

French Public Attitudes towards the Prospect of War in 1938-39: 'Pacifism' or 'War Anxiety'?

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Abstract: This article challenges the received wisdom that French public opinion was infused with pacifist sentiment during the 1930s, and that this sentiment in turn contributed to the French defeat of 1940. It will suggest that French public attitudes towards the prospect of war can be better defined as 'war anxiety' rather than the value-laden term 'pacifist'. Taking as a test case the period between the Munich Agreement of September 1938 and the outbreak of the Second World War less than a year later, the article will tease out the necessary distinction between 'pacifism' and 'war anxiety'. By employing a notion of 'representations' of public opinion, it will be shown how French opinion was demonstrably less pacifist than many existing analyses assume. Instead, it will be contended that the public's anxieties with regard to a future war manifested themselves in a variety of ways, of which pacifism was merely one marginal example. Indeed, 'war anxiety' increasingly demanded that France prepare for an inevitable conflict, in stark contrast to simply retreating into a defeatist mindset and thus establishing the conditions for the defeat in 1940.

Pacifism is widely regarded to have been a defining characteristic of public attitudes towards the prospect of war in interwar France.¹ French foreign

¹ Pacifism was evoked, either explicitly or implicitly, in several of the earliest autopsies of the French defeat of 1940, including A. Werth, *The Twilight of France, 1933-1940*, (New York, 1966 [1942]), C. Micaud, *The French Right and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939: A Study of Public Opinion*, (New York, 1964 [1943]) and M. Bloch, *L'étrange défaite: témoignage écrit en 1940*, (Paris, 1946). It has consistently been alluded to in the subsequent historiography, notably L. Mysyrowicz, *Autopsie d'une défaite: origines de l'effondrement militaire français de 1940*, (Lausanne, 1973), J.-B. Duroselle, *La décadence, 1932-1939*, (Paris, 1979), J.-P. Azéma, *De Munich à la libération, 1938-1944*, (Paris, 2002 [1979]), E. Weber, *The hollow years: France in the 1930s*, (New York, 1996), and J. Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940*, (Oxford, 2003). Analyses focusing on French opinion also emphasize the prevalence of pacifism, including J.-L. Crémieux-Brilhac *Les Français de l'an 40*, 2 vols, (Paris, 1990), P. Laborie, *L'opinion française sous Vichy*, (Paris, 1990) and Y. Lacaze, *L'opinion publique française et la crise de Munich*, (Bern, 1991). Several works focus on pacifism itself, notable N. Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France, 1919-1939*, (Oxford, 1991), F.-G. Dreyfus, 'Le pacifisme en France, 1930-1940', in M. Vaïsse (ed.), *Le*

policy-makers, it is argued, were constrained by a profoundly pacifist French populace, desperate to avoid war. This article, however, will argue that the term ‘pacifism’ has been too broadly applied to interwar French public opinion and thus fails to explain sufficiently public attitudes to war. Specifically, the negative connotations of pacifism – namely fear of war, unwillingness to fight, defeatism, and even collaborationism – were less widespread in 1930s France than the notion of a pacifist-infused masses implies. In its place, a broader concept of ‘war anxiety’ will be developed. Less rigid than ‘pacifism’, ‘war anxiety’ is more applicable to sections of French opinion that feared war but were not ‘pacifist’ in the doctrinal sense of term. ‘War anxiety’ incorporates not only ‘pacifist’ tendencies of opinion but also those less easily identifiable, politicized or voluble tendencies regarding the prospect of war. A concept of war anxiety is beneficial as it encompasses a diverse range of sentiments and opinions, and thus better reflects the nuances of French opinion.²

Essentially, they are two defining characteristics of war anxiety: firstly, it was inspired by the prevailing sentiment that the Great War must never be repeated; secondly, it was founded upon an acute unease regarding the potential repercussions of another conflict. Indeed, the term ‘next war anxiety’ is arguably more accurate, reflecting the concern that technological advancements since 1914-18, particularly in terms of air power, meant that the next war would be more destructive than the last. This article will

pacifisme en Europe des années 1920 aux années 1950, (Brussels, 1993) and J.-P. Biondi, *La mêlée des pacifistes, 1914-1945*, (Paris, 2000). Finally, a number of works discuss pacifism within certain sections of French society, such as war veterans (A. Prost, *Les anciens combattants et la société française*, 3 vols, (Paris, 1977), esp. vol. 3, *mentalités et idéologies*), intellectuals (J.-F. Sirinelli, *Génération intellectuelle: Khâgneux et Normaliens dans l'entre-deux-guerres*, (Paris, 1994 [1988])), the role of women in the pacifist movement (S. Reynolds, *France between the Wars: Gender and Politics*, (London, 1996)), and schoolteachers (M. Siegel, *The Moral Disarmament of France: Education, Patriotism and Pacifism, 1914-1940*, (Cambridge, 2004)). Pacifism within the French peasantry has also been explored (I. Boussard, ‘Le pacifisme paysan’, in R. Rémond and J. Bourdin (eds.), *La France et les Français, 1938-1939*, (Paris, 1978), pp. 59-75, as has the impact of pacifist sentiment amongst French socialists (R. Gombin, ‘Socialisme et pacifisme’ in *La France et les Français*, pp. 245-260 and M. Bilis, *Socialistes et pacifistes, 1933-1939: ou l'intenable dilemme des socialistes français*, (Paris, 1979)).

² Norman Ingram has noted the semantic debate on the use of the term, with the French concept of pacifism being more all-encompassing than the Anglo-Saxon usage, which tends to be more value-laden. N. Ingram, ‘Repressed Memory Syndrome: Interwar French Pacifism and the Attempt to Recover France’s Pacifist Past’, *French History*, 18 (2004), p. 316.

examine war anxiety in the period between the Munich Agreement in September 1938 and the outbreak of the Second World War less than a year later. This period is crucial as it is widely argued that Munich marked the zenith of French pacifism, an argument that initially took hold in the early years of the war. In 1941, Louis Lévy wrote how, 'At the time of Munich, all the hidden pacifism that had lain in the hearts of some of the working-class leaders came to the surface'.³ Similarly, the apparent 'hardening' of public opinion after Munich is often equated with a diminution of pacifist sentiment.⁴

However, although doctrinal pacifism certainly lost ground after Munich, it would be misleading to assume that all anxieties regarding a future conflict had vanished. War anxiety remained, only now it dictated that French policymakers adopt a firmer posture, deterring the dictators whilst simultaneously preparing France for war. Consequently, although war anxiety was still a constraint, it did not induce the defeatism so often associated with pacifism. By 1939, perceptions of public opinion held by the policymaking elites no longer compelled them to avoid a policy of firmness against the dictators. On the contrary, war anxiety demanded a concerted effort to prepare the nation for an impending conflict.

I

In order to analyse public attitudes towards the prospect of war, it is essential to both develop a methodological framework with which to understand the troublesome concept of public opinion. Evidently, 'public opinion' can emanate from a diverse array of groups and organisations throughout society. Nevertheless, approaching the question via a notion of representations can reveal how certain tendencies of opinion assumed a

³ L. Lévy, *The Truth about France*, translated by W. Pickles, (London, 1941), p. 119. This interpretation remains prominent, particularly the assumption that Munich was the 'apogee' of pacifism. See J.-P. Azéma, *De Munich à la liberation*, pp. 12-22. See also J. Jackson, *The Fall of France*, pp. 147-149, for a similar viewpoint.

