

KENTUCKIAN IN KNEE BREECHES:
ROBERT WORTH BINGHAM AT THE COURT OF ST. JAMES'S

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Before becoming ambassador to the Court of St. James's in London in 1933, Robert Worth Bingham (1871-1937) demonstrated several tendencies during his lifetime. Though a reconstructed southerner in many ways, he never completely transcended his southern upbringing and always suspected the eastern establishment of being anti-southern. For example, while ambassador to the Court of St. James's, he reacted effusively to Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With The Wind*, believing that the book more than vindicated his family's history in North Carolina during the Civil War and Reconstruction.¹

Moreover, Bingham demonstrated many of the ideals of Wilsonian progressivism during his professional life as a lawyer and political leader, having met Woodrow Wilson as a young man. Moving to Louisville in 1896, he married into a prominent local family and soon became one of the leading young local lawyers. Though a registered Democrat, he sometimes supported Republicans he thought progressive, cooperating with them in Louisville and Kentucky politics in the first two decades of the twentieth century. While serving as interim mayor in 1907, he infuriated the local Democratic machine with his attempts to reform the city politics.²

After the tragic death of his first wife, Bingham's life drifted for a time until his marriage to Mary Lily Kenan Flagler, the widow of Standard Oil co-founder Henry Flagler. She died in 1917 under

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1 Robert Worth Bingham (RWB) to Margaret Mitchell, 16 February 1937, Robert Worth Bingham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (hereafter cited as RWB-LC).

2 William E. Ellis, "Robert Worth Bingham and Louisville Progressivism, 1905-1910," *Filson Club History Quarterly* 54 (1980): 169-95.

circumstances that spawned a cottage industry of books in the 1980s, all of which accused her husband of varying degrees of complicity in her death because of a codicil to her will leaving him \$5,000,000.³

Bingham took one million dollars of his bequest and purchased the *Louisville Times* and the *Courier-Journal* in 1918. Over the next two decades he made the papers his fiefdom, using them against what he considered to be the enemies of Wilsonian progressivism and internationalism. Moreover, he led crusades for cooperative marketing in the 1920s and took an active interest in state and national affairs.⁴

Not long after the Great Crash in 1929, Bingham began searching for a progressive Democratic standard-bearer for 1932. He became one of the staunchest supporters of Franklin D. Roosevelt. "I have no doubt in my mind that you are the best hope not merely for the Democratic Party, which is a minor consideration, but for our country, which is the major consideration," Bingham wrote Roosevelt in September 1931. More importantly, he contributed substantially to the Democratic Party's coffers and used his papers to push for Roosevelt's election.⁵

Soon after Roosevelt's election, Bingham visited Roosevelt at Warm Springs, Georgia, and there may have been talk then of a substantive reward for him. "You worked long and faithfully,"

3 The cause for the publication of these books came with the breakup of the Bingham family in the mid 1980s. The family sold off its considerable media holdings after the siblings of Barry Bingham, Sr., could not agree on publication policies of their papers. These books include: David Leon Chandler and Mary Voelz Chandler, *The Bingham of Louisville: The Dark History Behind One of America's Great Fortunes* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1987); Marie Brenner, *House of Dreams: The Bingham Family of Louisville* (New York: Random House, 1988); Sallie Bingham, *Passion and Prejudice: A Family Memoir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989); and Susan E. Tift and Alex A. Jones, *The Patriarch: The Rise and Fall of the Bingham Dynasty* (New York: Summit Books, 1991).

4 Ellis, "Robert Worth Bingham and the Crisis of Cooperative Marketing in the Twenties," *Agricultural History* 56 (1982): 99-116; Ellis, "The Bingham Family: From the Old South to the New South and Beyond," *Filson Club History Quarterly* 61 (1987): 5-33.

5 RWB to Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR), 22 September 1931, Private Correspondence, 1928-1932, FDR Papers, Hyde Park, New York (hereafter FDR Papers).

