

No. 3

First letter of the 23rd September from the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Chancellor of the German Reich.

September 23, 1938.

I think it may clarify the situation and accelerate our conversation if I send you this note before we meet this morning.

I am ready to put to the Czechoslovak Government your proposal as to areas so that they may examine the suggested provisional boundary. So far as I can see there is no need to hold a plebiscite for the bulk of the areas i.e. for those areas which (according to statistics upon which both sides seem to agree) are predominantly Sudeten German areas. I have no doubt, however, that the Czech Government would be willing to accept your proposal for a plebiscite to determine how far, if at all, the proposed new frontier need be adjusted.

The difficulty which I see about the proposal you put to me yesterday afternoon arises from the suggestion that the areas should in the immediate future be occupied by German troops. I recognize the difficulty of conducting a lengthy investigation under existing conditions and doubtless the plan you propose would if it were acceptable provide an immediate easing of tension. But I do not think that you have realized the impossibility of my agreeing to put forward any plan unless I have reason to suppose that it will be considered by public opinion in my country, in France and indeed in the world generally as carrying out the principle agreed upon in an orderly fashion and free from threats of force. I am sure that an attempt to occupy forthwith by German troops the areas which will become part of the Reich at once in principle and very shortly afterwards by formal delimitation would be condemned as an unnecessary display of force.

Even if I felt it right to put this proposal to the Czechoslovak Government, I am convinced that they would not regard it as being in the spirit of the arrangement which we and the French Government urged them to accept and which they have accepted. In the event of German troops moving into the areas, as you propose it is necessary, no doubt the Czechoslovak Government would have no option but to order their forces to resist and this would mean destruction of the basis upon which you and I a week ago agreed to work together, namely, an orderly settlement of this question rather than a settlement by the use of force.

It being agreed in principle that the Sudeten German areas are to be joined to the Reich, the immediate question before us is how to maintain law and order pending final settlement of arrangements for transfer. There must surely be alternatives to your proposal which would not be open to the objections I have pointed out. For instance I could ask the Czechoslovak Government whether they think that