

with the publication of a couple of articles in *The Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *Evening Standard*, and several Belgian newspapers. They all published lengthy accounts of Halifax's conversations with leading Germans, and with Dr. Schacht in particular. The news had clearly been leaked, but by who?

The British can be excluded, given the embarrassment that resulted from the newspaper articles. Weinberg suggests that the Germans leaked the content of Schacht's conversation with Halifax.⁹³ Ribbentrop himself may even have been responsible. He talked about the possibility for an intrigue in the international press even before the publication of the articles.⁹⁴ Besides, the German ambassador in London was bitter about his exclusion from the Hitler-Halifax talks. Ribbentrop himself wanted to be the architect of an Anglo-German rapprochement. By leaking details of such a sensitive matter as colonial appeasement, he perhaps hoped to ruin the chances of an understanding between London and Berlin.

Sir Omre Sargent thought it «clear that the French have leaked, and I think we may have in consequence to give assurances to both Belgium and Portugal»⁹⁵. Sir Robert Vansittart did not agree with Sargent's view. In the margin of the same document Vansittart wrote: «I don't think this need be a French leakage. It is an obvious speculation based on a good many German leakages and speculations». The Germans blamed the French embassy in London for giving information to several journalists.⁹⁶

Ribbentrop acted swiftly to deny the validity of the articles published in the Belgian and British press. He said that they did not reflect Hitler's view, and were probably not more than rumours.⁹⁷

On December 2nd, ambassador Ribbentrop visited Eden who informed him on the outcome of the Anglo-French summit of November 29th and 30th. Ribbentrop aired to his anger at the attitude of the British press.⁹⁸ The alleged willingness of Germany to give up her claims on East and Southwest Africa in exchange for the Belgian Congo and Portuguese Angola, would — according to Ribbentrop — give the public opinion a distorted impression of Germany's colonial aspirations. Belgium had already refused to take the plan into consideration, he continued. And if the public opinion came to take the German renunciation of East and Southwest Africa for granted, then Germany was left with only the Cameroons and Togoland he told Eden. Ribbentrop further insisted on a quiet press campaign. An «official [German] statement would perhaps be advisable»⁹⁹.

93 Gerhard L. WEINBERG, *op.cit.*, p. 121.

94 See footnote 92.

95 *Minute by Sir Omre Sargent*, December 1, 1937 (DBFP, n° 359).

96 *German embassy in London to German Foreign ministry*, December 4, 1937 (DGFP, n° 60).

97 *Eden to Henderson*, December 1, 1937 (DBFP, n° 360).

98 *Ribbentrop to the German Foreign ministry*, December 2, 1937 (DGFP, N° 51).

99 *Ibid.*

The damage was however done, and the Belgian and Portuguese ambassadors questioned their colleagues and the governments to which they were accredited.

The Belgian chargé d'affaires in London, Count de Lantsheere, asked Eden on December 1st if Hitler had made any allusions to the Belgian Congo. He was told that Hitler had not done so, and that the newspaper articles were erroneous¹⁰⁰. The Portuguese ambassador was told the same with regard to the Portuguese colonies¹⁰¹.

The British government continued trying to convince Brussels of the non involvement of the Belgian Congo. Anthony Eden insisted during cabinet meetings that the Belgian government should be informed of any negotiations¹⁰². Neville Chamberlain stated in the House of Commons on December 2nd «that H.M. Government have no immediate intention of extending the Anglo-French conversations to include any other countries – contrary to the communiqué of November 30th – this lets out Belgium and Portugal» and their colonies¹⁰³. Foreign Secretary Eden said in Parliament that the other countries mentioned in the Anglo-French communiqué were the Dominions that were administering the former German colonies as mandates¹⁰⁴.

Despite all the British efforts, the Belgian government was not reassured. On December 3rd, Belgium's Foreign Minister Paul Henri Spaak stated in the Senate that he had not received any communication on the subject of colonial appeasement¹⁰⁵. Any proposal to include the Belgian Congo in a scheme for colonial restitution would not be entertained for one moment. Spaak further stressed the determination of his government to act against any such plans.

Baron Cartier de Marchienne, the Belgian ambassador in London, called on Eden on December 6th. The ambassador wanted to find out what the German views on the Belgian Congo were. Eden told the Baron that neither Hitler, nor Göring, Goebbels, or von Blomberg had ever mentioned the Belgian Congo. Only Dr. Schacht had done so. And Eden had been told by Ribbentrop that Schacht's views were of no importance, a piece of information he did mention to Cartier de Marchienne. Eden concluded his message to the Belgian ambassador by saying that «if ever we wished to discuss the subject of the Belgian colonies, it would be to the Belgian Government and to no other that we should address ourselves first»¹⁰⁶.

100 Corbin to Chautemps, December 3, 1937 (DDF, n° 306).

101 *Ibid.*

102 Von Ribbentrop to the German Foreign ministry, December 1, 1937 (DGFP, n° 48).

103 Minute by Sir Omre Sargent, December 2, 1937 (DBFP, N° 363).

104 Wolfe W. SCHMOKEL, *op.cit.*, p. 113.

105 Aveling, counsellor at the British embassy in Brussels, to Eden, December 3, 1937 (DBFP, n° 367).

106 Eden to Sir Robert Clive, British ambassador in Brussels, December 6, 1937 (DBFP, n° 372).

Two thirds of Eden's statement was correct. Only Dr. Schacht had mentioned the Belgian Congo, and his views were indeed no longer important (he was fired as Minister of Economics in February 1938). The promise that London would inform Belgium of any new plans involving the Belgian Congo was nothing but a lie. The British government had never planned to do so and did not plan to do so in the future. Not even so in February-March 1938, when ambassador Henderson offered Hitler concrete proposals. Eden may have wished to tell the Belgians, but his views did certainly not carry the day.