⁴ Indeed, it is commonly argued that the decline of pacifism began in the mid-1930s. A. Adamthwaite, for example, suggests that 'pacifism waned after 1936'. *Grandeur and Misery: France's Bid for Power in Europe, 1914-1940*, (New York, 1995), p. 169.

dominant position, not only transcending and marginalizing others, but often concealing them altogether.⁵ To an extent, such a methodology borrows from Pierre Laborie, who suggests that using representation as an historical tool enables one to identify, within the multifarious expressions of opinion, how specific dominant tendencies emerge, around which ‘a common notion of opinion’ can be identified. This shared perception of opinion allows the historian to ‘define the historical status of the phenomena of opinion, and its place in the explanatory processes’.⁶ Identifying dominant tendencies of opinion through the prism of representations enables a more sophisticated analytical framework to emerge, illustrating how the intangible phenomena of opinion was reduced to a more manageable series of dominant representations.

This article will consider two distinct categories of representation through which French public opinion in the late 1930s was perceived by the decision-making elites. Firstly, ‘reactive’ representations of opinion; that is, the immediate and spontaneous reactions of the public to circumstances/events as they occur. These forms of representation can include the contemporary press, recent police reports on the state of opinion, election results, an analysis of political leaflets, posters and pamphlets in current circulation, and the conversations, gossip, correspondence and rumours within social networks of friends, family and colleagues. This category of representations therefore reflects how public opinion is fluid, constantly in transition, fluctuating and diverse. Secondly, there are certain ‘residual’ representations, which can be defined as the remnants of previous memories and experiences, the more general tendencies of opinion considered characteristic of previous years, even previous decades. These lack the specificity of the contemporary, reactive

⁵ The study of representations has been pioneered largely within the disciplines of sociology and psychology. For a good introduction to these theoretical approaches, see S. Moscovici, ‘The phenomenon of social representations’, in S. Moscovici (ed.) *Social Representations: Explorations in Social Psychology*, (Cambridge, 2000 [1981]), and ⁵ S. Hall, ‘The Work of Representation’, in S. Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, (London, 1997).

⁶ P. Laborie, *Les Français des années troubles*, (Paris, 2003), p. 38.

representations, but nonetheless retained sufficient power to be habitually projected onto perceptions of current opinion.

It is within this category of representation that pacifism was prominent. Such was the pervasiveness of the idea that French society had assumed a pacifist tinge following the carnage and horror of the Great War that it formed a potent 'residual' representation of public opinion, persuading the policymaking elites that French opinion remained pacifist throughout the interwar years. It was thus difficult to conceive that the majority of the people would, just twenty years later, have abandoned this sentiment to the extent that they would favour resistance to appeasement. This article will suggest that residual representations of opinion can be overemphasized, interpreted in such a way as to distort reality by means of a dominant and vocal minority providing formative representations that are subsequently projected onto the wider corpus of opinion. As Jean-Noël Jeanneney asserts, 'the intense opinion of an active minority often exerts more pressure on proceedings than the half-hearted reactions of an indifferent majority'.⁷ Moreover, such a residual representation can become so pervasive that it retains a potentially unrepresentative influence, stubbornly refusing to yield to the changes and fluctuations of opinion(s) in response to the progression of time and events. Indeed, they become, to borrow from James Joll, 'unspoken assumptions'.⁸

In interwar France, pacifism was a peculiarly pervasive representation of public opinion. It is widely held that French opinion was, if not pacifist, certainly infused with an anxiety regarding the prospect of war. However, clearly differentiating between pacifism and a more widespread anxiety regarding the 'next' war facilitates a more accurate understanding of the public's apprehensions regarding the prospect of war. Of particular interest here is the prospect of aerial bombardment, and how technological advancements since the Great War meant that any future conflict would be

⁷ J.-N. Jeanneney, *Une histoire des médias*, (Paris), p. 16.

⁸ J. Joll, *1914: The Unspoken Assumptions*, an inaugural lecture delivered 25 April 1968 at the London School of Economics and Political Science, (London, 1968). See also, Z. Steiner, 'Elitism and Foreign Policy: The Foreign Office before the Great War', in B. J. C. McKercher and D. J. Moss (eds.), *Shadow and Substance in British Foreign Policy, 1895-1939: Memorial Essays Honouring C. J. Lowe*, (Edmonton, 1984), pp. 19-55.

even more devastating. Robert Young has noted that ‘literature on the subject of air war rarely use[d] Berlin as a figurative example of an air target. Rather, the French used Tours, or Dijon, or Reims, or, especially, Paris’.⁹ Similarly, Robert Paxton notes that, ‘War meant poison gas and the bombing of cities. Paris would be worse than Guernica’.¹⁰

However, such fears are better characterized as manifestations of war anxiety rather than pacifism. In contradistinction from pacifism, war anxiety was neither an explicit fear of war nor a deeply-held conviction that war was unjustifiable. Similarly it would not automatically manifest itself as defeatism in the event of war. This distinction between pacifism and war-anxiety – or more accurately, anxiety as regards the ‘next war’ – is one that needs to be made. It is rather crude simply to label the desire for peace as pacifism (in all its guises, ideological, doctrinal, religious etc.). Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that as war became increasingly likely, the distinction between pacifism and a more intangible ‘anxiety’, or even ‘fear’ of war became more conspicuous. Such an anxiety was arguably far more widespread than pacifism, in the stricter definition of the term. Moreover, it was shared by the public and policymaking elites alike.

Therefore, during the period 1938-9, the marginalization of doctrinal pacifism ensured that the residual representation of widespread French pacifism was gradually superseded. This did not, however, occur rapidly, as the idea of a pacifist French society was particularly entrenched. During the preceding years, pacifist doctrine had been espoused by numerous pacifist organizations, politicians and within the popular press. Consequently, the sentiments of a vocal minority were perceived to be a mirror of mainstream opinion. This is, of course, unsurprising, as the aftermath of the First World War provided a perfect environment in which pacifism could flourish, nurturing a deep-rooted conviction that it never be repeated. The pre-war representation of war as patriotic, of ‘*Mourir pour la patrie, c’est le sort le*

⁹ R. Young, ‘The Use and Abuse of Fear: France and the Air Menace in the 1930s’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 2 (1987), p. 103. Similarly, Mysyrowicz suggests that ‘The idea of peace, built on the terror of aerial and chemical warfare, persisted until the epoch of Munich’, *Autopsie d’une défaite*, pp. 177-178.

¹⁰ R. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944*, (New York, 1982), p. 11.

plus beau,¹¹ was dramatically superseded. As Antoine Prost has observed, war was now represented as horrifically modern, reflecting the technological advancements made since the Great War.¹² Pacifism also permeated cinema, literature and radio,¹³ whilst pacifist doctrine was vocally advocated within the legions of *anciens combattants*¹⁴, the teaching profession¹⁵ and amongst students.¹⁶ Above all, a visceral hatred of war emerged from the bitter experiences of 1914-18, the unprecedented loss of life, and the concomitant physical and psychological scars.

Consequently, at a time of profound ideological polarisation, French society has been represented as unanimous only in the shared conviction ‘*Surtout pas de guerre*’.¹⁷ But a fundamental problem arises from the tendency to equate pacifism with defeatism. The distinction between the two concepts is too often blurred, stemming partly from attempts to use the history of the interwar period as an explanatory tool with which to analyse the defeat of 1940. Indeed, within the vibrant historiography of the fall of France, the ‘decadence’ thesis implicitly suggests that the seeds of moral decay, sown in the legacy of the Great War and nourished throughout the interwar period, resulted in a ‘decadent’ France, infused with defeatism,

¹¹ From a popular military hymn of the First World War, cited in C. Rearick, *The French in Love and War: Popular Culture in the Era of the World Wars*, (New Haven, 1997), p. 1.

