CABINET 43(38).

Meeting of the Cabinet to be held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1., on SUNDAY, 25TH SEPTEMBER, 1938, at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDUM.

THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION: THE PRIME MINISTER'S SECOND VISIT TO HERR HITLER.

(Reference Cabinet 42(38)).
Continuation of discussion.

(Signed) E.E BRIDGES.
Secretary to the Cabinet.

Richmond Terrace, S.W.1.
24th September, 1938.
SECRET.

CABINET 43(38).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1., on Sunday, 25th September, 1938, at 10.30 a.m. and resumed at 3 p.m.

PRESENT:

The Right Hon. Neville Chamberlain, M.P.,
Prime Minister.

The Right Hon. John Simon, G.C.S.I.,
G.C.V.O., O.B.E., K.C., M.P.,
Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Right Hon. Sir John Simon, G.C.S.I.,
G.C.V.O., O.B.E., K.C., M.P.,
Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Right Hon. Lord Maugham,
Lord Chancellor.

The Right Hon. The Viscount Halifax, K.G.,
G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., Secretary
of State for Foreign Affairs.

The Right Hon. The Most Hon. The Marquess of Zetland,
G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.,
Secretary of State for India.

The Right Hon. The Viscount Halifax, K.G.,
G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., Secretary
of State for Foreign Affairs.

The Right Hon. The Earl De La Warr,
Lord Privy Seal.

The Right Hon. The Right Hon. Sir Thomas Inskip, C.B.E., K.C.,
M.P., Minister for Co-ordination
of Defence.

The Right Hon. The Right Hon. L. Hobbes-Bea, M.P.,
Secretary of State for War.

The Right Hon. John Colville, M.P.,
Secretary of State for Scotland.

The Right Hon. W.S. Morrison, M.C., K.C., M.P.,
Minister of Agriculture and
Fisheries.

The Right Hon. Walter Elliot, M.C., M.P.,
Minister of Health.

The Right Hon. E.L. Bourne, M.P.,
Minister of Transport.

Mr. E.B. Bridges, M.C. .................................. Secretary.
The Cabinet resumed the discussion which had been adjourned at 7.30 p.m. on the previous evening, Saturday, the 24th September.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that M. Daladier and M. Bonnet were flying over to England and would be available for discussion about 5 p.m. that same day.

He also reported that Mr. Anthony Eden had informed him that he hoped, if the terms of Herr Hitler's proposals were as stated in the newspaper reports, that we should reject them.

In reply to a question, the Foreign Secretary said that no news had yet been received from Prague. He had sent a telegram to Prague to the effect that we assumed that the Czechoslovak Government's reply would be submitted to the Prime Minister and not direct to Herr Hitler. He had also stated that if any representative of the Czech Government was able to spare time to come over and discuss the matter in this country we should be glad to receive him.

THE PRIME MINISTER answered certain questions arising out of Herr Hitler's Memorandum. He thought that the object aimed at in the Appendix to that Memorandum was to secure that the area to be transferred was handed over as a working concern and was not first made a desert. Thus there was a provision that no goods or cattle might be removed, but this related only to the period up to the occupation by German troops. What happened afterwards was another matter which would be dealt with by the proposed German-Czech Commission referred to in paragraph 6.

Asked about the guarantee, the Prime Minister said that the position was that the British Government
had offered to join in an international guarantee if the British and French Governments' proposals were accepted. Those proposals had not been accepted by Germany in the form in which they were submitted since the method of transfer was still in dispute. He saw no reason, however, to make any change in the offer which we had made to join in an international guarantee.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY pointed out that part of the plan had been that Germany should sign a pact of non-aggression and that this had not yet been secured. Further, he asked whether the Prime Minister was prepared to give a guarantee before the problem of the Polish and Hungarian minorities had been settled.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that this would be necessary and that the prospect did not alarm him. So great was the mutual mistrust between Czechoslovakia and Germany that it was essential that the assurances which Herr Hitler had given should be reinforced from the outset by some guarantee.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that he thought that it would be desirable that we should be clear in our own minds as to the position of the Polish and Hungarian minorities under the Covenant of the League of Nations before we made any approach to Russia. He thought that it would be rather a dangerous course to give a guarantee to Czechoslovakia when matters were in so fluid a position. If the Czechoslovak Government were to accept Herr Hitler's offer were we to undertake to go to Czechoslovakia's assistance if German troops crossed the new frontier? There was a danger of incidents, and he felt uneasy about the position. It was true that the offer of a
guarantee which we had made was not at the moment legally operative. Nevertheless he felt that a moral obligation rested upon us in consequence of the concessions which Czechoslovakia, on British and French advice, had agreed to make although effect had not yet been given to these concessions.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER said that on the previous Sunday, in agreement with the representatives of the French Government, the representatives of the British Government had reached two important decisions: first, that Czechoslovakia should be asked to give up certain Sudeten areas; secondly, that if she gave up these areas the United Kingdom Government would be prepared to join in an international guarantee of the new boundaries of the Czechoslovak State against unprovoked aggression. (See Joint Message to President Benes Cabinet 40(38) Appendix).