Gazel, the French chargé d'affaires in Brussels, is quite informative on the views of the Belgian government on colonial appeasement early in December 1937¹⁰⁷. He wrote Paris that the Belgians were very displeased that they had never been informed of Halifax's visit. It created the impression in Brussels that the entire matter did not concern Belgium. The opinion in Belgium was that a general settlement could only be reached within the framework of the League of Nations. Belgium did not want to contribute to a colonial appeasement since the Congo had never been part of Germany. With regard to Ruanda-Urundi, previously part of German Tanganyika and now a Belgian mandate, Belgium placed all her hope on a refusal by London to return any piece of the former German East African empire. Gazel's concluded that Brussel clearly wanted to avoid any territorial cession.

Viscount Davignon, the Belgian ambassador in Berlin, was instructed to get in touch with some of Germany's leading politicians. He did so before December 4th. Schacht, von Neurath, Goebbels, and Göring reassured him that Germany was not eyeing the Belgian Congo¹⁰⁸. Davignon reminded his interlocutors that the contrary would deal a serious blow to eighteen months of Belgian-German rapprochement¹⁰⁹.

The Portuguese government asked Germany's representatives in Portugal for information and a possible explanation for the rumours. Lisbon had good reasons to be worried. Before the Great War Anglo-German negotiations had also envisaged the possible partitioning of the Portuguese colonies.

The German ambassador in Lisbon was advised to refer to Hitler's speech of January 30th in which no colonial demands were made on countries that had not taken any colonies from Germany¹¹⁰. Göring told the Portuguese ambassador in Berlin that neither the Portuguese nor the Belgian colonies had been discussed by Halifax or Schacht, a statement which Schacht himself confirmed. This is a blatant lie as all the other documents indicate the contrary. Göring told the ambassador that Schacht,

107 *Gazel to Chautemps*, December 4, 1937 (DDF, n° 310).

108 *Henderson to Eden*, December 6, 1937 (DBFP, n° 369).

109 See footnote 107.

110 *German Foreign ministry to the German legation in Portugal*, December 2, 1937 (DGFP, n° 521).

even if he wanted to talk about the colonial question, was not qualified to do so¹¹¹. The Portuguese government finally followed Belgium's example and published a statement rejecting reports «concerning a change in ownership status of Angola as completely unworthy of credence»¹¹².

After the end of November 1937, no more Anglo-French talks on colonial restitution were held. There was not only opposition from France, but also from Belgium and Portugal, Britain's two oldest allies on the continent. King Leopold III of Belgium expressed his alarms at the press rumours during a state visit to Great Britain at the end of November 1937¹¹³.

The United States was not involved in the negotiations, and was not an interested party. But it had given Britain a free hand «to make a deal with Portugal or Belgium in order to give Germany Portuguese or Belgian territory instead of British»¹¹⁴. This is what Bullitt, ambassador of the United States in Paris, told German Foreign Minister von Neurath on November 18th.

This was the situation at the beginning of December 1937. The Germans were more or less indifferent to the colonial question, and awaited any specific British proposals. The French, Belgian, and Portuguese governments were suspicious about the Anglo-German negotiations. They feared a deal at their expense. London however was actively pushing for a colonial appeasement in exchange for peace and security in Central and Eastern Europe.

DECEMBER 1937 TO MARCH 1938

The colonial question was not much talked about during the last month of 1937. Apart from some exchanges of diplomatic dispatches, no new and detailed proposals were made in December.

«By the end of 1937 Hitler was concerned with other projects; although he still included the colonial claim in his public speeches, he saw little chance of realizing it without having to compromise his Austrian and Czech plans, and therefore let it rest»¹¹⁵.

111 Corbin to Chautemps, December 4, 1937 (DDF, n° 313).

112 Huene, German ambassador in Lisbon, to the German Foreign ministry, December 4, 1937 (DGFP, n° 61).

113 Lois G. SCHWOERER, *op.cit.*, p. 369. Unfortunately, there is nowhere a written record of Leopold's statement. Neither is it clear to whom he expressed his concern.

114 Bullitt to Cordell Hull, November 23, 1937, quoted in Martin GILBERT and Richard GOTT, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

115 Wolfe W. SCHMOKEL, *op.cit.*, p. 104.

The so-called Hoßbach Memorandum (November 5th 1937), one of the most important documents on German foreign policy goals, clearly states that colonies were not important. «It [colonies] is not a case of winning people but of winning agriculturally useful space. It would also be more to the purpose to seek raw-material producing territory in Europe, directly adjoining the Reich and not overseas»¹¹⁶. Colonies were absolutely no priority for Hitler.

In Great Britain the controversy between the pros and cons of a policy of colonial appeasement at the expense of other powers continued. Powerful forces were opposing any restitution. Sir Robert Vansittart, Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, was very sceptical about Chamberlain's colonial plans. From January 1st 1938 however, Vansittart was effectively silenced by promoting him to the meaningless office of chief diplomatic adviser. «The new post he will occupy will be very honourable and may be very useful but he will be removed from active direction of FO policy and I suppose that in Rome and Berlin the rejoicing will be loud and deep» wrote Prime minister Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain on December 5th 1937.

Foreign minister Anthony Eden also objected to making a deal with Berlin at the expense of various other countries. «A.E. [Anthony Eden] told P.M. [Chamberlain] he did not at all like the idea of any swapping round of colonies, or any arrangement by which France would be expected to pay major share by concession in West Africa: in fact (...) he would prefer to return all ex-German colonies, including Tanganyika itself»¹¹⁷. There was also strong opposition in the ruling Conservative Party. The faction of the political imperialists abhorred the idea of colonial appeasement¹¹⁸.

The different views surfaced during the various meetings of the British cabinet. A *modus vivendi* was reached on December 1st. It was agreed upon that France would not be asked to surrender any colonial territory if Great Britain would not do the same¹¹⁹.