Roosevelt explained in a letter, "and I am more than grateful to you." Although talk about other posts circulated, Bingham had already set his sights on an ambassadorship, "something on the outside," which, he maintained, would allow his newspapers a semblance of independence.⁶

Bingham's interest in appointment to the Court of St. James's came from his genealogical attachment to England, his long association with numerous English and Scottish friends, and his firm belief that the future welfare of the world depended on closer Anglo-American ties. "In my judgment, civilization, as we have known it, is at its greatest crisis," he explained to an old English friend. "If it is to be saved at all, it can only be saved through the joint effort of the British and ourselves." Challenged as an "Anglophile" and an "apologetic American" for previous statements about Britain and the United States, the Senate nevertheless confirmed Bingham as ambassador to Great Britain after a brief delay. *Newsweek* asked the inevitable question, directed to all new ministers to Great Britain: "Will you wear knee pants?" Bingham emphatically declared that he would not.⁷

Recurring health problems plagued Bingham's stay in London. He was unable to leave the United States until mid May 1933 and became ill on board the SS *Washington*. Stepping off the ship at Plymouth, Bingham took the diplomatic offensive and expressed the view that the grave problems of the world could only be solved "by genuine understanding and cooperation between Great Britain and ourselves."⁸

6 FDR to RWB, 3 December 1932, Private Correspondence, 1928-1932, FDR Papers; RWB to Shepard Bryan, 24 October 1932, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

7 Old political and personal enemies, including medical reformer Abraham Flexner, again raised the specter of Mary Lily Kenan Flagler Bingham. RWB to Reverend R.W. Paul, (n.d.) 1932, RWB-LC; Key Pittman to Cordell Hull, 16 March 1933, RWB-LC; *Louisville Herald-Post*, 18, 27, 29 September 1927; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 March 1933; *Newsweek*, 27 May 1933, p. 22.

8 *New York Times*, 11 May 1933; Dr. Edward H. Linneham to "Dear Doctor," 16 May 1933 and Dr. William F. Rienhoff, Jr., to Bingham, 9 June 1933, RWB-LC; *London Daily Express*, 18 May 1933.

Throughout his tenure as ambassador, Bingham jealously guarded what he considered to be his prerogatives. As chief representative of the United States government in Great Britain, he objected to the continual flow of special delegations from Washington to conferences in London and other European capitals, believing that these detracted from his own diplomatic usefulness and that of the embassy. Moreover, he disliked Roosevelt's penchant for assigning two people to work on the same task, so well illustrated by the fiasco that became the London Economic Conference. Keeping the State Department and the White House informed about other members of the American diplomatic corps took much of Bingham's time and energy. Sometimes these intrigues proved detrimental to American foreign policy, but more often they only demonstrated the whims of personalities and the inefficiency of the American diplomatic system. Moreover, Roosevelt in his earliest days in office did little to set the tone of American diplomacy, preferring instead to allow contending forces within the administration to test the waters of public opinion.⁹

Owing to the depths of the depression, foreign policy took second place to the domestic concerns in the early New Deal. During the campaign of 1932 Roosevelt scolded Hoover for blaming the depression on international factors and thereby trying to lift responsibility from his own shoulders. However, Roosevelt soon modified his foreign policy directives to gain the support of more conservative Democrats. In return for the backing of William Randolph Hearst, Roosevelt dropped his support for membership in the League of Nations. The Democratic candidate moved toward isolationism, or economic nationalism, during the campaign, contradicting his Wilsonian internationalist inclination.¹⁰

9 Oral History interview with Barry Bingham, Sr., 3 December 1980, Special Collections and Archives, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Kentucky; Hull to Embassy, Paris, 24 March 1933, 123 Bingham, Robert W./32, Department of State Papers, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; *New York Times*, 20 May 1933.

10 Robert D. Schulzinger, *American Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 150-53; Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 23-34; Wayne S. Cole, *FDR and the Isolationists* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 23, 108, 123-24.

British political scientist Harold Laski's estimation of Bingham's appointment to the Court of St. James's summed up the ideas of a number of Americans about the English as well as providing a scathing social commentary on his own nation's leaders. Bingham's appointment "will enable our aristocracy to feel that the best Americans are really like themselves" because "they share the same tastes, they have the same ambitions, they dream the same dreams." Anglophobic representatives of the press, such as William Randolph Hearst, had a wide audience in the early to mid 1930s, capitalizing on such statements as vindications of their own mindset.¹¹

Bingham sought closer ties with the British and a more prominent role for American foreign policy in European and world affairs. He thought of his function as educational in nature, his primary responsibility being to explain America to the British. In the process he defended Roosevelt and the New Deal at every opportunity. Significantly, he often appeared ahead of the times. Most of his speeches called for closer Anglo-American relations, often in contrast to official American policy.¹²