¹² A. Prost, *Republican Identities in War and Peace: Representations of France in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, translated by J. Winter and H. McPhail, (Oxford, 2002), p. 98.

¹³ E. G. Strebel, for example, claims that French cinema ‘contributed to a defeatist mentality, to a psychological acceptance of the Munich agreements and to the 1940 defeat’. ‘Political Polarisation and French Cinema, 1934-39’, in N. Pronay and D. W. Spring (eds.), *Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918-45*, (London, 1982). See also Rearick, *The French in Love and War*, pp. 220-241. Similarly, popular literature recalled the horrors of the last war and predicted the even more catastrophic consequences of the next. See Mysyrowicz, *Autopsie d’une défaite*, pp. 278-304. Elsewhere, Crémieux-Brilhac has argued that radio perpetuated fears of the ‘next’ war by graphically portraying the devastation of aerial bombardment, *Les Français de l’An 40, tome I: La guerre, oui ou non?* p. 85.

¹⁴ For pacifism among French war veterans, see Prost, *Les anciens combattants*, iii.

¹⁵ Weber, *The Hollow Years*, p. 20. Mona Siegel concludes that the teachers’ pacifist leanings became ‘a matter of political importance to the entire nation’, ‘To the Unknown Mother of the Unknown Soldier’: Pacifism, Feminism, and the Politics of Sexual Difference among French Institutrices between the Wars’, *French Historical Studies*, 22 (1999), p. 429. See also idem, *The Moral Disarmament of France*.

¹⁶ J. Jackson, *The Fall of France*, pp. 147-148. Jean-François Sirinelli notes how the pacifism within the Écoles Normales ‘remained solidly established’ throughout the 1930s. *Génération intellectuelle*, p. 534.

¹⁷ This observation was notably made by Duroselle in *La décadence*, p. 169.

simply unable to meet the demands of modern war.¹⁸ Implicitly or explicitly, such analyses suggest that pacifism left the nation psychologically unprepared, riddled with defeatist sentiment.

Although revisionist and post-revisionist interpretations have challenged this thesis,¹⁹ the impact of pacifism continues to be given prominence, as many of those who generally refute the more critical conclusions of the decadence school continue to suggest that pacifism contributed to the politics of the French defeat. Julian Jackson, for example, suggests that France emerged from the Great War a ‘profoundly pacifist society’, the zenith of which was the Munich Agreement of September 1938. Similarly, François-Georges Dreyfus has written that French policy-makers were conscious of a ‘latent pacifism and refusal of war’, thus contributing to ‘the defeat, the acceptance of an armistice, and the Vichy regime’.²⁰

Such analyses invariably use pacifism as a ‘catch-all’ term, encompassing many diverse sentiments regarding the prospect of war. However, several analyses provide more sophisticated arguments, distinguishing between different varieties of French pacifism.²¹ More specifically, Mona Siegel’s analysis of the pacifism of French schoolteachers reveals not only how different forms of pacifism infused their politics, but

¹⁸ The best-known expression of this argument is Duroselle’s *La décadence*, although the fundamental tenets of the argument are forwarded more systematically elsewhere, notably in A. Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, (London, 1979), P. Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1932-1936*, (Princeton, 1988) and N. Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe: The Dilemmas of French Impotence, 1919-1940*, (Cambridge, 1992). Weber’s descriptive account of French society in the 1930s, *The Hollow Years*, also lends itself to the decadence thesis.

¹⁹ For a more detailed overview of the historiography, see P. Jackson, ‘Returning to the Fall of France: Recent Work on the Causes and Consequences of the “Strange Defeat” of 1940’, *Modern & Contemporary France*, 12 (2004), 513-536.

²⁰ J. Jackson, *The Fall of France*, pp. 147-149; Dreyfus, ‘Le pacifisme en France’, p. 144.

²¹ Ingram distinguishes between a *pacifisme ancien style*, essentially an ideological pacifism prominent during the 1920s, and a more ideologically motivated *pacifisme nouveau style* that emerged in the 1930s. *The Politics of Dissent*, p. 8. Ingram’s *pacifisme ancien style* can be considered akin to the category of ideological pacifists identified by Roger Chickering in his study of German pacifism prior to World War One, *Imperial Germany and a World Without War: The Peace Movement and German Society, 1892-1914*, (Princeton, 1975), whilst *pacifisme nouveau style* can be seen as resembling the utopian pacifists of Chickering’s analysis. Ingram also identifies a third strand, ‘feminist pacifism’. See idem, “Nous allons vers les monastères”: French Pacifism and the Crisis of the Second World War’, in M. S. Alexander and K. Mouré (eds.), *Crisis and Renewal in France, 1918-1962*, (Oxford, 2002), p. 133. Others who distinguish between various forms of pacifism include Biondi, *La mêlée des pacifistes*, p. 141 and Dreyfus, ‘Le pacifisme en France’, p. 139.

also how they manifested themselves as a ‘patriotic pacifism’, encapsulating a widespread disdain for war without undermining loyalty to the Republic.²² Furthermore, Siegel rightly notes that French schoolteachers’ pacifism did not foster ‘an atmosphere of decadence’; by contrast, their patriotic pacifism helps explain why, when the ‘Republic was directly threatened, French men and women overwhelmingly rallied to its defence’.²³

Although numerous varieties of pacifism have been detected, the tendency to employ a more nebulous conception is problematic. The multifaceted nature of public opinion means that employing such terminology inevitably results in over-simplification. Pacifism is simply a single term used to describe multifarious attitudes. As Pierre Laborie observes, the only area of convergence is the aspiration for peace.²⁴ War anxiety, therefore, is a better label for such a multitude of attitudes, avoiding the over-simplification that ensues when applying the more value-laden term ‘pacifism’. Indeed, Norman Ingram has alluded to a similar concept in defining the *pacifisme nouveau style* that emerged in the late 1920s, suggesting that it was partially defined by an anxiety regarding the next war.²⁵ Pacifism, he suggests, was appealing by virtue of the ‘increasing sense that another war could destroy civilization because of the progress made by science and technology since the end of the Great War’.²⁶

Ingram’s analysis is informed by Martin Ceadel’s typology, particularly the latter’s definition of the ‘modern-war pacifists’ who argued that just wars were no longer possible ‘in view of the indiscriminate destructiveness of modern technology’.²⁷ Consequently, ‘modern-war pacifists’ were ‘the first to believe that it was possible to show, on a utilitarian calculation of the likely pros and cons, that no future war could ever be worth fighting’.²⁸ Borrowing from Ceadel, Ingram provides a conceptual distinction between different varieties of French pacifism. However, Ingram’s conceptual framework is

²² Siegel, *The Moral Disarmament of France*, p. 227.

²³ Ibid. p. 227.

²⁴ Laborie, *L’Opinion française sous Vichy*, pp. 87-89. For more on the diversity of pacifism, see Biondi’s appropriately titled *La mêlée des pacifistes*.

²⁵ Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent*, p. 129.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 127.

²⁷ M. Ceadel, *Thinking about Peace and War*, (Oxford, 1988), p. 143.