Ribbentrop, the German ambassador in London, visited Eden on December 2nd to discuss the Anglo-French conversations of the end of November. Eden told him that both Great Britain and France were willing to make concessions, and that Germany would be approached with concrete proposals. Given the difficulty of the issue at stake however, Ribbentrop was told that at least one month would elapse before some clarification of the subject might be reached¹²⁰. It took three more months, till March 3rd 1938, before detailed plans were placed before the Germans.

116 *Id.* p. 105.

117 John HARVEY ed., *op.cit.*, p. 63 (entry for December 7, 1937).

118 *Corbin to Chautemps*, December 6, 1937 (DDF, n° 320).

119 *Extract from Cabinet Conclusions of December 1, 1937* (DBFP, n° 358).

120 *Ribbentrop to German Foreign ministry*, December 2, 1937 (DGFP, n° 48).

Sir Neville Henderson, the British ambassador in Berlin, played a pivotal role in the Anglo-German colonial conversations early in 1938. He regularly advised London on the diplomatic steps to take, or informed London on the opinions in Germany and other European countries on the question of colonial restitution. Henderson had some sort of admiration for Germany. In his memoirs *Failure of a Mission* he wrote «There are, in fact, many things in the Nazi organization and social institutions, as distinct from its rabid nationalism and ideology, which we might study and adopt to our own use with great profit both to the health and happiness of our own nation and old democracy»¹²¹.

Henderson discussed the colonial question with the former French Foreign Minister Flandin on December 13th. Flandin insisted that Tanganyika should be given up, if not, France would not contribute herself. Henderson then dropped the idea of a «shuffle round whereby we offered Tanganyika to Portugal in exchange for Angola». Flandin replied that France might consider giving up Togoland, and perhaps even the Cameroons, if Britain was willing to cede Southwest Africa¹²².

Henderson wrote Eden on December 15th that France and Britain had to take the initiative by proposing detailed plans to Hitler. Henderson added that it should also be made clear to Hitler that the British public opinion would never accept a colonial settlement without a German quid pro quo. Henderson concluded by putting forward two suggestions on the policy to follow. First, detailed plans had to be drafted indicating what Great Britain was willing to offer. Second, a list had to be made of the British desiderata for a German quid pro quo¹²³.

Great Britain resumed full diplomatic activity from January 1938 on. An entirely different plan was now being worked out. Until now, all proposals had focussed on a restitution of the former German colonies in Africa. If that would turn out to be impossible for strategical reasons, Germany could always be compensated by offering her territories to be carved out of the African colonial empires of France, Belgium and Portugal.

From January 1938 on, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain laboured to convince Berlin of the newness of his plans, which were also more detailed and concrete than the previous ones.

The first indication of a shift in British colonial policy can be found in the British and Belgian press early in December 1937. It was stated that proposals circulated envisaging unifying the Belgian Congo and Portuguese Angola, and the administration of this territory by an international

121 Neville HENDERSON, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

122 Henderson to Eden, December 14, 1937 (DBFP, n° 388).

123 Henderson to Eden, December 15, 1937 (Committee on Foreign Policy Meeting, FP (36)43 - FO 371/21654).

society with a German majority¹²⁴. The German Foreign Ministry disregarded the articles as «a deliberate attempt to make trouble»¹²⁵.

Some of the papers must have had foreknowledge for it was along these lines that Chamberlain designed his new proposals. Direct territorial restitution was no longer the leading principle, but the creation of a special zone in Central Africa, administered not by an international body with a German majority, but by the various colonial powers, including Germany, under the supervision and control of an international body, composed of the various countries involved. In doing so, it was hoped that all parties would be satisfied. Belgium, Portugal, and France would not be excluded entirely, but would be represented in the supervising body. Besides, these countries would still retain some of their holdings to administer.

A cabinet document, dated January 1st 1938, and prepared by Foreign Minister Eden, did not yet make any mention of this new approach¹²⁶. It reflected the advice given by Sir Nevile Henderson in his writing of December 15th¹²⁷. Eden's memorandum stressed the need for concretisation of the existing vague plans. Colonial restitution was still seen as part of a general settlement of international cooperation and consultation. A territory equivalent to Tanganyika needed to be found elsewhere. The document also raised the question of the position of Southwest Africa, Samoa, and New Guinea. The Belgian and Portuguese holdings in Central Africa were once more discussed. Eden wrote that as Belgium had received Ruanda-Urundi after the Great War, she should also be asked to make a contribution. The same applied to Portugal. She had obtained the Kionga Triangle, once part of German East Africa. Eden's premium desideratum for a German quid pro quo seems to have been a German return to the League of Nations. Clearly, the memorandum still reflects the old plans and proposals of just a simple territorial reshuffling.

A list of possible German concessions in exchange for a colonial settlement was drafted at a meeting of the cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy on January 25th 1938¹²⁸. A Western Pact of non-aggression, replacing the defunct Locarno Treaty, headed the list. Disarmement, a return to the League of Nations, a settlement of the Austrian question, and German guarantees for Czech territorial integrity were London's other desiderata.

The list clearly laid more emphasis on security for Western and Central Europe, than on the League of Nations (Eden's number one goal). More, these demands had basically been agreed upon during the Anglo-French

124 German Foreign ministry to German legation in Portugal, December 2, 1937 (DGFP, n° 52).

125 *Ibid.*

126 *Points arising in connexion with consideration of settlement with Germany*, January 1, 1938 (FP (36)41 - FO 371/21654).

127 See footnote 123.

128 *Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy*, January 22, 1938, January 25, 1938 (FP (36)43 - FO 371/21654).

conversations of November 29 and 30. Therefore, they were certainly not new. Sir Nevile Henderson had previously even criticised these desideratums. He wrote on December 15th that as far as Germany was concerned, the colonial problem was not a question of bargaining, and that nothing had to be expected from her in return for a colonial restitution.¹²⁹ Henderson informed London that the British insistence on a German quid pro quo was irrelevant in the entire discussion.