In doing so, Bingham received heated criticism from both British and American sources. While officials in the State Department disliked the candor of these remarks, Roosevelt never repudiated Bingham. In a press conference on 31 May 1933, for example, the president displayed his usual confident control over the proceedings when asked if he agreed with a statement made by Ambassador Bingham about Norman H. Davis concerning war debt problems. Roosevelt replied, "off the record," that the ambassador had given a "wrong impression on the American viewpoint" toward disarmament. However, he neither publicly nor privately reprimanded Bingham. In another instance Roosevelt refused to take the bait in a reporter's query about Bingham's urging closer Anglo-American relations, saying that he had not seen the statement, when, "in fact he had."¹³

11 Reprint from the *London Daily Herald* in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 May 1933.

12 *New York Times*, 31 May 1933.

13 Edgar B. Nixon, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs* (3 vols.; Cambridge:

If Bingham appeared to be an alarmist on international matters, Roosevelt understood those reactions. Bingham's responses mirrored ones that Roosevelt would have made if not constrained by political exigencies. Roosevelt used Bingham, as he did others, to test either the domestic or international political waters. The isolationist mood of the United States in the early New Deal years, coupled with Roosevelt's preoccupation with domestic problems, constrained his pro-British predilections until after Bingham's death in December 1937. Settlement of the World War I debts owed the United States and stabilization of international currencies were the highest priorities of Roosevelt in 1933. Moreover, he was wary of straying too far into international cooperation because of the fear of losing political support.¹⁴

It did not take Bingham long to show his colors. His first speech, at the annual meeting of the Pilgrim's Society, came only ten days after assuming the post in London and just before the opening of the London Economic Conference. Though still suffering from a debilitating infection, Bingham delivered a forceful speech that not only set the tone for his later speeches but also clearly established the course of his ambassadorship.¹⁵

"I would have you know that I believe the hope for a stricken world rests entirely upon understanding, co-operation and confidence among the English-speaking peoples of the world," Bingham announced, "and to the task of maintaining and promoting this attitude of mind, I come here resolved to dedicate all that I can, all that I have of mind and spirit." Moreover, he issued a solemn warning that though "our civilization is trembling in the balance . . . there is no time for any other thought except 'what shall we do to be saved?'" He concluded that the "hope of the world lies in whole-hearted,

The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1969), 1: 193; *Foreign Relations, 1933* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1950), 1: 166-68; James MacGregor Burns, *FDR: The Lion and the Fox* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1956), 189.

14 Burns, *FDR*, 189; Arthur S. Link, *American Epoch, A History of the United States* (3 vols.; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 3: 470-71.

15 *Raleigh News and Observer*, 31 May 1933.

concerted action between Great Britain, the great self-governing British Commonwealths, and the United States."¹⁶

If this speech set the tone for Bingham's ambassadorship, the reactions in Britain and in the United States were also an indication of things to come. On the American side, Hearst, "always the isolationist" if inconsistent about other matters, allowed his *Chicago Herald-Examiner* to take the offensive with an article entitled "Who Put the Ass in Amb-ass-ador?," claiming that Bingham had already spoken out of turn on several occasions during his brief tenure. "He is a danger to the peace and good understanding which all Americans desire with the people of England," the editorialist exclaimed, "This country has already had enough of Bingham. We imagine that England has, too." Senator Joseph Robinson of Arkansas repeated an earlier attack on Bingham from the floor of the Congress, while the more evenhanded *New York Times* cited Bingham's pronouncement about the need for tariff reduction as a legitimate concern.¹⁷

On the other side of the Atlantic, reactions were also mixed and heated. The *London Daily Telegraph* found the ambassador's pleas for Anglo-American cooperation to have "the authentic ring of sincerity." The *Evening News* proclaimed Bingham to be "the best, the clearest and the most decisive speaker that Washington has sent us as Ambassador for many a year past." However, several papers like Lord Beaverbrook's *London Evening Standard* and the *London Daily Mail*, republished the Hearst article and contributed their own critical appraisals of Bingham. Bingham would later claim that the "Hearst gang in our country and the Beaverbrook gang over here . . . hooked up with each other" in a conspiracy to discredit him. The

16 Ray Atherton to Hull, telegram, 23 March 1933, 123 Bingham, Robert W./6, Department of State Papers; Pilgrim's Dinner Speech, 30 May 1933, Speech File, RWB-LC; *London Times*, 31 May 1933.