²⁸ Ibid. pp. 151-152.

applied only to overtly pacifist organisations rather than mainstream French opinion, resulting in an analysis explicitly confined to ‘those men, women and organizations in interwar France for whom peace was a primary, consistent, and overriding concern and goal’.²⁹ War anxiety, however, was not confined to these individuals or organizations. Attachment to peace was widespread in interwar France and it is therefore essential that the application of war anxiety is not confined to those with a developed and politicized pacifism.

Equally, it is imperative to avoid interpreting all manifestations of war anxiety as pacifism. A concept of war anxiety benefits from a definitional clarity, and is thus better suited to explaining the more general attitudes of the French public towards the prospect of war. In particular, it avoids the negative implications of pacifism, notably the belief that pacifists are ‘scared’ of war. Although many dreaded the devastation of the ‘next war’, many would choose to fight if the territorial integrity of France was at stake. War anxiety was not confined to doctrinal pacifists, as the majority of French men and women during the interwar years would have unhesitatingly expressed a desire to avoid war. As Prost notes, this was true of nearly all ex-soldiers. However, Prost cannot resist equating this desire with pacifism and, moreover, projecting it onto the entirety of French opinion: ‘the whole of France was pacifist, and this pacifism was the reason why France did not oppose Hitler earlier’.³⁰

Most analyses of the late Third Republic implicitly suggest that pacifism contributed both to the capitulation at Munich in 1938 and the French defeat in 1940. Indeed, the term ‘pacifism’ immediately conjures up such negative associations. War anxiety can thus prove beneficial in moving beyond such connotations, facilitating a study of public attitudes towards the prospect of war on their own terms, rather than through the prism of the 1940 defeat. Moreover, it accounts for the fact that the number of integral or absolute pacifists was always relatively small, leading Ingram to describe his

²⁹ Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent*, p. 8.

³⁰ Prost, ‘The Impact of War on French and German Political Cultures’, *The Historical Journal*, 37 (1994), p. 210.

study of French pacifism as dealing ‘with the politics of the margins’.³¹ By contrast, war anxiety was not confined to the margins, although it was often difficult to distinguish it from the vocal representations of opinion emanating from marginal pacifist movements. Nevertheless, by 1938-9, reactive representations of public opinion demonstrated that war anxiety was more pronounced than pacifism. Consequently, it helps us to understand how the Daladier government was able to adopt a *politique de fermeté* without outrunning a seemingly pacifist public opinion.

II

In the period of 1938 preceding the Munich Agreement, reactive representations of opinion continued to reinforce the residual representation of widespread pacifist sentiment. Police reports conveyed numerous examples of the integral pacifism embraced by a small minority. At a meeting of the *Ligue Internationale des Combattants de la Paix* (LICP) on 31 March 1938, Guy Jernan, of the *Anciens Combattants Pacifistes*, argued that ‘the independence of Czechoslovakia must not be a motive for war’.³² Although the LICP was a marginal organisation, such reactive representations served to reinforce the residual perception of a pacifist French public. However, it was not only doctrinal pacifists who were deeply unsettled by the prospect of war. As Norman Ingram has noted, ‘In a country which had borne the brunt of the Great War public opinion and politicians alike took seriously the pacifist cry *‘plus jamais ça!’*’³³

As the Czechoslovakian crisis threatened to escalate into war, the residual representation of pacifism constrained French policymakers. Moreover, contemporary events exacerbated a more widespread war anxiety. The horror and revulsion provoked by the news and imagery of modern warfare in Spain heightened the conviction that such events must not be

³¹ Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent*, pp. 15-16.

³² A[rchives] de la P[réfecture] de la P[olice], BA/1777: Police report, 31 March – meeting organized by the LICP, 30 March 1938. For more on the LICP, see Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent*, *passim*.

³³ Ingram, “Nous allons vers les monastères”, p. 133.

allowed to occur in France. Newsreels, photo-journalism and evocative newspaper articles graphically relayed the horrors of war to the French people. The French Premier, Édouard Daladier was not immune to these anxieties. In a speech of 16 June 1938, he referred to the bombings in Spain as ‘an attack on civilisation itself’, lamenting the loss of ‘centuries of heritage and thousands of innocent lives’.³⁴

War anxiety greatly influenced public and political reactions to the Czechoslovakian crisis, particularly as there was no guarantee of British assistance in the event of a conflict with Germany. As the British ambassador in Paris, Sir Eric Phipps, noted, there was ‘a strong movement in right circles against France fighting for Czechoslovakia unless assured of British support’.³⁵ Such concerns were not confined to the political right. As Lacaze observes, ‘in the summer of 1938 the press continued to give all its support to Franco-British cooperation’.³⁶ For all, the spectre of war loomed on the horizon, and the potential repercussions of a future European conflict weighed heavily. The American Ambassador, William Bullitt, encapsulated the prevailing mood when informing President Roosevelt that, ‘if war should begin, the result would be such a devastation of Europe that it would make small difference which side should emerge the ostensible victor’.³⁷

Unsurprising, the willingness of the French public to go to war on behalf of Czechoslovakia was questioned. The British Military Attaché in Paris, Colonel William Fraser, had his doubts: ‘Whether or not the French are prepared to fight seems a little uncertain’. He also referred to the view of the Embassy’s press attaché, Charles Mendl, who was ‘most emphatic in his opinion that the French will not fight except in self-defence’.³⁸ Undoubtedly, certain influential circles in France were vocally hostile to intervention on

³⁴ Archives d’histoire contemporaine, Centre d’histoire de Sciences Po, Fonds Roger Genebrier, GE6: Allocution de M. Daladier, Président du Conseil, au Comité Exécutif du Parti radical socialiste, 15 June 1938.

³⁵ T[he] N[atational] A[rchives], FO 371/21599/C3388/55/17: Phipps to Halifax, 24 April 1938.

³⁶ Lacaze, *L’opinion publique française et la crise de Munich*, p. 197.

³⁷ Bullitt to Roosevelt, 31 August 1938, in O. H. Bullitt (ed.), *For the President, Personal and Secret: Correspondence between Franklin D. Roosevelt and William C. Bullitt*, (Boston, 1972), p. 283.

³⁸ TNA, WO 106/5413: Fraser to van Cutsem, 31 August 1938.

behalf of the Czechoslovakians, providing a voluble reactive representation of French opinion. The press were pivotal in furnishing such representations, not least following the publication on 7 September of a notorious leading article in *The Times* advocating the cession of the Sudeten areas to Germany. This article provoked considerable debate in the pages of the French press, with several writers applauding the stance taken by the London paper. Émile Roche, director of the Radical newspaper, *La République*, had already made such a suggestion the previous day, and cited the *Times* article with approval on both the 8th and the 9th of September. The leader of the far-right *Parti populaire français*, Jacques Doriot, in *La Liberté*, and Stéphane Lauzanne, chief editor of *Le Matin*, did likewise on 9 September, while Léon Bailby provided further favourable comment in the *Jour-Écho de Paris* on 10 September.

Similar reactive representations were provided by Pierre-Étienne Flandin, who distributed numerous leaflets and tracts around Paris advocating a peaceful settlement of the Czechoslovakian crisis. Moreover, on 14 September, he informed the British Prime Minister that French public opinion 'is more likely to be in the direction of non-intervention than that of intervention'.³⁹ Flandin also made his opinions known to the British press, commenting to staff at the Paris offices of the *Daily Express* that 'the Chief of the French Army had told him that a French defeat was certain'. The majority of the French people desired peace, he continued, '[i]t is the communists and the Jews who are leading us into this war. They are determined to push us into it'.⁴⁰ Although Flandin's comments were in keeping with the 'neo-pacifism' adopted by sections of the French right from the mid-1930s,⁴¹ the extent to which it reflected a genuine pacifist sentiment must be questioned. Indeed, it can be seen as political profiteering, the right seeking to exploit an underlying war anxiety by

³⁹ TNA, PREM 1/249: Flandin to Chamberlain, 14 September 1938.