Chamberlain revealed his new plans during the 21st meeting of the cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy on Monday, January 24th, 1938.¹³⁰ He opened the session by saying that there were reasons for some urgency and speed. The Hitler-Halifax talks were by now more than two months old, and Berlin might start to think that the British government had abandoned all intentions of a follow up of Lord Halifax's conversations. He then continued by introducing his new plan, which he compared with «the opening of an entirely new chapter in the history of colonial development». A special Central African zone would be created, its northern border running south of the Sahara, Sudan, Abyssinia, and Italian Somaliland; its southern border running south of Portuguese West Africa (Angola), the Belgian Congo, Tanganyika, and Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique). New rules and regulations would come into effect for all territory laying in between. Germany would be given some territory to administer in the special zone. Chamberlain's plans however, did no longer envisage a transfer in full sovereignty of territory to Germany, but only the administration of certain regions by her.

All powers were to have equal privileges and obligations in the special zone. But certain restrictions would apply. The rights and privileges of the natives had to be preserved. Freedom of communication throughout the entire zone had to be guaranteed. Complete freedom of trade needed to be respected. The powers exercising the administrative rights had to refrain from raising native armies and building submarine bases. An international body of control — including Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, and Portugal — would review the reports on the administration of the various territories, and would also hear complaints regarding this administration.

After the presentation by the Prime minister, the actual discussion started. Inquiries were made about the likely reactions of Belgium and Portugal, both of which owned extensive areas in the delineated zone. Ormsby-Gore, Secretary of State for the colonies, told the members of the committee that King Leopold of Belgium had told him that a return of Ruanda-Urundi was out of the question, but that Belgium «might be prepared to make some contributions in West Africa».¹³¹ Questions were

129 See footnote 123.

130 *Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, January 24, 1938, January 25, 1938* (FP (36)21st - FO 371/21678).

131 Ormsby-Gore seems to have had some first hand information from King Leopold himself relating to the Belgian attitude. He may have discussed the matter with the King during Leopold's state visit to Great Britain at the end of November 1937. This is just an

raised about compensations for countries that lost part of their territories. France could be compensated with British territory on the coast of West Africa. Indemnities for Belgium or Portugal were however not talked about. Ormsby-Gore also remarked that the population, climate, and commercial value of the territories had to be taken into account.

Ormsby-Gore continued to enumerate all practical problems. Giving up Tanganyika would leave Kenya wedged in between Italian Abyssinia and German Tanganyika. The territorial link with South Africa would thus be broken. He also warned «that tropical Africa, the West Indies, and parts of Asia, would be greatly disturbed, and would intensely resent the idea of our handing over of native populations to another power».

Supported by Foreign Minister Eden, Ormsby-Gore insisted upon linking the colonial problem with a general settlement. This was a *conditio sine qua non* for both. Most other committee members were also opposed to Henderson's (who was not present) proposal «to obtain a colonial settlement with Germany in the hope that Germany would subsequently meet us in regard to our own desiderata». Henderson clearly advised against a link between a colonial deal and a general settlement. The ambassador hoped that Germany would become more accommodating once a deal had been reached. It was finally agreed upon to recall ambassador Henderson from Berlin for consultation and discussion. Paris would not be informed of Chamberlain's plans.

Chamberlain's plan did not convince everyone. Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, wrote in his diary: «Quite good, as presentation, but it won't satisfy Germans»¹³². Oliver Harvey, private secretary to Eden and Lord Halifax, did not seem to be convinced either¹³³.

On January 25th, ambassador Henderson was informed of Chamberlain's new plan for Central Africa¹³⁴. He was also given notice that he would shortly be recalled to London for consultation. Henderson called on the German Foreign Minister, Baron von Neurath. He told Neurath that influential people in London opposed Chamberlain's plans for a colonial restitution, adding that a promise of a German *quid pro quo* would strengthen the Prime Minister's position. Neurath replied that the colonial question was not subject to bargaining¹³⁵. Henderson further informed London of the general mood in Berlin. He stated that Germany would object any limitation on her sovereignty. He also noticed «considerable general scepticism as to His Majesty's Government intentions to make any definite

educated guess, since no sources contain any information on a meeting between Ormsby-Gore and Leopold III.

132 David DILKS ed., *op.cit.*, p. 41 (entry for January 24, 1938).

133 John HARVEY ed., *op.cit.*, p. 78 (entry for January 24, 1938).

134 Foreign Office to Henderson, January 25, 1938 (DBFP, n° 468).

135 Memorandum by Baron von Neurath, January 26, 1938 (DGFP, n° 108).

proposals at all». Berlin was getting the impression that London was trying to win time.¹³⁶

A couple of days later, Henderson was recalled to London for consultation. Before leaving he informed Neurath that he had «to take part in work on which His Majesty's Government have been engaged for following up Halifax's conversations»¹³⁷. This consultation took place during a meeting of the cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy on February 3rd.

On the eve of this meeting, Corbin, the French ambassador in London, informed Paris about the different views on colonial appeasement in the British Commonwealth.¹³⁸ Australia and New Zealand did not want to return the former German colonies they were now administering. The Union of South Africa did not want to hear of a colonial reshuffling in Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique), because it was too close by. South Africa did however not oppose a deal involving Togoland and the Cameroons. Corbin ended his report by stating that all British efforts were in vain, since Germany did not want her former colonies back. It did however not yet dawn upon London that this was indeed the case.

Ambassador Henderson met the members of the Committee on Foreign Policy on February 3rd.¹³⁹ They asked Henderson for his opinion on Chamberlain's plans. He replied that the British public opinion would never swallow it. He would however explain the Prime Minister's scheme to Hitler, emphasising that the accommodation of Germany's colonial claims depended entirely upon the conclusion of a general settlement. He would further sound out Hitler's reaction about the fact that no territory would be returned in full sovereignty, and that restrictions would also apply. He told the Committee that Berlin would probably be unwilling to accept any such arrangement. A German *quid pro quo* was then discussed, without determining what this had to be. Henderson suggested air disarmament, which would be very advantageous for Germany since she could be bombed from all sides; and Austrian and Czech security. He stated that a German return to the League of Nations, Foreign Minister Eden's main goal, was out of the question. Chamberlain himself stressed in his concluding remarks the need for concealing the facts to the French, as «he was very much afraid of a leakage at the present day».