Some of the present difficulties arose from the fact that these decisions had been framed in somewhat vague terms which had not as yet been closely or clearly defined.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA pointed out that the Czechoslovak Government, in accepting the joint French and British proposals, had done so on the supposition that if Czechoslovakia was attacked in the meantime we should come to her assistance.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HOME AFFAIRS said that last Sunday's decisions had been taken on the supposition that the transfer of territory would take place under the control and supervision of an International Commission. He thought it was difficult to conceive that the Czechoslovak Government would readily surrender these safeguards unless we said quite definitely that if Germany ever crossed the new frontier we should at once embark on hostilities. Even if we were prepared to give that definite guarantee he thought
it would be a tremendous responsibility to advise the Czechoslovak Government to accept Herr Hitler's terms. We should be asking them not merely to give up strong military fortifications, but also to accept a moral defeat.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE thought that the first question was to settle whether we should advise the Czechoslovak Government to accept the present offer, and that if it was decided to advise the Czechoslovak Government to refuse Herr Hitler's proposals a number of the points which were under discussion would not arise.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that he had found his opinion changing somewhat in the last day or so, and even now he was not too certain of his view. Yesterday he had seen, or thought he had seen, certain things fairly clearly. For example, what alternative was open to Czechoslovakia other than acceptance? The answer was war, leading to the almost certain disruption of the country, accompanied by great loss of life and suffering.

A week ago, when the Franco-British proposals had been drawn up, he had felt strongly the immorality of yielding to force; but he felt that we had to some extent overcome that objection by the plans for carrying out the transfer which, it was hoped, would be settled by an International Commission. Yesterday he had felt that the difference between acceptance of the principle of last Sunday's proposal and the scheme now put forward a week later for its application did not involve a new acceptance of principle. He was not quite sure, however, that he still held that view.
made him hesitate was that it might be held that there was a distinction in principle between orderly and disorderly transfer with all that the latter implied for the minorities in the transferred areas.

Much, of course, turned on Herr Hitler's future intentions and on the Anglo-German rapprochement of which the Prime Minister had spoken on Saturday. Nevertheless, he could not rid his mind of the fact that Herr Hitler had given us nothing and that he was dictating terms, just as though he had won a war but without having had to fight.

While he did not altogether share the First Lord's views as to the "March to the East", he nevertheless felt some uncertainty about the ultimate end which he, (Lord Halifax) wished to see accomplished, namely, the destruction of Nazi-ism. So long as Nazi-ism lasted, peace would be uncertain. For this reason he did not feel that it would be right to put pressure on Czechoslovakia to accept. We should lay the case before them. If they rejected it he imagined that France would join in, and if France went in we should join with them.

Continuing, the Foreign Secretary said that he did not put this forward as a final conclusion, but his reflections through the night had provisionally led him to think that the present proposals involved a difference in principle, and that pointed tentatively to the conclusion that it would be very difficult to put any pressure on Czechoslovakia.
He also remembered that Herr Hitler had said that he had gained his power by words and not by bayonets. He asked whether we were quite sure that he had not gained power by words in the present instance, and that if he was driven to war the result might be to help to bring down the Nazi regime.

The Foreign Secretary concluded by saying that he had worked most closely with the Prime Minister throughout the long crisis. He was not quite sure that their minds were still altogether at one. Nevertheless, he thought it right to expose his own hesitations with complete frankness.

THE LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL said that the Prime Minister had told the Cabinet yesterday that he was satisfied of the good faith of Herr Hitler's assurances. The Prime minister had seen Herr Hitler and was in a better position to judge than were his colleagues. Nevertheless, the Lord President continued, he felt that he could not trust Herr Hitler. He quoted in this connection a number of renunciations of territorial claims in Europe which had been made by the Führer or other representatives of the German Government, viz., on the 21st May, 1935, two months after the re-introduction of conscription in Germany Herr Hitler said -

"The German Government has broken away from the discriminatory articles of the Treaty, but it herewith solemnly declares that these measures relate exclusively to the points which involve moral and material discrimination against her people. It will therefore respect unconditionally the articles concerning the mutual relations of nations in other respects, including the territorial provisions, and will bring about the revisions inevitable in the course of time only by the method of peaceful understandings."
On the 7th March, 1936, the day of the re-occupation of the Rhineland, Herr Hitler said -

"We have no territorial demands to make in Europe. We are aware, above all, that all the causes of tension which arise as a result either of faulty territorial provisions or of a disproportion between the size of populations and their living space, cannot be solved by means of war in Europe. At the same time we hope that human wisdom will help to mitigate the painful effects of these conditions and to remove causes of tension by way of gradual evolutionary development in peaceful collaboration."

Again, two pronouncements made on 11th and 12th March, 1938, after the Anschluss. On 11th March Field Marshal Goering assured M. Mastny, the Czechoslovak Minister in Berlin, that Germany had no hostile intentions against Czechoslovakia -

"I give you my word of honour" he said, "and I can add that we wish only for better relations".

On 12th March Baron von Neurath asked M. Mastny to call upon him and informed him officially in the name of the Reich Chancellor that he had been instructed before the latter's departure for Austria to inform M. Mastny that Germany had no hostile intentions towards Czechoslovakia. He alluded to the interest taken by Germany in the Sudeten Germans, but at the same time expressed the hope that "this domestic question of the Czechoslovak State" might be satisfactorily settled.

These undertakings had not been adhered to. He did not feel that we could trust Herr Hitler's declarations in future. The Germans differed from us in that to us a promise was a binding obligation, whereas to them it was a statement of intention.

He thought the right thing to do was to put the facts to the Czechoslovak Government, and if
that Government rejected the German demands and France came to Czechoslovakia's assistance we should come to the help of France. No pressure, however, should be put upon Czechoslovakia to accept.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION said that he thought there was some difference between the declarations quoted by the Lord President of the Council and the assurance which Herr Hitler had now given to the Prime Minister, who had clearly exercised a considerable influence over him.

