to us to be too great an idealist.[54]

Britain struggled to heal the wounds by acting as arbiter or 'honest broker' between the two sides, but the only effect of British policy was to undermine the already fragile balance of power. By the end, having allowed the Axis to overrun Europe, Britain was left alone.

БРИТАНИЈА И ПИТАЊЕ ЈУГОСЛОВЕНСКЕ НЕУТРАЛНОСТИ, 1930—1937.

Резиме

Кроз цео међуратни период Британци су се старали да „смирују духове" у Европи путем споразума између ревизионистичких и анти-ревизионистичких сила, у првом реду између Немачке и Француске. Не правећи никакву разлику између победника и поражених из првог светског рата, нити између фашистичких и демократских режима, они никада нису изгубили наду у могућност њиховог помирења, одбијајући при томе да се укључе на било чију страну да би могли и даље да играју улогу поштеног арбитра.

Главна побуда ове политике био је страх да ће Енглеска пасти на ниво другоразредне светске силе у случају поновљеног рата против Немачке и евентуално против Италије и Јапана. Владало је ипак убеђење да француски систем савезништва са другим анти-ревизионистичким земљама (Пољска, Чехословачка, Румунија и Југославија) може само погоршавати односе тих земаља са Немачком, Италијом и другим земљама. Зато су Британци свесно радили на „слабљењу" система који, по њиховом мишљењу, води ка подели Европе у два супротстављена табора.

Значајну улогу по британској политици требало је да игра Југославија, под условом да се прво споразуме са својим ревизионистичким суседима (Бугарска, Мађарска и Италија). Могла би тек тада да спречи

[54] *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine, 1936—7*, II, 808—12.

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оружану интервенцију било које велике силе на Балкану, али на тај начин да не угрози виталне интересе ниједне друге силе, н. пр. Немачке. Први услов за такав обрт био је опет „слабљење" веза између Југославије и њених старих савезника, утолико више што би немачка наклоњеност знатно утицала да смирује агресивност Италије и других суседа према Југославији.

Енглески посланик (1929—1935) Невил Хендерсон се најенергичније борио за овај исход, али ни они Британци који нису поделили Хендерсонове изразито про-немачке ставове нису били спремни да изазову непријатељство и Немачке и Италије.

У околностима све очигледнијих слабости и супротиости у политици Енглеске и Француске према Немачкој и Италији, Југославији није остао други избор него да прими енглески савет, те да се дистанцира од Француске, да тражи пријатељство својих суседа и да се не замера Немачкој. Док је Краљ Александар лавирао између Француске и Немачке, Принц Павле и Милан Стојадиновић су се одмах определили за Немачку. Успели су уз помоћ Немачке да остварују за кратко време привидан мир са Италијом и Бугарском.

Нада за мир са Немачком и другим ревизионистичким земљама била је ипак чиста илузија. Исход британске политике је био рушење иначе слабог француског система безбедности и јачање снаге и јединства главних непријатеља постојећег поретка. Били су они (Немачка и Италија) и главни непријатељи Енглеске и Југославије.

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