The question whether or not to link any colonial deal with a general settlement was still not resolved. Henderson argued against it, but Eden and Ormsby-Gore favoured the idea. The Foreign Minister and Oliver Harvey feared that Chamberlain, Lord Halifax, and Simon «would throw colonies away as a sop apart from any general settlement»¹⁴⁰. A compromise was

136 Henderson to Foreign Office, January 26 and 27, 1938 (DBFP, n° 471-472).

137 Foreign Office to Henderson, January 27, 1938 (DBFP, n° 477).

138 Corbin to Delbos, February 1, 1938 (DDF, n° 84).

139 Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, February 3, 1938, (FP (36)22 - FO 371/21655).

140 John HARVEY ed., *op.cit.*, p. 85 (entry for February 6, 1938).

not yet found and Eden and Chamberlain would eventually drift further apart on the issue.

Henderson returned to Berlin on February 4th. The German embassy in London in the meantime still had no clue as to the new plans of the British government. Embassy officials continued sending reports to Berlin guessing about the British blueprints along the old lines. Von Strempe, counsellor at the German embassy in London, for example informed his superiors of Henderson's visit to London on February 11th.¹⁴¹ He wrote that colonial restitution was in the making. German colonies under British mandate would be returned with the exception of Southwest Africa. Portuguese territory would be offered instead of German East Africa. The Portuguese would then be compensated with other British colonies. It is clear that the German embassy was not informed about Chamberlain's new strategy for Central Africa, which by February 11th, when Strempe sent his report to Berlin, was at least three weeks old.

The next step then was to agree upon a date for a meeting between Hitler and Henderson. Ambassador Henderson received instructions for his upcoming talk with Hitler.¹⁴² They were along the lines of the conclusions of the two previous meetings of the cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy. Foreign minister Eden once again stressed the importance of a general settlement. However, Henderson «should not at this stage discuss what particular territories might be transferred». Finally, Henderson was urged to arrange a meeting with Hitler before February 20th when Hitler was scheduled to give his speech before the *Reichstag*.

On February 16th 1938, Henderson had a short conversation on the colonial issue with Göring during the annual newyear's reception for the corps diplomatique. Göring emphasised that the colonial question was one of Germany's lesser priorities. Central and Eastern Europe were much more important. He further told ambassador Henderson that «Germany would give every imaginable guarantee except to renounce ultimate union between Austria and Germany (...) even if we offered the whole of Africa in exchange».¹⁴³ Göring thus made it once again clear what Germany's main foreign policy goal was and how subordinate the colonial question was to this goal. Ambassador Henderson informed London of Göring's statements¹⁴⁴, but apparently Chamberlain chose to stick to his colonial plans.

Anyhow, Eden's deadline for the Hitler-Henderson meeting passed without any conversations having taken place. Ribbentrop informed the British government on February 17th that the interview would not happen before the 20th. Henderson thought that the arrival of Seyss-Inquart, the

141 Memorandum von Strempe, February 11, 1938 (DGFP, n° 112).

142 Eden to Henderson, February 12 and 14, 1938 (DBFP, n° 512 and 514).

143 Henderson to Eden, February 16, 1938 (DBFP, n° 536).

144 Ibid.

leader of the Austrian Nazis, had caused the delay¹⁴⁵. But domestic political problems in Germany probably lay on the basis of the postponement¹⁴⁶.

But there were also political difficulties in London. Fundamental differences between Chamberlain and Eden on how to conduct foreign policy caused the latter to resign on February 20th. Eden stated in his letter of resignation: «Of late the conviction has steadily grown upon me that there has been too keen a desire on our part to make terms with others [read Germany and Italy] rather than that others should make terms with us (...) I do not believe that we can make progress in European affairs (...) if we yield to constant pressure»¹⁴⁷. He further thought that the «P.M. had no idea of what he wanted or where he was going»¹⁴⁸. Eden was succeeded by the much more Germanophile Lord Halifax.

Major political shifts had occurred in both Berlin and London during the month of February. In Germany most of the moderate politicians had been dismissed. In Britain, Anthony Eden, one of the most outspoken opponents of a colonial deal without a German quid pro quo, was replaced by someone who was much more sympathetic to Germany's demands and did not insist on a German quid pro quo. Even the Germans were pleased. Weizsäcker wrote *Mit Halifax sind wir zufriedener als mit Eden*.

As a result of the political problems, ambassador Henderson was instructed to delay any talks with Hitler until the new Foreign Minister had taken office¹⁴⁹. Hitler in the meantime, gave his speech before the *Reichstag* on February 20th¹⁵⁰. He talked about colonies in the context of *Lebensraum*, and of a densely populated Germany. «Therefore our demands will become more and more insistent as the years go by for those colonial possessions which Germany after all never deprived any other nation of, and which are practically worthless to the Powers that hold them but appear indispensable to our own nation.» However, the colonial question received scant attention in Hitler's 34 pages long speech. Much more

145 Henderson to Eden, February 17, 1938 (DBFP, n° 542).

146 The Blomberg-Fritsch Affair kept Germany busy during the first half of February. Blomberg, the Minister of War, had married a woman suspected of prostitution. Hitler and Göring had been witnesses to his wedding. Fritsch, the commander-in-chief of the German army, was charged with homosexual activities. On February 4th, Blomberg and Fritsch were both replaced by people more loyal to Hitler. Foreign Minister Neurath was supplanted by Ribbentrop, previously ambassador in London. Economics minister Dr. Schacht was also dismissed. Some of the more moderate forces in Germany lost their position to more ardent followers of Hitler. The Austrian question, and the meeting between Hitler and Schuschnigg (the Austrian chancellor) on February 12th, consumed more of Hitler's time.