The President said that he viewed the matter realistically. The position of Czechoslovakia was entirely changed as the result of the Anschluss. Germany could now enter the country by the southern frontier and turn the strong western fortifications. Under the present proposals Czechoslovakia would only lose the fringe of Sudeten Germans, on whom she could not place reliance. If she went to war she would lose everything and would be swallowed up in a few weeks. If this country and France defeated Germany in a world war, we could not replace Czechoslovakia on the map as she existed to-day. He therefore felt that the lesser of two great evils, from Czechoslovakia's point of view as well as from our own, was acceptance of Herr Hitler's offer; and he thought that we should advise her to accept.

THE LORD CHANCELLOR said that in his view the matter was mainly one of power, and that indignation was the worst guide to the action which this country should take. If Czechoslovakia asked our advice he thought it was right to tell her that France, Russia
and Great Britain could not prevent her from being overrun and destroyed. He referred to the fate of Abyssinia, which might have been saved if the Hoare-Laval agreement had not been overturned.

If we were involved in a world war our position was none too favourable. Russia was useless as an ally; the present state of France's air force was alarming; Italy would come in against us, and perhaps Japan too. The heart of the French people was not in this dispute, and he thought that if heavy losses were inflicted upon them they would probably go out of the war after a couple of months. Such a war would result in the disappearance of Czechoslovakia from the map; and there would be financial ruin which would make it impossible to continue the social services in this country. He came to the conclusion that the proper advice to give to Czechoslovakia in this matter was that she should accept Herr Hitler's terms.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER thought that the view taken of the combined allied air forces was somewhat pessimistic. On the main issue, he thought that the Cabinet could not support the acceptance of these proposals for a number of reasons. On moral grounds the Memorandum was an ultimatum and was couched in almost offensive terms. He thought that before long we were bound to be asked whether we supported or rejected Herr Hitler's proposals. When Parliament reassembled this issue could not be avoided. If we said that we accepted the proposals the result would be such a blow to our
prestige that he thought the Government would fall.

THE MINISTER FOR CO-ORDINATION OF DEFENCE hoped that his colleagues would think in terms of the difficult questions involved rather than of the Parliamentary situation. In any case it was impossible to foresee exactly what the situation would be when Parliament met.

He would state his conclusion first, which was that we were under a duty to put the full facts of the position to Czechoslovakia. He was not, however, in favour of putting pressure on Czechoslovakia and saying that if she did not accept the proposals we should in no circumstances support her.

The facts which should be put to Czechoslovakia included the certainty that France would be an ineffective and half-hearted ally in this war, unless we put strong pressure on her.

The Minister for Co-ordination of Defence had considerable confidence in our ultimate victory, yet such a victory might well result in the virtual destruction of both sides. He could not feel that we had any moral obligation to urge Czechoslovakia to fight. While our sympathies must be against acceptance of these proposals, it would be morally reprehensible to refuse to look the facts in the face.

Looking at the matter purely from the point of view of our interests, it seemed to him that the remedy was worse than the disease, and that it was therefore not in our interest to go to war.

Continuing, the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence said that he agreed that this was not the
end of the matter. We should not exhort Czechoslovakia to accept Herr Hitler's proposals, but we should put the facts clearly before them and explain first, that if they refused the proposals there was no means of saving Czechoslovakia as a political entity. Secondly, that they must not assume that France would come to their aid. This point would need delicate handling.

If France was prepared to put her whole weight into a war against Germany it might be that the position would be more favourable than we had previously thought.

The Minister referred to the latest information, which showed that Germany had only a thin couverture of troops on her western frontier. It was clearly of the first importance to ascertain the real facts as to France's intentions.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR thought that it was impossible to reach definite conclusions before the Prime Minister had seen the French Ministers that evening. The Air Ministry thought that the French must have received some new information about two or three weeks ago, which had made them hesitate about going to war with Germany.

The Secretary of State for Air mentioned that Colonel Lindbergh had been to the Air Ministry. They thought that he had perhaps become an unwitting tool of the Germans. For all that, he had given them a fair, if somewhat superficial, account of the French, Russian and German Air Forces. There was no
doubt that, from the point of view of the air, both France and Russia were in a comparatively weak position. Russia's armament productive capacity, suffered as the result of the recent widespread purges. Colonel Lindbergh had given figures for German production which were considerably higher than the figure of 600 machines per month, which was given in our calculations. From our point of view, the most hopeful feature was the difficulties which Germany was experiencing in regard to personnel. In recent months, they had had a large number of fatal accidents.

Continuing, the Secretary of State for Air said that he shared the feelings expressed by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. We had suffered a humiliation for which we must all take the responsibility - a responsibility extending back over many years. It was necessary, however, to look at the matter from the practical point of view, and the present circumstances would show a weak Russia and a doubtful France. He agreed with the President of the Board of Education and the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence that the terms should be accepted. He reached this conclusion notwithstanding his intense disgust at the terms.

He thought that the matter had been put very well by the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence, and it was both fair and honourable, as well as our duty, to put the facts of the case before Czecho-lovakia.
The Secretary of State for Air said that whatever might be the result of the present negotiations, he had no doubt that all his colleagues were glad that the Prime Minister had paid these visits to Germany. These visits had been received with profound respect and satisfaction throughout the world.

If, notwithstanding his efforts, war came, it would be evident that nothing had been spared in the cause of peace. Further, these visits had made a considerable impression in Germany, and had probably done more to weaken Nazism than any other event in recent years.

The Secretary of State for Air said, therefore, that he was in favour of postponing a final decision until the representatives of the French Government had been seen.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that he had just been handed a letter from the Czechoslovak Minister in London. The Minister had been instructed to ask to be received by the French and British Ministers when they were in conference that afternoon in order to deliver to them an urgent message from his Government. He assumed that the answer to this request must be in the affirmative. This was agreed to.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY said that the Czechoslovak Government would ask whether, if she refused Herr Hitler's terms, France and Great Britain would support her. He thought that the Cabinet should reach an answer to that question that morning.