17 *Chicago Herald-Examiner*, 4 June 1933; Emanuel Levi to RWB, 5 June 1933, RWB-LC; Rodney P. Carlisle, *Hearst and the New Deal* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 9, 19; RWB to FDR, 26 May, 11 June 1933, OF 491, FDR Papers; *New York Times*, 1, 7, 22 June 1933; W. A. Swanberg, *Citizen Hearst* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 473; Cole, *FDR and the Isolationists*, 23, 108, 123-24.

most eminent Briton, King George V, however, apparently thought well of Bingham, at least from first impressions.¹⁸

During the ill-fated London Economic Conference, special envoy Raymond Moley and Bingham clashed from the start. Plans for the conference began in the last months of the Hoover administration, but Roosevelt was uneasy about any kind of international commitments. Ostensibly, the meeting had been called to discuss temporary currency stabilization, but Secretary of State Cordell Hull wanted to push his tariff-reduction agenda. Although Bingham did not take direct part in the conference, he kept in close touch with Hull, who often talked with him about the negotiations. Bingham did everything he could to impede Moley. He believed Moley's hyperactivity was upsetting the embassy's routine, and he especially disliked Moley's constant use of the code room. Moreover, Bingham visualized a cabal controlled by Bernard Baruch, consisting of William E. Bullitt, Moley, Herbert Feis, and others intent on undermining Hull and taking over negotiations.¹⁹

Roosevelt removed all doubt about American intentions when he issued his "Bombshell Message" on 2 July 1933. In this speech he pulled the rug out from under Hull by denying that the United States had any intention of using the dollar and an international gold standard for world currency stabilization. He also used Moley as a smoke screen to keep the conferees off balance. Bingham, blinded as he was by his devotion to Hull and Roosevelt, put a gloss on the whole affair. He reported to Roosevelt that Hull "did a really magnificent job here and emerged as the great figure of the Conference . . . I know of no finer incident in American diplomatic history than his achievement here."²⁰ The only thing that Hull achieved was to briefly put forward the American idea of lowering tariffs.

18 *London Daily Mail*, 5 June 1933; *Daily Telegraph*, 31 May 1933; Bingham Diaries, Volume I, 21 June 1933; Bingham to Ulric Bell, 27 October 1934; Bingham to Grover Page, 23 June 1933, RWB-LC; Nixon, *FDR and Foreign Affairs*, 1: 238.

19 Ted Morgan, *FDR: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 393; Bingham Diaries, I, 1, 5 March, 12, 19, 22, 30 June, 6 July 1933, RWB-LC; Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), 114-17.

In the spring and summer of 1934, diplomatic maneuvering for reconsideration of the naval treaties that came out of the Washington Conference of 1921-1922 developed into a test of wills between the major naval powers of the world. The 1922 Five-Power Treaty had allowed for a "Capital Ship Holiday" for ten years and limited tonnage of the major navies of the world. Roosevelt instructed Bingham to "feel out the British on their attitude towards cooperation with us, in the event a war should break out in Europe or elsewhere." Specifically, the president ordered Bingham to relay to the British the American apprehension of giving Japan parity in any new naval agreement.²¹

After the beginning of negotiations in London, Bingham recommended that the United States should not challenge the British position about armaments and security. "On the whole, they need us and will need us much worse then we shall need them, and they will come to us in time," he concluded, "if we leave them entirely alone, and make it clear that we have nothing to talk to them about."²²

Though often criticized as an Anglophile by his critics, Bingham took a far more critical view of the British than his detractors perceived. He did not believe that America should bend to the British proposals at the 1935 London Naval Conference. Although the anti-American *London Evening Standard* claimed that Bingham had "acquired a remarkably good imitation of an English accent," Bingham himself poked fun at the variety of English accents as well as criticizing the "underlying supercilious attitude" of the English upper class. Moreover, he echoed the feelings of many of his countrymen by deploring the lack of British sensitivity on the World

20 Link, *American Epoch*, 3: 461; Bingham Diaries, I, 13, 14, 23, 24 June, 2, 6, 12, 26, 28 July 1933; RWB to Lincoln MacVeagh, 11 September 1933, RWB-LC; Freidel, *FDR*, 116-17.