⁴⁰ House of Lords Record Office, Beaverbrook Papers, BBK/B/293: Letter to Beaverbrook from Lord Forbes (from the Paris offices of the *Daily Express*), 25 September 1938, detailing notes of an interview with Flandin.

⁴¹ The notion of a conservative 'neo-pacifism' was noted as early as 1943 by C. Micaud, *The French Right and Nazi Germany*, pp. 152 and passim. J. Jackson has also used this terminology, in *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944*, (Oxford, 2001), pp. 89-92, as has Azéma, *De Munich à la libération*, pp. 12-14.

castigating leftist war mongering. Flandin allegedly remarked that he had embraced pacifism in order to avoid a leftist ‘monopoly of the pacifist platform, which was bringing them so much electoral success’.⁴²

Nevertheless, reactive representations of opinion during September 1938 largely reinforced the residual representation of widespread pacifism. The French teaching and postal unions petitioned Daladier on 26 September to argue against going to war over the Sudeten question, reinforcing the belief that these unions remained a bastion of pacifism.⁴³ Furthermore, the pacifist fringe of the SFIO advocated a similar line. ‘Naturally, the Sudeten problem is the most critical, the most pressing to be resolved’, wrote Paul Faure on 18 September, ‘and it must be done by pacific means’.⁴⁴ Similarly, at a meeting of the SFIO Parliamentary Group on 29 September, Faure told Jean Zyromski, prominent within the *Bataille Socialiste* section of the SFIO, that he would rather be accused of being Hitlerite than be accused of war-mongering, a response applauded by a large majority of those in attendance.⁴⁵

Although Faure’s position can be defined as pacifism, it would be disingenuous to label as ‘pacifists’ all those who favoured a peaceful solution to the Czechoslovakian crisis. Léon Blum, for example, had largely abandoned a pacifist position by 1938, yet he welcomed Chamberlain’s decision to fly to Germany in an effort to resolve the crisis peacefully through discussions with Hitler. ‘[T]he audacious decision of M. Neville Chamberlain’, wrote Blum, ‘[is] a chance for peace That is why I applaud ... we applaud all that renders war more difficult’.⁴⁶ Moreover, even Hitler’s increased demands at the Godesberg meeting with Chamberlain on 22 September failed to lead to a hardening of opinion analogous to that seen in

⁴² Flandin’s comments as relayed by Lévy, *The Truth about France*, p. 119.

⁴³ M. Vaisse, ‘Le passé insupportable: les pacifismes, 1984, 1938, 1914’, *Vingtième Siècle*, 3 (1984), p. 34. However, Mona Siegel has recently illustrated that, by the mid-1930s, many schoolteachers had dramatically altered their opinions despite the official line of the Syndicat national des instituteurs (SN) leadership. M. Siegel, *The Moral Disarmament of France*, Ch. 6. Conflict between anti-fascism and integral pacifism has also been identified within the women’s pacifist movement, in E. Carle, ‘Women, Anti-Fascism and Peace in Interwar France: Gabrielle Duchêne’s Itinerary’, *French History*, 18 (2004), 291-314.

⁴⁴ *Le Populaire*, 18 September 1938.

⁴⁵ APP, BA/1685: Police report, 29 September 1938, ‘À la Chambre’.

⁴⁶ *Le Populaire*, 15 September 1938.

Britain.⁴⁷ As Lacaze has noted, ‘if Hitler’s Godesberg demands provoked unanimous resistance in the British press, this unanimity was not encountered in the Parisian newspapers’.⁴⁸

The majority of reactive representations of opinion therefore reinforced the belief that pacifism remained prominent. This was certainly the British interpretation, and when Daladier and his Minister for Foreign Affairs, Georges Bonnet, visited London on 25 and 26 September, the British ministers did not hesitate to suggest that French opinion was unwilling to go to war. As Daladier recalled, ‘they invoked French newspapers advocating submission to Hitler [and] the hostility of a section of French opinion’. Daladier retorted, ‘at this moment a million Frenchmen pass to the frontiers, without any incident and without weakness of morale. You ask me, without enthusiasm? Do you believe, therefore, that it is with enthusiasm that I have asked them to respond to my appeal?’⁴⁹ If Daladier’s confessed lack of enthusiasm for war reflected a latent war anxiety, Bonnet was convinced that these anxieties were shared by the mass of French opinion: ‘[D]o you know what war is like?’ he asked the journalist Geneviève Tabouis, ‘War with *bombs*?’ ‘If war breaks out’, he continued, ‘there will be a revolution, and the people will throw me into the river’.⁵⁰ The policymaking elites were acutely conscious of a widespread war anxiety, as practically everyone in France were apprehensive of the potential repercussions of a Franco-German conflict. But a lack of enthusiasm for war is not indicative of pacifism, and few preached a policy of peace at any price. The dominant reactive representations of opinion indicated that whilst there was, as Blum put it, a ‘chance of peace’, this had to be seized. War anxiety rather than pacifism thus ensured that the Munich Agreement would be embraced.

⁴⁷ On 23 September, Halifax sent a telegram to Chamberlain at Godesberg, noting: ‘Great mass of public opinion seems to be hardening in sense of feeling that we have gone to the limit of concession’. D[ocuments] on B[ritish] F[oreign] P[olicy], iii, 2, no. 1058.

⁴⁸ *L’opinion publique française et la crise de Munich*, p. 272. Jean Zay, Daladier’s Education Minister, lamented how ‘the press campaign for French neutrality (*République, Journal, Matin*, Flandin) has led to our retreat and portrayed us as divided in Hitler’s eyes’. J. Zay, *Carnets secrets (de Munich à la guerre)*, (Paris, 1942), p. 8.

⁴⁹ A[rchives] N[ationales] Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/10, 2DA3 Dr. 2, sdra: Conférence de Londres, 25–26 September 1938: Notes manuscrites d’Édouard Daladier.

⁵⁰ Cited in Geneviève Tabouis, *They Called me Cassandra*, written in collaboration with Helen Scott, (New York, 1942), p. 355 (original emphasis).

III

Daladier, much to his surprise, returned from Munich to a hero's welcome.⁵¹ The initial fervour that welcomed the maintenance of peace appeared to most contemporary observers as heartfelt, genuine, and thoroughly understandable. Confirmation of this widespread sentiment was provided by the newspaper *Œuvre*, which noted that of the letters they had received from the public on the issue of Munich, 4,555 approved the agreement with only 193 voicing dissent.⁵² Furthermore, it was not only the French press that lavished praise on the British Prime Minister, as many French towns renamed streets in his honour, umbrellas were referred to as 'mon Chamberlain', and a new dance, 'Le Chamberlain', swept Paris.⁵³ The overriding reactive representation of opinion in the immediate aftermath of Munich was relief that war had been averted, reinforcing the residual representation of a society so infused with pacifist sentiment that recourse to war was unthinkable.