Continuing, the First Lord said that, when great moral issues were at stake, there was no time to weigh out one's strength too carefully. He
discounted much of Colonel Lindbergh's remarks, as Colonel Lindbergh was now a convinced admirer of the Nazi Regime.

The First Lord also thought that it was right to have regard to opinion in the House of Commons, since what happened in the House of Commons was, after all, a fact.

The previous week, the Prime Minister had pointed out that his (the First Lord's) conclusions did not altogether agree with his premises. A week ago, he thought that any delay which could be obtained was worth while and might help to break up the Nazi system. But when Herr Hitler's present terms were published, there would be an explosion of public opinion. The Press was none too favourable to-day, although the terms published in the Press were better than the actual terms. He thought that the revulsion of public opinion would lead to a defeat of the Government in Parliament, with far-reaching consequences. Turning to the actual terms, he thought that it was impossible to ask our Minister in Prague, after the vigorous and perhaps excessive pressure which had been applied last week, to apply still further pressure to get the further terms accepted. He was also disturbed at the fact that an inhabitant in the areas to be transferred, if fleeing from the Nazi terror, could not take his property with him. He was also afraid that the French Government would take the same line as they had taken last week, when they had tried to put all the responsibility for the joint Anglo-French proposals on to this Government. He thought that we should now tell the Czechoslovak Government that we regarded the terms as intolerable, and that, if they refused the ultimatum presented to them, we should stand by them and that we hoped France would do the same. He thought that the future of Europe, of this country and of democracy was at stake.
THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE expressed agreement with what the Secretary of State for Air had said as to the Prime Minister's visits to Berchtesgaden and Godesberg. He had accepted his share of responsibility for these two visits. He had hoped that the Prime Minister would have been able to secure a proper solution of the present difficulty and also would have been able to achieve a result which would do more than postpone war with Germany. At the meeting held before the Prime Minister left for Godesberg he (the President) had stated certain conditions which he regarded as essential. These included:

(i) Proper time for the delimitation of the areas to be transferred; and

(ii) That pending delimitation, the German troops should not occupy the territories.

Neither of these conditions had been obtained. Indeed, they had been refused in insolent language, which left him under no delusions. In his view agreement on this basis was quite unacceptable. He felt sure that, if these terms were accepted, Herr Hitler's price would only rise again, and we should then find that we had bartered away many of the strong points in our position.

No doubt war was horrible but it would be equally horrible in six months' time. Further, Germany was not now prepared for a long war, whereas, if we waited, she would be able to extend her influence in South Eastern Europe and thereby strengthen her position.
The president agreed that it was impossible for the British Government to act as a post office. If we thought the terms were right, then we should put pressure on Czechoslovakia to accept them. If we thought they were wrong, we should say so, and should make it clear that if France carried out her obligations we would come to her help.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies said that he thought that publication of Herr Hitler's proposals would probably lead to an outburst of public indignation. In the course of days that outburst might be stemmed, although he did not feel very great confidence on this point. The real point, however, was to reach a decision on the merits of the case. He thought his colleagues might like to know the views of the High Commissioners of the Dominions, with whom he had had several discussions in the last few days. Mr. te Water, Mr. Dulanty and Mr. Massey had all definitely taken the view that we had accepted the principle of transfer a week ago, and that we ought now to accept proposals which merely concerned the method of giving effect to that principle. Mr. Bruce was inclined to take the same view, provided we made it clear that we would support Rumania and Yugoslavia and other countries whose support we might need in some future war. Mr. Bruce agreed that we should give a guarantee in such a form as to make it clear that we should fight if Germany went any further.
The Colonial Secretary said that, a week ago, he had felt no difficulty about the principle of self-determination for the Sudeten Germans. The Prime Minister had gone back to Germany to get reasonable terms. Through no fault of the Prime Minister the terms offered were shocking. Nevertheless there were certain points about the proposals which were not quite as bad as they appeared to be. Thus the provision for a plebiscite might mean that Germany got something less than the 50% line. Again, the plebiscite was to be undertaken by an international commission. The main point which shocked him was the demand that these transferred areas should be occupied by German troops. His view was that we should use every effort to ensure decent terms for the minorities. He thought that it must be admitted that the terms really represented a surrender as regards the methods of carrying out the principle on which they had agreed. Nevertheless, the fact remained that the principle had been accepted, and only the method was at issue. Further, war to-day was such a disastrous affair that he did not think we should go to war on a question of method. He did not regard it as in any way dishonourable to suffer the present rebuff in the effort to preserve peace. His view was, therefore, that the present terms should be accepted, but that it should be made quite clear that no further concession could be made, and that our guarantee of Czechoslovakia should
operate from now onwards. He thought we should have a great moral effect if we were to declare that if the German Army crossed the new frontier we should at once go to war with them.

As regards Herr Hitler's intentions, he was afraid that he was not quite so hopeful as the Prime Minister. Nevertheless, he did not take the view that if we avoided war now, war in the future was inevitable. However, when all was said and done, he did not think that we could put pressure to bear on Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, put these considerations before Czechoslovakia, frankly and fully, and let her make up her own mind. If Czechoslovakia decided that the terms were unacceptable, in that case our decision was as stated in the Prime Minister's speech of the 24th March.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND agreed with the Colonial Secretary that we could not bring pressure to bear on Czechoslovakia, but he thought it would be right that, before Czechoslovakia refused the terms, she should have before her the full facts as to what we thought would happen if the terms were refused, and as to the guarantee we were prepared to give.