21 Link, *American Epoch*, 3: 344; Bingham Diaries, I, 20 February 1934, 1 March 1934, II, 16 July, 7 November 1934, RWB-LC; RWB to FDR, 8 May 1934, PSF, GB: 1934-36, FDR Papers.

22 *Foreign Relations*, 1934, 1: 264; Bingham Diaries, "Memorandum of Conversations Between Prime Minister MacDonald and Norman H. Davis," 2 March 1934, inserted in Vol. I, 22 June 1934; II, 16 July 1934, 18-19 June 1934, 19 November 1934, 13 December 1934, RWB-LC; Hull to RWB, 30 June 1934, OF 491, FDR Papers.

War I debt question. To Bingham the attitude of the British government needed a complete overhaul. Judging from his correspondence and notations in his diaries, he continually reminded British officials and friends that the majority of Americans felt betrayed by the British course on war debts and the question of stabilization of world currencies. Notwithstanding, Bingham continued to plead for Anglo-American cooperation. To Lord Queensborough, a pro-American friend, he explained that, "You may be sure that as you love my own country next to your own, I love your country next to my own."²³

Bingham became embroiled in controversy in October 1934 after a speech before the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution. He explained that neither Americans nor the English adequately understood the culture, politics, and needs of each other, so both should immediately begin to make amends for such misunderstandings. Of course, he stressed the importance of cooperation, emphasizing that the welfare of both nations "is inextricably bound together." He told his British audience that the depression had created worse conditions in the United States than in Great Britain because of the American banking crisis. More importantly, he urged stabilization of the dollar and the pound as necessary for improvements in the economies of both countries.²⁴

After the initial reaction of Bingham's critics, Hull and Roosevelt hinted at the same stance in public addresses. Bingham believed that he had been vindicated for the statement at Edinburgh. Apparently supported by the administration, Bingham plunged back into the fray

23 *New York Times*, 24, 25, 29, 30, 31 October 1934; *London Evening Standard*, 9 November 1934; RWB to Lord Queensborough, 14 April 1934; RWB to William E. Dodd, 29 October 1934, 16 April 1935; RWB to Mary M. French, 7 May 1935; Copy of *Fortune* magazine article from Ulric Bell, 25 June 1934, RWB-LC; Bingham Diaries, I, 12 April 1934; II, 10 April 1935; IV, 27 October, 4 December 1936, RWB-LC; Anne Trotter, *Britain and East Asia, 1933-1937* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 170-72.

24 *Louisville Courier-Journal* (hereafter *Courier-Journal*), 25, 30 October 1934; *New York Times*, 26 October 1935; "Address to Edinburgh Philosophical Institution," 23 October 1934, RWB-LC.

by making a similar speech before the Plymouth Branch of the English-Speaking Union.²⁵

In 1935 the world moved closer to war. The Roosevelt-Bingham correspondence of mid 1935 offers two examples of the dilemma American policy-makers faced during this era, a time in which the general mood of Americans inclined toward isolationism. In late March Bingham declared that "the European atmosphere is surcharged" with fear of Nazi aggression. "I am more than doubtful whether we could keep out of a great European conflagration," Bingham surmised. Roosevelt voiced a more cautious concern: "A very wise old bird tells me that a number of important world forces, including the British, would much like to involve us in some way — any way — in the world's critical problems." Of course, the question in the coming months would be how much leadership, moral or otherwise, the United States could muster without a consensus of public opinion.²⁶

Anglo-American relations in 1935 remained strained because of the unsettled debt and pound-dollar stabilization questions. Bingham, for his part, continually probed British opinion, not only within Whitehall but among the English people as well. His suggestion of tying the value of the dollar and the pound together "at the proper time" drew immediate repudiation from the United States Treasury Department. However, Roosevelt said nothing about Bingham's statement. Bingham reacted by redoubling his efforts to bring about better Anglo-American relations. When the BBC began broadcasting a series, "The American Half-hour" hosted by Alistair Cooke, Bingham kept close tabs on the program's content, officially complaining about one segment that did not "tend to promote a spirit of friendly

25 Hull to George Holden Trinkam, 16 January 1935, 123 Bingham, Robert W./87, Department of State Papers; RWB to Lawrence K. Callahan, 26 October 1934, RWB-LC; *Manchester Daily Express*, 24 October 1934; Bingham Diaries, II, 23 October 1934, 162-63.

