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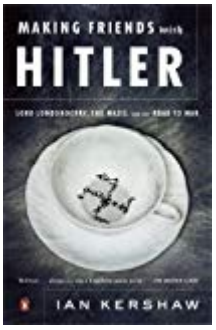
Sidney Aster, ed.. *Appeasement and All Souls: A Portrait with Documents, 1937-1939.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 251 pp. Â£50.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-84374-4.

James J. Barnes, Patience P. Barnes. *Nazis in Pre-War London 1930-1939.* Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2005. 283 pp. Â£55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-84519-053-8.



Ian Kershaw. *Making Friends with Hitler: Lord Londonderry, the Nazis, and the Road to War.* New York: Penguin Books, 2005. 488 pp. $17.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-14-303607-4.

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Before 1939, Ian Kershaw reminds us, "Hitler was a puzzle" (p. 25).[1] Working out what he wanted and how to respond to his demands exercised the minds of many of the best and brightest members of the British establishment, as well as some of the less bright. The subjects of Sidney Aster's *Appeasement and All Souls* were definitely in the former category and they knew it. In it, Aster publishes the surviving records of the All Souls Foreign Affairs Group, supplemented by extracts from its members' diaries and letters, to debunk the popular image of the Oxford college--unique in having only fellows and no undergraduates--as a hotbed of appeasement. He depicts the college instead as a place where the international challenges facing Britain were debated seriously

by some of the finest intellects of the time. Further down the intellectual scale, though much higher socially, was Charles Stewart Henry Vane-Tempest-Stewart, 7th Marquess of Londonderry. In *Making Friends with Hitler*, Ian Kershaw recounts the aspirations and frustrations of Lord Londonderry, Tory grandee and former air minister, in his lone mission to avert war by brokering an agreement between Great Britain and Nazi Germany. But Nazis were also living in Great Britain in the 1930s. What were they up to? The appendix to *Nazis in Pre-War London*, by James Barnes and Patricia Barnes, lists some four hundred NSDAP members residing in Britain before the war. In the rest of the book the authors provide detail on how these German residents organized themselves and what they sought to achieve.

The All Souls Foreign Affairs Group was founded as an unofficial "brains trust" (p. 3) in December 1937, held nine meetings, the last in May 1938, and petered out in the summer of that year as the Sudeten crisis deepened. The driving force was Sir Arthur Salter, a classic All Souls figure who personified the role of the college as a "bridge between the academic and the public life" (pp. 3-4). In founding what was sometimes known as "Salter's Soviet," he sought to bridge another divide, between appeasers and anti-appeasers, as well as to draw in a range of opinion-formers that extended well beyond the college itself: only eight of the twenty-one individuals who attended all or some of the meetings were fellows. Thus the membership included outspoken opponents of Nazi Germany like A.L. Rowse and Harold Nicolson, alongside such ingrained appeasers as Lionel Curtis and Lord Allen of Hurtwood. Somewhere in between came Gilbert Murray, Arnold Toynbee, Basil Liddell Hart and other figures less instantly recognizable as the great and the good of their day.

What did Salter's Soviet achieve? Its aim was modest enough. Having started as a discussion forum without concrete goals, the group tried to come up with an agreed statement on foreign affairs that could be used to influence government and public opinion. Unsurprisingly, no such agreement could be reached. The group sought a consensus that proved elusive: "a middle policy between resistance and retreat" (p. 15). But opinions proved too divergent to be reconciled in a single document, and events moved too fast for any agreed position to remain valid for long.

The members of the group were intelligent enough to realize the drawbacks to any solution they came up with. Perhaps, it was suggested at their second meeting in January 1938, a "positive peace group" could be based on "a constructive economic order" (p. 35). But "in the last resort, economics depended on power," and power was largely in the hands of the wrong countries and the wrong people (p. 36). Perhaps the British could "make a stand" in the Far East--but the United States would not support such a move (p. 33). They could "surrender east of the Holland-France line" and consolidate their position in western Europe, Salter suggested; but Spain was already lost, or soon would be (p. 77). In his diary entry for February 6, 1938, Harold Nicolson summed up the predicament of the "upright gentlemen" assembled at All Souls: "We then go on with the agenda and come to several conclusions but we feel it is all very academic when one thinks of the raging activity of Berlin" (p. 46).

If the reader is occasionally wearied by the account of such lengthy yet inconclusive debate, albeit perked up by a sprinkling of academic malice, that is not the fault of the editor, nor even of the members of the All Souls Group, but of the intractable nature of the problems they faced. Aster has done an excellent job of reconstructing the group's activities from widely scattered sources, and his scholarly commentary provides valuable background information on its members and their activities (they were active but didn't accomplish much) after its demise. He argues that de-

spite the group's lack of concrete achievements, its discussions helped individual members to clarify their views: "They then spoke, wrote publicly, and lobbied the press and the Foreign Office, confident that the issues had been analysed by some of the best elite minds of the period" (p. 228). Aster would probably admit that there is an element of special pleading here: nevertheless, this largely forgotten discussion forum was well worth resuscitating.