THE LORD PRIVY SEAL said that up to now he thought no fundamental difference of opinion had been revealed.
It was now clear that Czechoslovakia would have to make immense concessions, and that Herr Hitler had abated none of his demands. Indeed, his demands became daily more preposterous. He thought that a vital question of principle was at stake. Herr Hitler's proposals in effect amounted to an ultimatum.

The Lord Privy Seal drew attention to the fact that in his first letter to Herr Hitler, the Prime Minister had described the proposals as such that he could not put them forward. The demands themselves were quite unjustifiable and would permit the Germans to get behind the Czech fortified lines. This would make the guarantee doubly dangerous. He also objected to German troops occupying the areas in which the plebiscite would later be held. The idea of orderly transfer had been completely given up.

All this would be bad enough, but after looking at Herr Hitler's record, and his intentions as set out in his writings, it was impossible to have any confidence in him. If what was now asked for was conceded, he would only ask for more later.

The Lord Privy Seal was afraid that we were being drawn along and slowly abandoning the moral basis of our case. The result would be that we should lose the sympathy of the world and our own moral conviction. He proposed, therefore, that we should take the full responsibility of making it clear to Czechoslovakia that we were not prepared to ask them to accept the terms. Further, we should
not shelter behind the French, nor the French behind us. We should say to the French that if they fulfilled their obligations we should march with them. If the French did not move, a new situation would arise.

The Secretary of State for India said that if the case was decided by sentiment, there could be no doubt whatever as to their views. But he could not dismiss from his mind the almost certain result of a decision reached on that basis. He agreed with the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence that it was our duty to place the facts before the Czechoslovak Government as objectively as possible.

The Secretary of State for India said that he had no doubt that it would be said later that if France and Great Britain had made it clear that the terms were unacceptable, since they were based on force, Herr Hitler would have given way, but he felt no confidence in that view. Herr Hitler was not bluffing. On the contrary, he was quite prepared to plunge the whole world into war. They were all conscious of what a world war would be like. The military and naval aspects were for the experts, but he would like to invite attention to our Achilles heel in the Middle East. Although we were at peace Palestine absorbed daily larger numbers of British troops. He was also afraid of the attitude which the Moslems of India might adopt.

As regards public opinion, he thought that many of those who were now clamouring for us to take up a stronger attitude with Germany would adopt a different view when a world war had
been in progress for a month or so. The Foreign Secretary had said that he would not feel safe so long as the Nazi Regime and Herr Hitler existed in Germany.

LORD ZETLAND wondered what sort of regime would exist in Germany after a world war. Might it not be even more dangerous to us than the Nazi Regime? For these reasons he thought that we should take all possible steps to avoid the calamity of war. He did not suggest that we should impose more pressure, but we must put the full facts objectively to the Czechoslovak Government.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER expressed agreement with the last speaker. There was no dispute about the fact that Herr Hitler's proposals were a shocking document. In particular he drew attention to the provision in paragraph 5 for the withdrawal of the military force during the plebiscite, and pointed out that nothing was said about the withdrawal of non-military forces. He agreed entirely with what the Home Secretary had said about the guarantee. He thought that it should be made quite clear that, if German troops were allowed up to the new frontier, we should give an immediate and unqualified guarantee against unprovoked aggression.

As regards our advice to Czechoslovakia, it was right to point out that, whatever we did, Czechoslovakia could not be saved now or hereafter. Was there a middle course? On this the Prime Minister must be the final judge and he had expressed the view that unless the present terms were accepted Czechoslovakia, as now constituted, must cease to exist.

If Czechoslovakia rejected the terms, did we at once go to war with Germany?
THE CHANCELLOR did not think that we could put ourselves into a position in which we undertook to make our entrance into a world war dependent upon a decision of the Government of Czechoslovakia. That Government might, for example, take some desperate action which, though it might command our respect, could not, in the circumstances with which we were now faced, justify the participation of this country in the war that might follow. He was not prepared to place this country in a position in which Czechoslovakia had the final word on whether this country should be involved in a war. The attitude which he thought we should be well advised to take vis-a-vis the Czechoslovak Government was -

1. To set out the facts as we saw them objectively.
2. To indicate that we were prepared to give them a guarantee.
3. That we should not say that, if they rejected the proposed terms, we should come to their aid.
4. That we should ascertain the French attitude. It seemed to be doubted whether the French had definitely decided to stand by their obligations.

THE MINISTER OF TRANSPORT said that a good deal of guidance would be found from studying the map. Whether the areas concerned were ceded now or later they would in any case have to be ceded in a few months time. Many things which it was now feared would happen on the 1st October would inevitably have to take place some months after that date, in whatever manner the transfer was carried out. The main questions which he asked himself were; first, whether these terms were the best which could be obtained for Czechoslovakia, second, whether the present was the best time for us to attack the Nazi Government.
It was to be remembered that our fighting forces were in the main organised for defence and not for attack. He was by no means sure that the best way of disrupting the Nazi Government was to subject it to military attack from outside. He thought that we should tell the Czechoslovak Government that, in our view, they should accept the terms and that, if they rejected them, they could not look to us for certain support.

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH said that he rather shared the views expressed by the Foreign Secretary that the alteration in the proposals was not merely one of method but one of principle. The real question to him was whether Czechoslovakia should now be invited to sign terms of surrender. He thought that it was impossible for us to press the Czechs to sign terms of this nature and that this really followed from what the Prime Minister had said in paragraph 3 of his first letter of the 23rd September to Herr Hitler.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR said that there was nothing to regret in the decision that the Prime Minister should go to Berchtesgaden and Godesberg. His action had rallied the public opinion of the world. The decision to be taken now rested with the Czechs. The question which he asked himself was whether we had increased our moral obligations to them as the result of the action which we had taken. He thought that the issue was now a moral one. Czechoslovakia was a democracy, which was inspired by the same ideals as this country and shared our opposition to Nazi tyranny. If we forced Czechoslovakia to yield, we should not be able to escape strong condemnation. If we put any pressure on Czechoslovakia, we should, in fact, become
allies of Herr Hitler.