147 David DILKS ed., *op.cit.*, p. 52-53 (entry for February 20, 1938).

148 John HARVEY ed., *op.cit.*, p. 95 (entry for February 19, 1938).

149 Foreign Office to Henderson, February 20, 1938 (DBFP, n° 565).

150 Norman H. BAYNES ed., *op.cit.*, p. 1390.

emphasis was laid on Austria and Czechoslovakia. Henderson described Hitler's speech as moderate ¹⁵¹.

On March 1st, Henderson was informed by Foreign Minister Ribbentrop that the interview was scheduled for Thursday, March 3rd. Henderson told Ribbentrop that London would come with «a positive proposal on the colonial question regarding Africa». But on the other hand, the British government insisted «on certain counter-concessions» regarding «the securing of peace in Europe». Ribbentrop replied that Germany had a legal claim, and that therefore there could not be any haggling over the price Berlin had to pay ¹⁵².

A couple of days before Henderson met Hitler, the ambassador was instructed by London to tell as little as possible to his French colleague in Berlin. The Prime Minister «was very much afraid of a leakage at the present stage» ¹⁵³. The British government thus no longer showed any intention of informing Paris of its negotiations with Germany. Sir Eric Phipps, the British ambassador in Paris, was told to inform the French Foreign Minister a little in advance of Henderson's meeting with Hitler, and that the ambassador would raise the colonial question ¹⁵⁴. No further details were to be given. Corbin, France's ambassador in London, asked Lord Halifax for additional information, but was given a evasive answer ¹⁵⁵.

London in the meantime, continued to prepare the meeting between Hitler and Henderson, scheduled for March 3rd. The Foreign Office memorandum, prepared by Sir Omre Sargent and discussed on February 16th, is the most detailed and lengthy document on the plans for colonial appeasement of the British government ¹⁵⁶.

The document recapitulated Chamberlain's plan for the creation of a special zone in Central Africa. Population assessments, and commercial value estimates were made for all the territories covered by the plan. Climatic factors, the presence of raw materials, infant mortality, and other factors were also taken into account. All these elements were put into various numerical tables. The document mentioned the two main difficulties in transferring colonies to Germany. Legally, the approval of the parliament or of the League of Nations in the case of mandates would be necessary. Psychologically, it would be difficult to cede old British colonies which had developed a bond of loyalty to the British Crown. Swapping natives might further have a negative impact on other parts of the British empire, and especially India, Egypt, and the Middle East.

151. Henderson to Foreign Office, February 20, 1938 (DBFP, n° 567).

152. Henderson to Halifax, March 1, 1938 (DBFP, n° 603).

153. See footnote 139.

154. Eden to Phipps, February 14, 1938 (DBFP, n° 515).

155. Halifax to Phipps, February 25, 1938 (DBFP, n° 593).

156. Memorandum prepared by the Foreign Office, and the Colonial Office on the search for a solution on the colonial problem in Tropical Africa, February 16, 1938 IC 1305/G - FO 371/21679).

Six different courses were discussed which could result in an Anglo-German colonial agreement. Course A envisaged the return of all of Germany's former colonies, including Tanganyika. This path had already been advocated by Eden, but had its disadvantages. The British air route to South Africa would be interrupted, and the position of Kenya would become precarious, as she would be wedged in between Italian Somaliland and German Tanganyika. However, Belgium could be asked to cede a small strip of territory along Lake Tanganyika, allowing Great Britain to send military aircraft by that route to South Africa.

Course B equaled course A except for the return of Tanganyika. Kenya and Uganda, or Northern Rhodesia and Nyassaland, or parts of Nigeria could be offered to Germany as a substitution for Tanganyika. The presence of raw materials and numerous white settlers in for instance Northern Rhodesia, and strategical considerations made this course impossible however.

Course C focussed on the transfer of a non British colony as a replacement for Tanganyika. Portuguese Angola and East Africa, the Belgian Congo, and French West or Equatorial Africa were considered potential candidates for this transfer. Portugal however had not received any German territory after the Great War and would probably refuse to cooperate. French losses could be compensated with British territory, even outside Africa (e.g. some Caribbean Islands). The Belgians were expected to make a contribution, since they had been given Ruanda-Urundi after the war. Northern Congo could be offered to Germany, with Belgian compensations in Tanganyika, and a promise that she could keep Ruanda-Urundi. Inaccessibility, the lack of an outlet to the sea, and the absence of mineral wealth would however make the area everything except acceptable to the Germans.

Course D was labeled as a patchwork solution. All countries involved — Great Britain, France, Belgium, and Portugal — would make territorial concessions to Germany. The Belgians would lose an area in Southwest Congo, roughly the size of Ruanda-Urundi. Belgium would receive compensation in Tanganyika. It was a very complex plan. Compensations would include territories such as the Seychelles, Borneo, Dominica, and the Solomon Islands. It was without any doubt the most impractical of all proposals. Monetary compensations were also another possibility.

Course E envisaged the return of Togoland and the Cameroons, and *something more*. That something would have to be contributed by Belgium, Portugal, and France, with compensations by the British.

Course F, the final proposal, restituted only Togoland and the Cameroons to Germany. The British knew however that Berlin would not be satisfied with this solution, and that there would be need to compensate France.

It should be clear that all these proposals were in reality unworkable, and too complicated, not at least because too many different parties were involved: Great Britain, Germany, France, Belgium, and Portugal. It would therefore be very difficult to reach any agreement at all. And London was aware of this.

The memorandum therefore concentrated on Chamberlain's proposal for the establishment of an entirely new regime in Tropical Africa. Prime Minister Chamberlain had in mind an area whose borders ran as follows: the northern border ran south of French West Africa, Equatorial Africa, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Ethiopia and Somaliland; the southern border of the area under consideration ran south of Portuguese Angola, the Belgian Congo, Tanganyika, and Portuguese Mozambique. This region did however not include the British territories of Rhodesia and Nyassaland, forming a marked salient northwards into the area under consideration. There was apparently an effort to keep as much British colonies as possible out of the designated area. The former German Togoland also lay outside of the area. It was suggested that it might be ceded to Germany in full sovereignty. The zone did however cover all of Belgium's and Portugal's African possessions.