Support for Munich was also evident in parliamentary circles, with only the communists, the nationalist deputy Henri de Kérillis, and a sole socialist deputy voting against them in the French Chamber. Indeed, even Socialists who had abandoned pacifism welcomed the maintenance of peace. As Blum told the Chamber, 'The French people feel an immense elation to have avoided a war that had been so close'.⁵⁴ Inevitably, marginal pacifist organisations also embraced the Munich accords. The LICP claimed that gratitude for the reprieve belonged not to Daladier and Bonnet, but to those

⁵¹ For an account of Daladier's return from Munich see É. de Crouy-Chanel, *Alexis Léger: ou l'autre visage de Saint-John Perse*, (Paris, 1989), p. 235. Bonnet subsequently informed Lucien Lamoureux, a Deputy and former Minister, that Daladier, on the plane returning from Munich, 'was sombre and preoccupied. He dreaded the welcome that the people of Paris had in store for him'. (Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine: Papiers Lucien Lamoureux, 'Souvenirs politiques', Mfm 31).

⁵² *Œuvre*, 4 October 1938.

⁵³ R. and I. Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy: The French and the British from the Sun King to the Present*, (London, 2006), p. 534.

⁵⁴ Blum, speech to the Chambre des députés, 4 October 1938, *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Débats et comptes-rendus, chambre des députés* (hereafter *JO*), séance du 4 octobre 1938. For more on Blum's attitude during the Czechoslovakian crisis, see N. Jordan, 'Léon Blum and Czechoslovakia, 1936-1938', *French History*, 5 (1991), 48-73.

pacifists who imposed ‘a psychosis of peace’ and thus ‘rendered an immense service to humanity’.⁵⁵ These expressions of public and political opinion are often cited as evidence of the French people’s lingering pacifism. Jean-Pierre Azéma, for example, has remarked that Munich marked the end of an era, the culmination of the pacifism borne out of the ‘Der des der’.⁵⁶

However, not all those who approved the Munich accords were pacifists. Support for Munich was, above all, an expression of relief that war had been avoided. It was not necessarily the final, desperate act of pacifism, but simply another expression of war anxiety. The ‘cowardly shame and relief’ evoked by Blum was certainly more akin to war anxiety than a doctrinal pacifist position.⁵⁷ Furthermore, war anxiety not only explains public reaction to Munich, but also the hardening of opinion thereafter. Indeed, it is already accepted that French opinion was more divided than initially thought, with an October 1938 opinion poll showing only 57% approval for the Munich accords.⁵⁸ Undoubtedly, this figure did not correspond with the 87.5% vote of approval in the Chamber, supporting the Communist Jacques Duclos’ claim that the ‘parliamentary votes do not translate the amplitude of popular protest’.⁵⁹ Moreover, the same poll revealed that 70% believed that France and Britain must resist any further German demands. Therefore, even amongst those who had approved of Munich, there was a significant belief that it must not be repeated. This seemingly paradoxical position – support for Munich coupled with the belief that analogous concessions would be intolerable - is more compatible with war anxiety than pacifism. Far from retreating into a pacifist shell or defeatist mindset, French opinion in the aftermath of Munich suggested that a firmer foreign policy would be embraced.

First and foremost, this concerned the state of French defences, and the belief that French military weakness had been pivotal in the decision to

⁵⁵ APP, BA/1777: Police report, 1 November 1938, citing a speech made by Aurèle Patorni at a meeting organized by the LICP, 31 October 1938.

⁵⁶ Azéma, *De Munich à la libération*, p.18.

⁵⁷ *Le Populaire*, 19 September 1938.

⁵⁸ On early French opinion polls, conducted by the Institut français d’opinion publique (IFOP), see C. Peyrefitte, ‘Les premiers sondages d’opinion’, in R. Rémond and J. Bourdin (eds.), *Édouard Daladier, chef de gouvernement*, (Paris, 1977), pp. 265-278.

⁵⁹ *Humanité*, 7 October 1938.

appease Germany. Military considerations had certainly been foremost in Daladier's mind during the Czechoslovakian crisis, particularly aerial deficiencies. A note on air power by General Vuillemin, Chief of the French Air Staff, of 26 September, was described by Daladier as 'more pessimistic than normal'.⁶⁰ Such concerns undoubtedly influenced French policy, and were subsequently the subject of press discussion. Blum was convinced that 'the comparative reports on military aviation played a considerable role' in the frantic diplomacy of the previous weeks.⁶¹ Furthermore, the need for protection against aerial bombardment became prominent, and several French newspapers vehemently campaigned for French aerial deficiencies to be rectified. On 15 October, *l'Intransigeant* carried the headline: 'Planes! planes! Is France resigned to die or does she have the will to live?' This campaign would continue for the next week, vigorously urging the necessity of augmenting French air power.⁶²

It soon became apparent that support for Munich was ephemeral, suggesting that the instinctive relief at avoiding war was motivated by residual anxieties regarding the 'next war' rather than a deeply-rooted pacifism. Certainly, there was little indication of doctrinal pacifism by late November 1938, when the majority of the French public rallied behind the government's firm response to the Italian demands for Corsica, Nice and the Haut-Savoie. Daladier's statement to the Chamber that 'France will not cede an inch of territory'⁶³ was well-received by French newspapers of all political persuasions.⁶⁴ Indeed, press reactions to the Italian claims were characterized by incredulity and disdain. Even the far right, which had espoused a neo-pacifist agenda at the time of Munich - the headline in the *Action française* on 28 September read, 'Non! Pas la Guerre!' - rejected the outlandish Italian demands. *Je Suis Partout* dismissed the demands as having 'the exact same intrinsic value as the demands of my little daughter:

⁶⁰ AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/32, 4DA5, Dr. 5, sdre: Note on a letter from Vuillemin of 26 September 1938.

⁶¹ *Le Populaire*, 17 October 1938.

⁶² *Intransigeant*, 15-22 October 1938. See also *Paris-Soir*, 15-16 October 1938, for a similar press campaign.

⁶³ *JO*, Chambre des députés: Daladier speech, 13 December 1938.

⁶⁴ Duroselle has suggested that Daladier's firmness was partly attributable to the weight of public opinion, *La décadence*, p.391.

they are the words of children'. This, it was argued, was very different from Munich: 'since our possessions are targeted, the peace of Munich is not a precedent'.⁶⁵

As France galvanized around a firm response to Mussolini, reactive representations of opinion no longer reinforced the residual representation of pacifism. Daladier's visit to North Africa and Corsica in early January 1939, widely covered not only in the printed press but also in cinema newsreels, contributed to an upsurge in patriotic sentiment and, moreover, of pride and faith in the loyalty and strength of the French Empire.⁶⁶ Mainstream popular culture also conveyed more optimistic messages. Within French cinema, the pacifist films of the early 1930s gave way to pictures that, whilst not glorifying war or revelling in the prospect of a future conflict, nonetheless portrayed French courage and ingenuity in face of the German menace. Bravery and guile replaced cowardice and decadence; the Maginot Line was celebrated, and the valour and glory of the Empire upheld.⁶⁷ Officially sanctioned films sought to capitalize upon this perceived sentiment, with productions such as *Unité française* and *Somme-nous défendus* reiterating France's strength and unity. *Unité française*, released just after Daladier's voyage, contained such statements as: 'This country, pacific and tranquil ..., is capable of facing all attacks and all challenges'.⁶⁸

French opinion appeared to relish manifestations of French firmness and resolve. A government note suggested that the press 'optimistically awaits the initial echoes of Daladier's voyage in Tunisia'.⁶⁹ Daladier's visit, coupled with the unity of French opinion in light of the Italian demands, also helped convince Britain of French resolve, dissuading Chamberlain from seeking to mediate between Paris and Rome during his forthcoming

⁶⁵ P.-A. Cousteau, 'La France n'est pas le père Noël', *Je Suis Partout*, 9 December 1938.