When the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary saw the Czechoslovak Minister that afternoon, he thought the best plan would be to lay the facts before him, but also to point out that we took the view that Czechoslovakia would be justified in refusing to accept these proposals.

(The Cabinet then adjourned and agreed to meet again at 3.0 p.m. the same day.)
The Cabinet resumed their discussion of the international situation at 3 p.m.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that a message had just been received from the French Embassy that a Meeting of the Council of French Ministers was being held at 2.30 p.m. Arrangements for the departure of the French Ministers were quite uncertain, but they might be able to catch a train at 4 p.m. It was clear, however, that they would not reach London at 5 p.m. In the circumstances he thought that the best plan would be that the Prime Minister and he should offer to see M. Masaryk at about 5 p.m. in order to receive from him the Czechoslovak Government's message.

This was agreed to.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HOME AFFAIRS said that he had been much shocked by the style of the document containing the German Government's proposals. Further, the provision that the whole area should be evacuated by the 1st October gave the proposals the character of an ultimatum. His first impression had been that whatever might be Herr Hitler's real intentions, it was impossible to put pressure on the Czechoslovak Government to accept these proposals. The issue, however, was much too big to allow one's judgment to be biassed by considerations of sentiment. He had reached the conclusion that the proper course was not to put any pressure on the Czechs either to accept or to reject these proposals. If we adopted the latter course he was afraid that we might find that we had urged the Czechs to take steps which would result in their destruction. He also thought that if we urged rejection we were
bound at the same time to say that we would support Czechoslovakia by declaring war on Germany.

The Home Secretary added that he did not disguise from himself the fact that we might soon be involved in war, but he thought it was very important that we should not take a final decision until we knew how we should stand with the Dominions. From private information which had recently reached him he thought there was a possibility that if we entered into a war to assist Czechoslovakia the Prime Minister of Canada would take a referendum on the proposal whether Canada should join with us, and that this proposal might well be rejected.

The Home Secretary also thought that it was of the utmost importance that the countries involved (Great Britain, France and Russia) should together examine the military position as impartially as possible. Until this had been done he thought no final decision should be taken.

The Home Secretary asked whether we could not make something of Herr Hitler's statement that these proposals did not constitute an ultimatum and ourselves suggest counter proposals. He thought that if need be we should offer to send a division of British troops to Czechoslovakia, notwithstanding the risks involved, to see that the transfer of territory was carried out in an orderly way.

Finally, he hoped that before we went so far as to say to Czechoslovakia or France that we would join them in war, we should discuss the military aspects with the Chiefs of Staff. So far as passive defence was concerned, the longer the delay the stronger our position would become. He also thought that consideration should be given to the question whether, if war broke out, it might not be in the
interests not merely of ourselves but of our allies, that we should delay joining in.

**THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES** said that, from the point of view of his Department, if we were to be involved in war the sooner a decision was reached the better, as the ploughing season was now nearly over, and unless a decision was reached in a week or so it would soon be too late to take any steps to increase our food production until next Spring.

On the major issue involved, no-one who knew what would be the consequences of war would lightly embark upon it. But there was a feeling in this country that war with Germany was quite inevitable, and that if the bastion of Czechoslovakia was surrendered the position would really be worsened.

The Minister referred to some of the matters which encouraged this belief in the inevitability of war. Hitherto matters had been discussed in the Cabinet on the assumption that Herr Hitler was a complete autocrat. He doubted whether this was correct. He thought that to some extent Herr Hitler was the servant of the machine he had created, and of the doctrine that he had expounded. He thought that Herr Hitler, with his strong personality and demagogic power, was useful to the Party, but that he was dependent upon the concurrence of the Party leaders for the steps which he took, and that there were other primary sources of energy in the German system. He instanced the mysterious delay in the reply to the Prime Minister's letter and the sequence of events after the Nuremberg speech, when it appeared that the speech had not taken quite the form
expected and the Sudeten-Germans had anticipated the immediate arrival of German troops in Czecho-
lovakia.

Another matter which fostered belief in the inevitability of war with Germany was the proposed guarantee, which filled him with some anxiety. One possible foreign policy was directed towards ensuring that potential enemies were occupied with frontiers remote from their own country and in which we had no interest. Another possible policy was to encircle a potential enemy with powerful foes. It could not be said that the proposed guarantee to Czechoslovakia had the merits of either of these policies.

There was also the psychological factor, namely that relief at a decision to declare war solved the conflict in the mind. This was a real danger, and he was sure that we must still make every effort to ensure peace.

Herr Hitler's Memorandum containing his proposals was as difficult a document as one could be asked to accept. He found great difficulty in pressing Czechoslovakia to accept it. At the same time he thought that we should express as clearly as possible the military position as we saw it if Czechoslovakia became involved in war. It might not be easy to draw a line between a stark presentation of the facts and pressure, but he thought that the line could be drawn. He also thought it was important to get back to the position of acting as "honest brokers". It was not for us to accept these proposals. His conclusion was that we should abide by the policy formulated by the Prime Minister on the 21st May that we should not commit ourselves to engaging in war.
automatically. By adhering to this policy we were more likely to be able to throw our weight on the side of peace. Perhaps a better phrase would be 'we should not take our decision too much on that'.