26 RWB to FDR, 26 March 1935, PPF 716, FDR Papers; FDR to RWB, 11 July 1935, PSF, GB: RWB, FDR Papers.

understanding." Within days, Sir John Reith, director of the BBC, apologized and promised to make amends on the airing of the next program.²⁷

Mussolini's pressure on Ethiopia in 1935 created a tense situation as an undiminished isolationist mood in America pressured the administration into a weak response. Bingham reacted to the crisis by not accepting any speaking engagements, claiming that the "situation here is too serious and too tense, and I should be a hypocrite if I made any suggestion which could possibly be construed as indicating a possibility that our country would take any hand in their troubles here." He returned to the United States in late July for consultation with Roosevelt and Hull on The London Naval Conference, the Ethiopian crisis, British-American relations, and other matters. While home, Bingham lobbied for the administration's view of pending neutrality legislation. Hull was able to persuade the House of Representatives to accept Roosevelt's view that the mandatory arms embargo would be limited to six months. When the Neutrality Act of 1935 passed Congress on 31 August, Bingham optimistically predicted that "history may mark this as Mr. Roosevelt's greatest achievement." Italy invaded Ethiopia on 3 October 1935. In the coming months neither the United States nor Britain, France, or the League of Nations demonstrated the will to keep Italy from swallowing up Ethiopia.²⁸

The bad blood between Bingham and Norman Davis intensified when Roosevelt appointed Davis to head an American delegation to the naval conference. Moreover, Bingham refused to serve as a special delegate at the conference. Throughout his tenure in London, Bingham argued that sending special delegations to Europe, especially headed by dignitaries like Davis, sent a false message of imminent American participation among western nations. In the long

²⁷ *Courier-Journal*, 26 March 1935; RWB to Cordell Hull, 28 June 1935; Sir John Reith to RWB, 28 February, 26 April 1935; RWB to Reith, 17 April 1935; Reith to Ray Atherton, 27 March 1935, RWB-LC.

²⁸ *Courier-Journal*, 7 August 1935; RWB to Barry Bingham, 8 April, 16 October 1935; RWB to Ulric Bell, 3 July 1935, RWB-LC; Dallek, *FDR and American Foreign Policy*, 111; *New York Times*, 25 July; 1, 7, 8, 12, 30 August; 11 September 1935.

run when America did not assert itself, European heads of state became even more cynical about its intentions. On at least one occasion in early 1935, Roosevelt told Colonel Edward House that he agreed with Bingham "about having no special missions abroad this summer," accepting the reasoning that it might be better to function only through regular diplomatic missions.²⁹

The Davis-Bingham relationship deteriorated the longer Davis stayed in London. Bingham interpreted Davis's actions in London as a political game that had nothing whatsoever to do with good diplomacy. He suggested that Davis be recalled before any more damage could be done. At first Roosevelt appeared to agree with Bingham but then reversed his tack and sent Davis anyway. Bingham asserted he did not receive adequate explanation for this decision from the White House.³⁰

Apparently Davis exceeded his instructions from the beginning of his negotiations with the British. Roosevelt finally dashed off an urgent note, asking Hull to "keep me in daily touch with what Davis is doing — I hear several dispatches have come from him showing that Davis is talking debts and economics. That is not his job!" Later in November 1935, in nearly identical letters, Hull and Roosevelt apologized to Bingham for the behavior of Davis and for the decision to send him to London. Both extolled Bingham as occupying the "premier position of all the notable Americans" serving in diplomatic posts. Bingham could hardly contain his elation at being vindicated in his judgment of Davis. In early 1936 the conference sank into impotency after the Japanese walked out, and apparently another chance had been lost to keep the peace in the world. But events as well as the efforts of Bingham and others began easing the

29 Elliott Roosevelt, ed., *F.D.R., His Personal Letters* (4 vols.: 1947-1950), 1: 473-74; Nixon, *FDR and Foreign Affairs*, 3: 45-47, 88-90; RWB to FDR, 9 May 1935, PSF, GB; RWB, FDR Papers; Bingham Diaries, II, 21 February 1935, RWB-LC; *Foreign Relations, 1935, Volume I*, 772-73.

30 Dalleck, *FDR and American Foreign Policy*, 90; Davis to RWB, 12, 27 January 1935; RWB to Barry Bingham, n.d., Family Correspondence, 1935, RWB-LC.