⁶⁶ For more on newsreel coverage of Daladier's voyage, see M. Benteli, D. Jay and J.-P. Jeancolas, 'Le cinéma français: thèmes et public', in Rémond and Bourdin (eds.), *La France et les Français*, pp. 34-35.

⁶⁷ For more on the content and impact of French cinema during this period, see Benteli, Jay and Jeancolas, *ibid.*; Rearick, *The French in Love and War*, pp. 234-235; R. Pithon, 'Opinions publiques et représentations culturelles face aux problèmes de la puissance: le témoignage du cinéma français (1938-1939)', *Relations internationales*, 33 (1983), pp. 91-102, and Strebel, 'Political Polarisation and French Cinema, 1934-39', pp. 157-170.

⁶⁸ Cited in Laborie, *L'Opinion française sous Vichy*, p. 119.

⁶⁹ AN, F7/15962/3: Ministère des Colonies: Service Intercolonial d'information et de documentation, *Bulletin Quotidien*, 2 January 1939.

visit to the Italian capital. Daladier's success in portraying a rediscovered French patriotism and unity was therefore propitious. 'Nothing could better prepare the visit to Rome of Mr Chamberlain and Lord Halifax' commented the *Journal des débats*, 'than the present trip of M. Daladier'. Similarly, *Le Populaire* emphasized that the British must be made aware, in no uncertain terms, that France was prepared to cede absolutely nothing to Italy.⁷⁰

Reactive representations of French opinion in early 1939 demonstrated that the French people were prepared, if necessary, to forcibly resist unreasonable demands. Simultaneously, representations of French pacifism became increasingly infrequent, gradually eroding the residual perception of a pacifist-infused populace. Indeed, within the SFIO, growing support for the *blumiste* position suggested that the pacifist *paulfauristes* were becoming marginalized. At the SFIO congress at Montrouge in late December 1938, Blum's firmness triumphed over Paul Faure's pacifism.⁷¹ However, this did not mean that French socialists had suddenly become war-like. A latent war anxiety persisted, but a growing feeling that war must one day be confronted was coming to the fore. Nevertheless, the residual representation of pacifism had been significantly superseded, permitting and even encouraging the French government to pursue a foreign policy of firmness rather than capitulation.

Following the German occupation of the rump Czech state on 15 March 1939, reactive representations reinforced the perception of a public rapidly losing patience with the dictators. Opinion now appeared to demand that a firm policy be adopted not only towards Mussolini but also towards Hitler. If the public's response to the Italian demands had challenged the residual representation of widespread pacifism, the Prague coup suggested that such residuals had lost their potency. Pacifism was increasingly marginalized, confined to integral pacifists and those on the right for whom a fusion of fascist sympathies and virulent anti-communism manifested

⁷⁰ Pierre Bernus, *Journal des débats, politiques et littéraires*, 5 January 1939; Pierre Brossette, *Le Populaire*, 9 January 1939.

⁷¹ For the first time, Blum forwarded a foreign policy motion in stark contrast to that forwarded by Paul Faure. Blum's motion prevailed, by 4,322 votes to 2,827, (figures taken from Crémieux-Brilhac, *La guerre, oui ou non?*, p. 255).

itself in a form of ‘neo-pacifism’. The majority of the French public, by contrast, appeared to accept that war might be unavoidable, and that it was better to prepare for it than seek to avoid it at any price. For Blum, such resolve was not incompatible with pacifism: ‘This is the state to which the dictators have left Europe. For us Socialists, for us pacifists, the appeal of force is today the appeal for peace’.⁷²

IV

Nevertheless, although doctrinal pacifist sentiment had been eroded since Munich, anxieties regarding the prospect of war had not been eradicated. Throughout the summer of 1939, war anxiety continued to linger, with certain representations of opinion questioning the wisdom of upholding the guarantee to Poland and fighting for Danzig. On 4 May, Marcel Déat published a now infamous article entitled ‘Mourir pour Dantzig?’ Déat’s argument was straightforward: ‘Fighting side by side with our Polish friends for the common defence of our territories, our rights, our freedoms, is a prospect we can envisage with courage, if it contributes to the maintenance of peace. But die for Danzig? No!’⁷³ Déat’s argument was, however, simply a marginal and extreme manifestation of wider anxieties regarding the prospect of war. More common was the lingering influence of war anxiety displayed by Daladier when he told the Chamber of Deputies on 11 May that ‘war will resolve none of the present problems. On the contrary, it will render the solution more difficult and more disastrous’.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, Daladier was convinced that this must not amount to capitulation, a conviction supported by the majority of the French press. In contrast to Déat, the majority of reactive representations of opinion continued to favour a firm stance towards the dictatorships.⁷⁵

⁷² *Le Populaire*, 16 April 1939.

⁷³ *Œuvre*, 4 May 1939.

⁷⁴ AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/11, 2DA4 Dr. 5: Daladier speech to the Chamber, 11 May 1939.

⁷⁵ On the right, Déat’s article found little support. Indeed, his argument was subsequently dismissed by Wladimir d’Ormesson in *Le Figaro*, 14 May 1939. For Micaud, Déat’s position could be classified as that of a ‘resigned nationalist’, along with the likes of Bailby. The

Certainly, there were few adherents to Déat's position, largely confined to the integral pacifists of the LICP who expressed a similar sentiment in their journal, *Le Barrage*, under the headline 'La Guerre de Dantzig n'aura pas lieu'.⁷⁶ Indeed, mainstream opinion is arguably better reflected by an opinion poll showing that 76% of respondents believed that France should, if necessary, use force to preserve the status of Danzig.⁷⁷ Right wing 'neo-pacifism' certainly subsided, and its more notorious proponents became increasingly estranged from mainstream conservative opinion. William Irvine has observed that by the end of 1938 Flandin had 'become an obvious embarrassment to many leaders of the party [the Alliance Démocratique] who took some pains to distance themselves publicly from his Munich stance'.⁷⁸ Moreover, in late 1938 and early 1939, the mainstream conservative press did not endorse the pro-German or pro-fascist rhetoric evident in such journals as *Je Suis Partout* or *Gringoire*.

In short, Daladier's firmness was more attuned to the perceived demands of the majority of French public opinion. Since Munich, reactive representations had revealed a growing determination to resist the dictators, eroding the residual representation of a public infused with pacifism and thus willing to countenance concession and capitulation for the sake of peace. Somewhat paradoxically, war anxiety actually added impetus to a firm foreign policy, as deterring Hitler by means of a 'peace bloc' was considered the most effective way of maintaining peace. Consequently, only extremist sections of opinion, such as far-right anti-Semitic organisations, integral pacifists, or isolated groups of far-left socialist revolutionaries

'resigned nationalists', suggests Micaud, were alone on the right in their continued advocacy of appeasement, opposed by the 'conditional nationalists' such as those represented by *Le Figaro*, and the 'traditional nationalists' such as Henri de Kérillis. Micaud, *The French Right and Nazi Germany*, pp. 212-221.

⁷⁶ *Le Barrage*, 13 July 1939. This was an allusion to Jean Giraudoux's 1935 play, 'La guerre de troie n'aura pas lieu', which was and has subsequently been regarded as profoundly pacifist in sentiment. For more on the growing marginalisation of the LICP in late 1938 and 1939, see Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent*. With regard to Déat, Azéma has observed that with the exception of the extreme-right and integral pacifists, political and public opinion generally condemned Déat's article. (*De Munich à la libération*, pp. 33-35).