As regards public opinion, in war was declared now there would no doubt, in Sir Robert Walpole's phrase, be a ringing of bells, but before long there would no doubt be a wringing of hands on the part of the same people.

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR said that he did not accept the inevitability of war. They all detested the Nazi system and methods, and there was, no doubt, a section of public opinion which was vocal for war. But in his view the section of opinion which thought that this issue should not be allowed to provoke a world war was certainly stronger.

After analysing the various ways in which the issue might arise, the Minister of Labour summarised the position as it appeared to him as follows. All three Governments had agreed to a transfer of territory. The areas to be transferred did not differ materially. The point of difference concerned the precise method of transfer. The terms of the Memorandum were highly objectionable, but we had to face the fact that unless these terms were accepted we should almost certainly be faced with a world war.

The Minister of Labour thought that the Czechoslovak Government would doubtless ask for advice. The Prime Minister had seen Herr Hitler, and the Prime Minister was better able to judge the prospects than any of his colleagues. For himself he found it difficult to know what answer to give, but he was much impressed by what the Prime Minister had said the previous night, when he had stated that although his first reaction to the Memorandum had been one of indignation after weighing
it up he had come to the conclusion that its real meaning was far less open to objection than its form implied. He was sure that the time had not yet come when we should give up our efforts to obtain peace by negotiation. Nor ought we to shelter behind the attitude of France.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that all his colleagues had now spoken and had disclosed their points of view. There had been some difference of opinion, as was only to be expected. Although he had given expression to certain views which he had formed as the result of his second visit, he never expected other members of the Cabinet to accept those views as a final judgment.

The first point he wished to make was that he was sure that even those of his colleagues who did not see matters in precisely the same light as himself would be the last to wish to magnify differences. They were faced with a critical situation, and it was important that the Cabinet should present a united front. When he came to the position we were in today, and to the immediate decision which had to be taken, he did not think he would find any real differences. In the course of the discussion certain of his colleagues had spoken somewhat loosely of "accepting" or "rejecting" Herr Hitler's proposals. It was, of course, clear that it was not for us to accept or reject them, or, indeed, to feel any humiliation in regard to these terms. The proposals were not addressed to us, and we were only acting as an intermediary. The final responsibility for acceptance or rejection lay with the Czechoslovak Government.
The more immediate question was the attitude we should take up at the forthcoming interview with the representatives of the French Government and with the Czechoslovak Minister. The question had been asked whether we should put pressure on the Czech Government to accept the proposals contained in the Hitler Memorandum. He shared to the full the view expressed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for the Colonies as to the character of this document. He hoped that his colleagues would not think that he was insensible to the moral considerations involved. In the past week he had gone through much wrestling of spirit and agony of mind, and at moments the responsibility that lay upon his shoulders had been almost unbearable.

This matter must not, of course, be looked at merely from the point of view of material considerations. All sorts of factors must be weighed up, and it must be realised that on the decision taken depended the lives and happiness of millions of their fellow countrymen.

There had also been talk of "pressure" on Czechoslovakia. What did this mean? Nobody suggested that if the Czechs rejected the terms we should go to war against them. The assumption was ridiculous, but it served to illustrate the point that there was no pressure which we could exert in the literal sense. He felt sure that those who talked about "pressure" did not suggest that we were debarred from putting before Czechoslovakia all the considerations which should properly be borne in mind in reaching a decision. We owed it to them to do no less than this, and not to let them take a decision without knowing what was involved.
The only pressure which we could exercise on Czechoslovakia was negative. We could say that if they rejected the terms proposed we should not come to their assistance. But we could not make any such statement, because it was not only Czechoslovakia that was involved, but France also.

In his speech of the 24th March, and subsequently, he had said that we could not afford to see France defeated and overrun by Germany. From this it followed that, if France went to war, it was almost inevitable that we ourselves should be involved. We could not, therefore, say to Czechoslovakia that if they rejected these proposals we should remain completely aloof, since that might not be the case. The Prime Minister said that he admired the logic of the First Lord's views, but he did not agree with them. The First Lord wished to tell the Czechoslovak Government to reject the proposals and to say that we would come in on their side. It was clear, however, that we could not take that course this afternoon unless the whole Cabinet was united in support of it, and it was evident that this was not the case. For the time being, therefore, that course was out of the range of possibilities.

In the last resort it seemed likely that Czechoslovakia's attitude would be determined by the attitude of France. If encouraged by France (and perhaps in any event), Czechoslovakia might resist Germany. Sooner or later the French Government would have to decide on their attitude.
Continuing, the Prime Minister said that, so far as he had summed up the situation, he thought that there was little difference of opinion among his colleagues. He did not think that it was necessary to take any immediate decision which went beyond the policy which had already been accepted by the Government. Nevertheless it was clear that a position had arisen in which we might before long be involved in war. If that happened, it was essential that we should enter war united, both as a country and as an Empire. It was of the utmost importance, therefore, that whatever steps we took, we should try to bring the whole country and Empire along with us, and should allow public opinion to realise that all possible steps had been taken to avoid a conflict.

The Prime Minister therefore proposed that, in the forthcoming discussions with the French Government and with the Czechoslovak Minister, our action should be on the following basis:

1. We should not say that if the proposals were rejected we undertook to declare war on Germany.

2. Equally we should not say that if the proposals were rejected we should in no circumstances declare war on Germany.

3. We should put before the representatives of the French and Czechoslovak Governments the full facts of the situation, as we saw them, in their true light.
The Home Secretary had suggested that in the interval before October 1st counter proposals should be submitted to Germany with a view to ensuring that the transfer of territory was effected in an orderly fashion. He referred to a proposal which the Foreign Secretary had mentioned to him. Sir Frederick Maurice had told the Foreign Secretary that he thought it was possible that a proposal for a mixed force of German and British ex-Service men to act as a screen to occupy the Sudeten German territories before the advance of the German troops might be accepted by Herr Hitler. Arrangements had now been made for Sir Frederick Maurice to fly to Germany to put this proposal to Herr Hitler. He did not know whether this proposal was likely to be accepted, but it was worth examination.