Anglo-American tensions of the early 1930s, and both nations moved ever so slowly toward cooperation.³¹

Poor health plagued Bingham's time in London. Never entirely free from occasional pain and weakness, he submitted to complete medical examinations in England in December 1935 and at the Brady Institute in Baltimore in March 1937. When neither examination diagnosed any cause for Bingham's recurring health problems, he stoically blamed his suffering on the ravages of advancing age. Particularly noticeable to his son Barry, Bingham began to develop "a bit of a stomach," which appeared unusual owing to his spare diet and a fastidious concern about his health and appearance.³²

Other sources made his life uncomfortable as well. Throughout his time in Britain, Bingham's critics often cited his allegedly pro-British stance. For example, one anonymous correspondent, who signed the letter "An American for America Only" wrote: "Honored Sir; Be Damn careful with secretive agreements and diplomatic pitfalls with the wily hipricritical [sic] English, lest you emulate the disgraceful pro-English record of Walter Hines Page." Irish-Americans attacked Bingham because they assumed that he must be anti-Irish because he was pro-British. Bingham also had to contend with William E. Bullitt, who, Bingham argued, worked against him within the State Department. After weathering these verbal storms for over three years, Bingham seriously considered retiring in 1936. Discussions with Hull, Colonel House, and Roosevelt brought an agreement that Bingham should remain on the job, at least until January 1938.³³

31 Bingham Diaries, III, 28 October, 17 November 1935, 23 page insertion; IV, 25 January 1936, RWB-LC; Roosevelt, ed., *Letters*, 1: 525-27; Hull to RWB, 19, 23 November 1936, PPF 716, FDR Papers; "Memo for Secretary of State," n.d., PSF Confidential, Department of State Papers.

32 Interview with Barry Bingham, Sr., 4 April 1987; Bingham Diaries, III, 17 December 1935; IV, 19 March 1936, RWB-LC.

33 House to FDR, 17 November 1936, PPF 222, FDR Papers; FDR to House, 9 December 1936, OF 491, FDR Papers; "An American for America Only" to RWB, 11 October 1935; Barry Bingham to RWB, 18 November 1936; Charles Edward Russell, et. al., to Cordell Hull, 8 June 1936, 123 Bingham, Robert W./123, Department of State Papers; RWB to Barry Bingham, 4 December 1936, RWB-LC.

In a critique of the early years of New Deal diplomacy, Howard Jablon has postulated that the single-minded, domineering leadership of Secretary of State Cordell Hull blunted any hope for more creative policy from 1933 to 1937. Hull, in short, was obsessed with free trade and reciprocal trade agreements to the exclusion of more substantive foreign policy issues. In several ways Bingham played a part in this "devotion to the reciprocal trade program." First, Hull and Colonel House headed a powerful interest group within the administration, and Bingham followed their lead. Second, southern congressmen and southerners historically had accepted the ideal of world peace through better trade relations. Perhaps, most important of all, the American people and the administration in Washington indicated no consensus on any foreign policy in the early New Deal years. Bingham's early suggestion that the United States should "stay on our side and let them come to us" suited the times. No one agreed more than Roosevelt.³⁴

If the United States lacked a coherent foreign policy in 1936 and leaned toward isolationism, Bingham went about his task from another perspective. His fundamental objective of bringing about closer relations between the United States and Great Britain finally began to bear fruit as British attitudes shifted. While the British government hesitated to talk about a reciprocal trade agreement early in 1936 because of the uncertainty of the re-election of Roosevelt, the English people moved ever so slowly toward a consensus that allowed them to produce a coherent defense and rearmament policy.³⁵

War clouds gathered ominously over Europe and the world in 1936 as Mussolini's forces overran Ethiopia. Moreover, Bingham relayed to Roosevelt his belief that Germany would go to war "if they feel they can get away with it, and it may happen through some untoward event which we cannot immediately foresee." To an English

34 Howard Jablon, *Crossroads of Decision: The State Department and Foreign Policy, 1933-1937* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 131-38; Bingham Diaries, II, 29 March 1935, RWB-LC.