⁷⁷ IFOP poll conducted in June and July 1939, cited in C.-R. Ageron, 'L'Opinion publique française pendant les crises internationales de septembre 1938 à juillet 1939', in *Cahiers de l'Institut d'Histoire de la Presse et de l'Opinion*, (Tours, 1974-75), p. 216.

⁷⁸ W. D. Irvine, 'Domestic Politics and the Fall of France in 1940', in J. Blatt (ed.) *The French Defeat of 1940: Reassessments*, (Oxford, 1998), p. 90.

continued to preach a strictly pacifist agenda. The *Étudiants anti-juifs* published a tract claiming: 'The Jew is the war.... Guilty for, and beneficiary of, the slaughter of 1914, the Judeo-Masonic capitalists prepare a new war in which you will be the first victims'. On the other side of the political spectrum, an orator at a meeting of the *Union des Amicales Socialistes* remarked, 'We estimate ... that between a war for Hitler's 'living space' and another for the defence of Daladier's Empire, there is a place for peace created by Socialism'.⁷⁹

However, such tendencies of opinion were marginal. Another tract intercepted by the police, distributed by de Kérillis, was more attuned to mainstream French opinion. '[E]vents have spoken. And the average Frenchman has clearly understood that the policy of concession has pitifully failed and that it is necessary to find another policy'.⁸⁰ To sustain a firm foreign policy, France required domestic unity, discipline and resolve. As the Minister of Finance, Paul Reynaud, told the French people on 29 July, 'It is essential that the spirit of defeatism should disappear ..., that the French people should not abandon the spirit of sacrifice, cease to believe in France, or once again fall back on facile ideas'.⁸¹ Reynaud's comments suggest that the French elites remained concerned by certain residual representations of French opinion, and his allusion to defeatism was doubtless inspired by Déat's 'Mourir pour Dantzig?' article. Evidently, the residual representation of pacifism – which even at the time was equated with defeatism – had yet to completely dissipate.

This was amply reflected during the final days of peace. As Jean-Baptiste Duroselle has noted, the French Cabinet was divided between the 'resisters' and the 'pacifists'.⁸² Beyond the Cabinet, several other influential figures were also reluctant to maintain the Polish commitment, including Jean Mistler, the President of the Foreign Affairs Commission in the French

⁷⁹ APP, BA/1815: Tract published by the *Étudiants anti-juifs*, from a police report of 3 June 1939; APP, BA/1692: Police report, 14 June 1939, of a meeting organized by l'Union des Amicales Socialistes du XI^{ème} arrondissement, on 13 June.

⁸⁰ APP, BA/2011: Police report of a tract distributed by de Kérillis, 23 June 1939.

⁸¹ Radio broadcast by Paul Reynaud, 29 July 1939, cited in a report on events in France during the third quarter of 1939, sent to Halifax by Campbell, 2 November 1939 (TNA, FO 371/22910/C17813/25/17).

⁸² Duroselle, *La décadence*, p. 475.

Chamber, and his counterpart in the Senate, Henry Bérenger. Bonnet, however, remained the most influential ‘pacifist’, and on 1 September he urged the British government to share his conviction that, ‘until the last moment, no effort be neglected in attempting to restore the peace’.⁸³ Similarly, die-hard advocates of ‘neo-pacifism’ such as Flandin pleaded that peace ‘is still possible’.⁸⁴

Of course, French leaders were aware that French opinion was not enthused by the prospect of war. On 26 August, Daladier addressed a personal message to the German Chancellor, as one war veteran to another, re-iterating French determination to uphold her pledges to Poland, although expressing the hope that a peaceful solution to the Danzig imbroglio could be found. Daladier once more reflected a general war anxiety in prophesizing the repercussions of a conflict: ‘If French and German blood is spilt again ..., in a longer and bloodier war, then both will fight confident of their own victory. But what is most certain is that devastation and barbarism will be the victor’.⁸⁵ Moreover, in his radio broadcast to the French people on 3 September, Daladier stressed that France, a peaceful nation, was only going to war ‘because it has been imposed on us’.⁸⁶ This interpretation was echoed throughout the French press. ‘War has been imposed on France and she has no choice but to fight’, was the verdict of *l’Intransigeant*.⁸⁷ Similarly, Blum argued that ‘the Nazis have compelled the most peaceful of nations to go to war for the defence of her liberty, existence and honour’.⁸⁸

For the French government, reactive representations of opinion since Munich indicated that the majority of the French population was morally prepared for war.⁸⁹ Although war was certainly not desired, it was accepted, and the lingering anxieties regarding the prospect of war did not equate to a

⁸³ AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/14, 2 DA 7 Dr. 6 sdra: Georges Bonnet to Charles Corbin (by telephone), 1 September 1939.

⁸⁴ *Paris-Soir*, 29 August 1939.

⁸⁵ Fonds Genebrier, GE15: Daladier’s letter to Hitler, 26 August 1939.

⁸⁶ Speech by Daladier, broadcast by radio on the evening of 3 September 1939, cited in *Œuvre*, 4 September 1939.

⁸⁷ *Intransigeant*, 2 September 1939.

⁸⁸ *Le Populaire*, 4 September 1939.

⁸⁹ This conclusion thus confirms that of Crémieux-Brilhac, *Les Français de l’An 40*.

visceral pacifism that made a French defeat inevitable.⁹⁰ If war remained, as Talbot Imlay has suggested, ‘an unacceptable prospect for large sections of the French political spectrum’, elite perceptions of public opinion persuaded them that war had been reluctantly accepted.⁹¹ In sum, reactive representations of French opinion no longer perpetuated the residual representation of widespread pacifism. Therefore, the situation in September 1939 was very different from the situation just one year earlier. At the time of Munich, numerous vocal reactive representations, emanating from the traditional pacifists of the political left to the ‘neo-pacifism’ of the far right, continued to reinforce the perception of a pacifist French public hostile to going to war. After Munich, these reactive representations increasingly yielded to demands for a firmer foreign policy.

The fact that these representations yielded so rapidly suggests that they were never an accurate barometer of wider French opinion; they were simply more voluble, creating the impression that pacifism was more widespread than was actually the case. Of course, pacifist doctrine appealed to many French men and women, as no-one desired war. But this desire to avoid war can be better defined as war anxiety. Indeed, in the post-Munich period, reactive representations of opinion suggested that the only way to avoid war was to deter Germany through French strength and resolve. In essence, therefore, war anxiety is compatible with a determination to fight. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this article to trace the evolution of opinion during the *drôle de guerre* – a subject worthy of a study in its own right – it can be concluded that French opinion at the start of the Second World War was certainly not riddled with pacifism and defeatism. Consequently, the conditions for the defeat of 1940 - and subsequently for Vichy - were far from established.

⁹⁰ Robert Frank has argued that, although the Daladier government enjoyed some successes in preparing France for war, it was never able to overcome the widespread pacifism that continued to haunt France even after the outbreak of war. *La hantise du déclin: la France, 1920-1960: finances, défense et identité nationale*, (Paris, 1994). The notion of the fall of the Third Republic being inevitable is a recurring theme in much French historiography, notably the decadence school. Notably, see Duroselle, *Histoire diplomatique de 1919 à nos jours* (Paris, 1981), and idem, *La décadence*.

⁹¹ T. Imlay, *Facing the Second World War: Strategy, Politics, and Economics in Britain and France, 1938-1940*, (Oxford, 2003), p. 358.