He rather doubted whether in all the circumstances much could be done on the lines of the Home Secretary's suggestion for counter proposals. Herr von Ribbentrop, at the end of the discussions, had told him very earnestly that Herr Hitler's proposals could not be made the subject of bargaining and that he hoped that no counter proposals would be submitted, as from his knowledge of the Fuhrer he knew that they would not be entertained. Nevertheless he (the Prime Minister) did not altogether exclude counter proposals. He thought Herr Hitler wanted peace, and that if the point at issue was not very large he might be induced to accept some compromise.
General discussion followed on the Prime Minister's statement in the course of which the following points were made.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADOLPHALTY thought that the Home Secretary's suggestion for counter proposals should be pursued.

It was suggested that the Czech Government were not called upon to give an immediate "yes" or "no" to Herr Hitler's proposals and that, in the meantime, Herr Hitler might be asked to agree to some modification of the terms suggested.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR thought that it was vital to know what were the intentions of the French Government before a decision was reached. On the other hand, if the French said that they were prepared to support Czechoslovakia and asked us what was our attitude, he did not think that we could refuse to give a reply.

The Secretary of State for War also suggested that the position had been somewhat modified by the statement made by the Prime Minister in paragraph 4 of his letter of the 23rd September that if German troops moved into the Sudeten German areas as the Führer had proposed, there was no doubt that the Czechoslovak Government would have no option but to order their forces to resist. He thought that this statement went some way to committing us to support the Czechoslovak Government.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he could not accept this view and this paragraph amounted to no more than a statement of the situation as he
had seen it, according to the information at his disposal. It was merely a statement of his view as to what action the Czechoslovak Government would take.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR suggested that the Prime Minister should conduct negotiations with the representatives of France and Czechoslovakia on the basis suggested and should ascertain their views. Until that had been done he thought that no further decision could be reached. He suggested, however, that a further report should be made to the Cabinet when the views of France and Czechoslovakia had been ascertained.

The Secretary of State for Air also suggested that inter-staff talks should take place between the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Chief of the French General Staff. If possible the Russians might be associated with these talks.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE thought that it was undesirable that there should be any further delay in reaching a decision. Time was an important factor and he thought we should definitely notify our decision to the French and Czechoslovak Governments at once. He also thought that immediate steps should be taken to set on foot further precautionary measures. The Prime Minister's speech of the 24th March had been perfectly correct in the circumstances in which it was delivered, but the circumstances were no longer hypothetical and in his view the time had come when we should define our policy in clear and unmistakable language. He suggested —
that we should say to France that, if Czechoslovakia objected to the terms proposed, and if France was prepared to support Czechoslovakia energetically, we should join with France.

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH supported the Home Secretary's suggestion that we should endeavour to obtain some modification in the terms proposed. He thought that any conclusion which involved integral acceptance of the terms proposed would be very difficult to justify.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS pointed out that it was for the Czechoslovak Government and not for ourselves to accept the proposals.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES suggested that if the Czechoslovak Government were prepared to accept the proposals, he thought we should be in a position to join in giving them an immediate guarantee without waiting for the transfer of the territory to the Reich. He thought this was one of the factors which we should lay before the Czechoslovak Government.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY thought that there was a risk of a marked difference of opinion on this matter. He agreed, however, that the essential point was to ascertain the views of the French. When that had been done the Cabinet should be reassembled.

In the course of further discussion, the Home Secretary's proposal for joint conversations between Britain, France and Russia in order that the Cabinet might be in possession of the best military information and advice met with support.
The view had also been expressed that it would be desirable for an immediate meeting of the Service Ministers and Chiefs of Staff in order to discuss the further defence measures which do not involve mobilisation set out in Annex A to the Report of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee (C.P. 207 (38)).

It was agreed that the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence should arrange a meeting in the course of the evening, with a view to a Report being made to the Prime Minister.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS reported that he had received a message to the effect that the representatives of the French Government would be available to start conversations at 9 p.m.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE expressed some anxiety that the attitude to be adopted by representatives of His Majesty's Government in these conversations had not been more fully defined, and the latter suggested that the conversations might be divided into two parts. In the first part of these conversations the views of the French Government should be ascertained. There would then be an adjournment, in the course of which the Cabinet should be reassembled and acquainted with the attitude of the French Government before any final decisions were reached.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he agreed with this suggestion. It was clear that the representatives of the French Government would have to stop overnight and he thought that this suggestion could be adopted without inconvenience.

It was agreed that the Cabinet should be ready to reassemble the same evening at short notice.

It was left to the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary to settle whether M. Masaryk should be seen before the meeting with the representatives of the French Government, or whether the interview with him should be postponed.
CONCLUSIONS.

The Cabinet agreed:—

(i) That no final decision should be reached in regard to the policy to be adopted in regard to Herr Hitler's proposals until the attitude of the French Government had been ascertained.

(ii) That for this purpose the conversations with the French Government should be divided into two parts, and that the Cabinet should be reassembled after the first part of the conversations have taken place, but before these conversations were concluded.

(iii) That the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence should convene a meeting of the Service Ministers and the Chiefs of Staff to consider the further defence measures set out in Annex 'A' to C.P. 207(38), and to report to the Prime Minister thereon.