The memorandum continued enumerating all possible obstacles. Portugal would certainly cause troubles. Paris would perhaps agree, if French West Africa was not included. «But there seems no reason to suppose that the Belgian Government would be unwilling to accept such a scheme.» This was however very doubtful in the light of the statements made in the Senate by the Belgian Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak early in December 1937.¹⁵⁷ It was further feared that Germany might initially agree to Chamberlain's plans only to free herself from all restrictions at a later stage. There was even the possibility that she would eventually establish full sovereignty.

The main colonial powers, including Germany, would get some territories to administer in the designated area. Restrictions would however apply. Slave trade and forced labour were not allowed. The religious rights and the properties of the natives were to be respected. Freedom of trade and communications needed to be observed. Immigration into the area could not be restricted. Freedom of religion and conscience, and the rights of missionaries were also emphasised. No native armies could be raised. Naval and military limitations also applied.

An International Commission for Tropical Africa would keep an eye on the compliance with the restrictions. England, France, Belgium, Portugal, Germany, and possibly Italy would be represented in the commission, whose permanent offices would be in the centrally located Elisabethville, in the Belgian Congo. The commission would examine the annual reports of the administrators, and settle disputes. Large scale public works, economical

157 See footnote 105.

matters, aviation, and public health would also be part of the commission's task.

This Foreign Office memorandum was very concrete and detailed, but at the same time also very complex. The involvement of too many different parties with different interests, and the prospects of worldwide compensations, would have made implementation of the plan a real Gordian knot. Nor does the plan make mention of any German quid pro quo, something former Foreign Minister Eden had always ardently pleaded for.

The minutes of the cabinet meeting of March 2nd — the day before the meeting between Hitler and ambassador Henderson — summarised Chamberlain's plans in a few sentences. «The idea was to treat this zone as a field for a new experiment in colonial administration. The existing mandates would be surrendered, and all the Powers holding territories in the area would agree to adopt and apply certain principles on such matters as demilitarization, the treatment of Natives, Trade and Communications. Room would be found in the area for territory for administration by Germany»¹⁵⁸.

Henderson was instructed to tell the press that he was having an interview with Hitler «on current questions affecting the two countries»¹⁵⁹. The British ambassadors in Rome, Brussels, Lisbon, and Washington were told to vaguely inform the governments to which they were accredited of the Henderson-Hitler talks¹⁶⁰. The oral communication had to be made on March 3rd, the day of the actual meeting. The Foreign Office further informed them that Henderson would «take some soundings in Berlin with the object of finding out on what lines it might be possible to find a solution of the various problems at issue, including the colonial question, Central Europe, and disarmament»¹⁶¹. His Majesty's representatives in Brussels and Lisbon were furthermore instructed to assure the Belgian and Portuguese governments that «there was no intention whatever of trying to reach a settlement with Germany in the Colonial field on the basis of a deal at the expense of other Colonial Powers»¹⁶². This clearly contradicts the above mentioned Foreign Office memorandum. London was willing to make a deal at the expense of Portugal and/or Belgium and/or France¹⁶³.

158 Extract from Cabinet Conclusion No. 10 of March 2, 1938, March 2, 1938 (DBFP, n° 606).

159 Halifax to Henderson, March 2, 1938 (DBFP, n° 605).

160 *Ibid.*

161 Lord Halifax to the British ambassadors in Lisbon, Brussels, Paris, and Rome, March 2, 1938 (FO C371/21655).

162 *Ibid.*

163 Gerhard L. Weinberg states that King Leopold III of Belgium knew about the colonial deal Great Britain was trying to arrange. The King may have been informed during his visit to London on March 22nd and 23rd, some three weeks after Henderson and Hitler had met. Among others, the King talked to former Foreign Minister Eden and Simon (Gerhard L. WEINBERG, *op.cit.*, p. 133 and Roger KEYES, *op.cit.*, p. 71).

Sir Nevile Henderson met Hitler on March 3rd.¹⁶⁴ Apart from Hitler and Henderson, the meeting was also attended by German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, and Hitler's chief interpreter Paul Schmidt. The ambassador kicked off by urging Hitler not to inform the French, Belgians, Portuguese, or Italians on the outcome of the talks. He then explained Chamberlain's plans for a special zone in Central Africa. The German chancellor was asked if he could agree at least in principle with this plan; and what kind of quid pro quo he was willing to make. Henderson made clear that London was thinking of disarmament (limiting the number of bombing planes) and pacification in Czechoslovakia and Austria.

Hitler replied that it was better to wait a few more years, and then changed the subject to Austria and Czechoslovakia. Henderson however insisted and asked the chancellor whether he was prepared, in principle, to participate in a new colonial regime; and what quid pro quo Berlin was willing to make in order to obtain peace and security in Europe.

Later during the discussion, Henderson indicated on the globe the area under consideration. Hitler remarked that the entire plan was too complicated and proposed a simple return of the German colonies, which, he feared, would be objected by Belgium and Portugal. Hitler was afraid that Brussels and Lisbon would get the feeling that Germany was demanding something from them to which she was not entitled. Henderson however, expressed his belief that France, Belgium, Portugal, and Italy would in the end cooperate.