The All Souls Group agreed that "British policy toward Germany should be one of firmness followed by conciliation" (p. 25). Lord Londonderry favored the opposite: conciliation, followed by firmness only if Germany rejected the hand of friendship. Impelled by a mixture of motives, which included a genuine desire to avert another world war alongside a large measure of anti-French and anti-Jewish prejudice and resentment at a failed political career, Londonderry dedicated himself to his self-imposed mission to reach an understanding with Nazi Germany. The high point of his campaign came in 1936, when Lord and Lady Londonderry visited Germany twice, where they met with Hermann Göring, Joachim von Ribbentrop, Rudolf Hess and Hitler himself. In the same year, Ribbentrop visited two of Londonderry's stately homes: Mount Stewart in Northern Ireland in May, and Wynyard Hall in County Durham in November. Ian Kershaw regales us with much picturesque detail of the culture clash between the hidebound English aristocrat and the parvenu Nazi leadership, as when Londonderry had to restrain Ribbentrop from giving the Nazi salute when the German national anthem was played in Durham Cathedral. The Londonderrys got on well with Göring--whom Lady Londonderry called "Siegfried"--and found Hitler, "a kindly man with a receding chin and an impressive face," to be "very agreeable" (p. 141). For their part the Germans, and Ribbentrop most of all, placed a wholly unjustified faith in Londonderry's capacity to influence the British political debate and the British government's policy towards Germany.

Making Friends with Hitler exposes the false assumptions that lay behind Londonderry's overtures. They rested, as the author points out, on the wholly false premise that the Germans wanted to become "helpful partners": that Hitler might somehow be persuaded to state what his aims were and to allow his freedom of action to be constrained by international agreements (p. 91). They rested on the equally shaky assumption that Britain had the military capacity, the political will and the reliable allies required to thwart Hitler's ambitions should he prove uncooperative.

On both sides, disillusionment set in quite rapidly. By December 1936 Londonderry was already "losing hope" in the possibility of averting war (p. 183), while Göring managed to avoid entertaining Londonderry at Carinhall during the latter's third visit to Germany in September 1937, clearly having more important things to occupy him. Ribbentrop evidently retained faith in Londonderry's goodwill, if not his influence over British policy, and later hoped he would testify on his behalf at Nuremberg. Londonderry, for his part, claimed never to have had any illusions about Ribbentrop and was said to have regarded him as "the rudest man he'd ever met" (p. 161). Kershaw clearly suspects that their relationship was more amicable than Londonderry subsequently maintained. He nevertheless does justice to Londonderry by showing that the man was not an out-and-out appeaser. True, it took a long time for the scales to fall from his eyes, but when they finally did fall, after the German occupation of Prague in March 1939, he saw no alternative to a fight to the finish. By now, however, his reputation as Nazi Germany's leading British apologist could not be erased. He died in 1949, an embittered, disappointed man.

As the focal point of a very big book, Londonderry is something of a disappointment. Querulous and supercilious, dim but not very nice, he is

not quite the man to give "new colour to the somewhat arid politics of appeasement" (p. xvi). As if to compensate, Kershaw fills out his volume with a good deal of familiar background detail on British politics and society, and the international politics of the interwar period. Occasional slips make one realize that Kershaw is less confident with British than with German history (life peers in the 1930s?) and, in places, linguistic inventiveness flags: storm clouds gather; Whitehall's corridors of power are struck by thunderbolts; Europe teeters on the brink (pp. 286, 102, 295), and so on. At its best, the volume combines entertaining anecdote with profound historical reflection. The thoughtful concluding chapter makes it clear that Londonderry was not much more in the grip of illusion than the government ministers he vainly sought to influence. But at times, one wonders whether Kershaw might not have been better advised to write the short study he originally planned. Inside this fat book a slimmer, more elegant volume is signaling to get out.

Nazis in Pre-War London, the third book under review, has the merit of reminding us that Ribbentrop was not the only Nazi plotting mischief in the Britain of the 1930s. Much lower down the food chain were the journalists of the *Völkischer Beobachter* and the local activists who formed the core of the Party's London *Ortsgruppe*, founded in the autumn of 1931 and later transmuted, although it is not entirely clear when or how, into the *Landesgruppe*, encompassing NSDAP members and sympathizers throughout the United Kingdom. The book attempts to reveal how these activists sought to bring all aspects of German life, whether church, business or merely social, under party control. It also shows that Nazi activities were a matter of long-standing concern to the British authorities. A Special Branch officer was able to infiltrate the London *Ortsgruppe* as early as the autumn of 1933 and was "trusted as a sympathetic observer" for some years (p. 19). At intervals throughout the period from 1933 to 1939, a number of journalists were expelled, some on suspicion of espionage. By 1935 MI5, backed by Sir Robert Vansittart of the Foreign Office, was hoping to close down the *Landesgruppe*, along with Italian Fascist organizations, as a potentially subversive body. The cabinet, however, repeatedly shied away from a decision, partly because "there would almost certainly be a demand for corresponding action towards the Communists" (p. 182).