It also became clear that Hitler did not want to link the colonial question with Central and Eastern Europe. At the end of the meeting, Henderson writes in his memoirs, it was clear that as far as Hitler was concerned «the colonial problem could wait for 4, 6, 8 or even 10 years. He promised however to give me a written reply on the subject, and I left Berlin a year and a half later without having ever received it». Henderson continued «It was clearly not colonies that interested Hitler», but the colonial question «was merely being exploited for propaganda purposes».¹⁶⁵

164 Ribbentrop to Henderson, March 4 and 5, 1938 (DGFP, n° 138 and 141). Henderson to Halifax, March 2, 1938 (DBFP, n° 609). Sir Nevile HENDERSON, *op.cit.*, p. 114-117. Henderson's account of the meeting, as written down in his memoirs, is very superficial and hardly offers any details. Henderson deliberately chose not to reveal all details in his memoirs which were published in 1940, only two years after his talk with Hitler. A detailed account might have caused an angry reaction within the Belgian government which at that time was living in exile in London and was a political and military ally.

165 Sir Nevile HENDERSON, *op.cit.*, p. 117, 58 and 115. Hitler's remark that the colonial problem could easily wait four, six, eight or even ten years may refer to the scheduled completion in 1944-1946 of Germany's Z-plan for the construction of six battleships, after which she could take the colonies by force (Klaus HILDEBRAND, *op.cit.*, p. 558 and 598).

It finally dawned upon ambassador Henderson that Hitler was not at all interested in colonies. His primary concern was Central and Eastern Europe. Besides, Chamberlain's plan for Tropical Africa was far too complicated. If there was any German excitement at all about colonial restitution, then it was limited to the simple return of her former colonies, and not to Chamberlain's complicated solutions. By early March 1938, Austria was Hitler's foreign policy goal number one. The colonial question was way down his list of priorities.

The disappointing outcome of the Henderson-Hitler talks did not go unnoticed in Great Britain. On March 4th, Sir Alexander Cadogan wrote in his diary: «It was completely negative. There are only two alternatives. One, to administer oxygen to the conversations. Two, to announce that everything possible had been done»¹⁶⁶.

Henderson did not have any idea when to expect the written reply promised by Hitler. And he did not propose to «show any anxiety on the subject»¹⁶⁷.

On March 9th, the British Foreign Office issued a statement saying that Henderson had acted on his own behalf, that his proposals were purely hypothetical, and that the British government had not studied the problem thoroughly yet. To the contrary: Ambassador Henderson did not act on his own behalf, but had gotten clear instructions from London. And saying that the government had yet to take a close look at the colonial problem is a clear lie: the issue had been very thoroughly talked about in at least six meetings of the cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy between the beginning of January and the start of March.

On March 13th, Germany annexed Austria (*Anschluss*). It clearly demonstrated to the British that Hitler could not behave as a good European. Therefore, and since a general settlement had turned out to be impossible, London finally abandoned its policy of colonial appeasement.

Henderson wrote «that after Germany's last display of jungle law (...) [he found] (...) it difficult to believe that His Majesty's Government would be in the mood to think about colonies»¹⁶⁸. Prime minister Neville Chamberlain said in the House of Commons on March 16th that «it is obvious that in the present circumstances nothing further can be done about this question»¹⁶⁹.

It had taken the British a long time to realise the futility of the Anglo-German conversations on colonial appeasement¹⁷⁰.

166 David DILKS, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

167 Henderson to Halifax, March 8, 1938 (DBFP, n° 618).

168 Quoted in Foreign Office Memorandum, April 21, 1938 (C3775/184/18 - FO 371/21680).

169 Quoted in Wolfe W. SCHMOKEL, *op.cit.*, p. 121.

170 For the colonial question after March 1938, see Klaus HILDEBRAND, *op.cit.*, p. 564 and following, and Wolfe W. SCHMOKEL, *op.cit.*, p. 121 and following.

CONCLUSION

«Never again was there to be such a definite possibility of peaceful colonial revision in favour of Germany as in early 1938»¹⁷¹. But «in the light of the Hoßbach Minutes the various subsequent efforts of the British government to appease Hitler with colonial concessions, were doomed to failure»¹⁷².

Indeed, if Hitler had really wanted the former German colonies in Africa back, he would have concluded a deal during the first months of 1938, when London's fervour for colonial appeasement was at its zenith. But Berlin did not want the colonies back if restitution also meant behaving like a «good European» in Central and Eastern Europe. Germany's foreign policy goals in that area far exceeded her appetite for her former colonial empire in Africa.

The idea of colonial appeasement was partially based upon the misinterpretation of the speeches of German politicians (including Hitler himself) and of various articles in the German press. London failed to realise that Berlin used the colonial issue primarily for its domestic propagandistic value, something even Henderson admitted in the end.

The Anglo-German conversations (negotiations have never really been conducted) on colonial appeasement can be divided in two distinct phases. The first one runs from October 1937 to December 1938. A simple restitution — whether or not with the inclusion of Tanganyika — was envisaged. Emphasis was also laid on the need of a German *quid pro quo*. The second phase started in January 1938 and ended in March 1938. A German *quid pro quo* was no longer a *conditio sine qua non*. An entirely new plan for colonial reshufflement in Central Africa was developed by Chamberlain. This plan went much further than a simple colonial restitution, and involved not only the British African empire, but also the French, Belgian and Portuguese colonies in Central Africa.

Finally, Berlin was much more honest in its dealing with Portugal and Belgium on the colonial issue than was Great Britain. Germany reassured the Portuguese and Belgian governments several times that she was not interested in these countries's African empires. And this was indeed true. London however, more than once pulled its two oldest allies's leg by stating that their African colonies were not being discussed and that they would be consulted in due time if their overseas territories became part of a plan for colonial restitution.

During the Anglo-German conversations, Germany at least honoured her declaration of October 13th 1937 in which she guaranteed Belgium's

171 Wolfe W. SCHMOKEL, *op.cit.*, p. 121.

172 *Id.*, p. 106.

territorial integrity. Besides, Ruanda-Urundi, once part of German East Africa, was never officially discussed between the two countries. Great Britain on the other hand, did not show very much respect for the Belgian efforts to follow an independent foreign policy. By saying no to the British proposals, Hitler saved London from a lot of future embarrassment.