James and Patricia Barnes have done us a service in compiling such a mass of information. It has taken them a very long time, more than a quarter of a century to judge from the footnotes, and is clearly the product of much labor in the archives and assiduous following up of clues. Unfortunately, however, the volume suffers from a number of defects that make it less useful than it might have been. These have to do with the nature of the information and the way it is presented, the structure of the book and the large number of errors it contains. The book comprises a total of seventeen short chapters. Chapters 1-6 and 13-17 deal with the evolution of the *Ortsgruppe* and *Landesgruppe* and the British government's responses to Nazi activities, but they are separated by a number of miscellaneous chapters, some interesting in themselves, such as chapter 9 on the churches, others with a rather dated and over-familiar feel, such as chapter 11 on Sir Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists. These are not integrated into a coherent whole. Indeed it is not easy to convey quite how haphazardly the book is put together or how often the authors manage to miss the forest for the trees.

The volume is a compendium in which facts are assembled in a strangely naïve and undiscriminating manner and every piece of data seems to be of equal value. The big picture disappears. We are given numerous addresses of individual Germans and German organizations, but one searches in vain for information on when quite important events took place. Some stories seem to come to an end in one chapter but are

mysteriously resumed in a later one. Other endings are unwittingly signaled in advance, and only in retrospect can one grasp their significance. One example is the career of Hermann Goertz. From the brief reference to Goertz in a passage quoted from R.V. Jones's "recent" (1978) memoirs on pages 56-57, through another reference on page 235 to his arrest as a German agent, we arrive finally at page 237, where we learn that Goertz was "the one clear and bona fide *Abwehr* agent in Britain." Then and only then--in the very last chapter--are we given a sustained account of his background and career.

Some chapter headings promise more than they deliver. In a chapter titled "Establishing a Nazi Brown House," for example, it eventually emerges that the Nazis did not get a Brown House in London, though they did eventually take over the former Austrian legation. A chapter on the "Appointment of a Nazi Consul-General" discusses Otto Bene, head of the *Landesgruppe*, who did become consul-general, but in Milan, not London. In fact Bene, one of the leading characters in the book, is a further symptom of the book's problems. He first appears out of the blue on page 15, then the whole of chapter 3 is devoted to Bene as *Ortsgruppenleiter* in the years 1932-35. But despite being provided with the minutiae of his life, including every single one of his addresses in London, we are never given a clear account of how he was appointed.

Errors and inconsistencies of English and German syntax, spelling, terminology and personal names abound, and the proofreading has been careless. A sample of mistakes includes: "relegated" for "delegated" (p. 3); Nuremberg/Nuremburg (both p. 20); Woermann spelled correctly on first appearance (p. 95), then wrongly on all further occasions; "Brendon" (for Brendan) Bracken (p. 40); "Cosimo" (for Cosmo) Gordon Lang (p. 108); "*Bekennenden*" (for *Bekennende*) *Kirche*; *Dienststelle Ribbentrop* was also known as *Büro Ribbentrop* but never as "Ribbentropbüro" (pp. 94, 97); and, most charmingly, "Lord Ha-Ha" for Lord Haw-Haw (a/k/a William Joyce) (p. 130). The book does not contain a bibliography.

Each of the three books under review adds to our knowledge of how the British reacted to the Nazi challenge at a time when it was still possible to imagine a response that was not either abject surrender or total war, and when few if any had yet imagined the "Final Solution." Yet older books cover similar ground and still have much, if not more, to offer. I am thinking in particular of Richard Griffiths's *Fellow Travellers of the Right* (1980) and his *Patriotism Perverted* (1998). Both are excellent reads and have the advantage of being well illustrated. In the former the curious will find a surreal photograph of Lord Londonderry and Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald surrounded by a number of stone dodos. The latter includes a photograph of the notorious pro-Nazi sympathizer Admiral Sir Barry Domvile. On his desk, along with a portrait of Hitler, there is a white porcelain figure of an SS man identical to the one illustrated in Ian Kershaw's book: the one that he saw on his visit to Mount Stewart in 1991, and that prompted his long quest for Lord Londonderry and his doomed peace campaign.

Note

[1]. The opinions expressed in this book review are those of the author and do not reflect the views of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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