35 *Foreign Relations, 1936*, I: 296-98, 304-305; Richard N. Kottman, *Reciprocity and the North Atlantic Triangle, 1932-38* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 133, 143, 272-79.

friend he declared that, "There is grave reason to suspect that Hitler and Mussolini are beginning to work together on the basis of dividing up the world between them." Unfortunately, he also found a strong pro-German sentiment among a minority in Britain, and people were generally "more anxious and apprehensive than I have ever seen them before."³⁶

In 1936, as Germany grew stronger, Bingham intensified his pleas to Hull and Roosevelt for closer ties with the British. Throughout 1936 he kept up a steady barrage of cooperationist speeches and press releases. Before the Association of British Chambers of Commerce he praised the benefits of Wilsonian internationalism and Hull's proposal for reduced tariffs. "The surest method of preventing war," he argued, "lies in the restoration of normal international trade, bringing with it the promise to the peoples of the world of a better standard of living and the hope of a fuller life." More specifically, he declared his belief that both the United States and Great Britain were at last ready to arm against aggression.³⁷

On the Fourth of July, 1936, in a short speech to the American Society in London, broadcast back to the United States on CBS, Bingham expounded on the same themes he had been preaching for over three years. The English-speaking and "other free peoples in the world" must cooperate to confront the forces of tyranny. "In a world armed and arming, we must and will be fully prepared, gun for gun, ship for ship, plane for plane, man for man, to protect our homes and our country," Bingham asserted. Dramatically, he ended his address: "I say again that ours is the supreme heritage among men, to be cherished, to be loved, to serve, to live and, if need be, to die for!"³⁸

36 RWB to FDR, 4 September 1936, 21 July 1937; FDR to RWB, telegram, 14 September 1936, PSF, GB; RWB, FDR Papers; RWB to Lady Grogan, 28 July 1936, 1 October 1937, RWB-LC.

37 Speech to the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, 30 April 1936, 123 Bingham, Robert W./119, Department of State Papers.

38 *New York Times*, 26 June 1936; Bingham Diaries, IV, 10-17 June 1936, 330-31, "Remarks of the American Ambassador at the American Society Dinner in London on July 4, 1936," RWB-LC.

Bingham "should be recalled," one Irish-American, Philadelphia lawyer bluntly told Roosevelt. Another critic told Hull that Bingham's remarks would cost votes in the upcoming presidential election. Bingham, however, did not relent. Not long after the revolt of General Francisco Franco and the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, Bingham spoke before an English-Speaking Union garden party at Capestone in Cheshire. Although he appeared to back off slightly from his previous call for Anglo-American cooperation in the early part of his speech, he continued to stress the common culture, language, and ethnic background of the two countries. The United States did not desire an alliance with any nation; however, Bingham explained, "There are many ties which draw the English-speaking nations together, . . . We are the great free peoples of this earth."³⁹

Bingham served Roosevelt at every turn. The 1936 presidential election presented him with another opportunity. Early that spring, Louis Howe, the president's oldest staff member, imposed on Bingham's support for Roosevelt by asking for and receiving a contribution of \$10,000 for a hazy "educational campaign." Howe's plans presumably included organizing a publishing company to print pro-administration material. After Bingham asked for a clarification from Roosevelt, Jim Farley discovered that Howe had been appropriating the money for himself. Roosevelt stopped this practice and the accelerating embarrassment that Howe had brought to him. Within weeks Howe died.⁴⁰

Several months before the Democratic convention, Governor A. B. "Happy" Chandler suggested that Bingham head Kentucky's state delegation. Bingham declined, maintaining that such a move would

39 Arnold A. Offner, *American Appeasement: United States Foreign Policy and Germany, 1933-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 154; *New York Times*, 15 July 1936; Michael J. Ryan to FDR, 5 July 1936, OF 491, FDR Papers; Celel Lyman to Cordell Hull, 9 July 1936, 123 Bingham, Robert W./126; *Ottawa Journal*, editorial, 123 Bingham, Robert W./ 127, Department of State Papers; Speech, English-Speaking Garden Party, 7 August 1936, 123 Bingham, Robert W./130, Department of State Papers.

40 Ted Morgan, *FDR*, 442; RWB to Howe, 16 March 1936; RWB to FDR, 19 March 1936, PSF, GB: RWB, FDR Papers; Bingham Diaries, IV, 18 March 1936, Insert, RWB-LC.

make him too much of a "partisan." However, he fully intended to play some role in the upcoming election. As much as he wanted to get back home, he said that because of the turbulent political climate in Europe, neither he nor other American diplomats should stray from their posts for long. Roosevelt insisted that Bingham come back home briefly to work on press relations, specifically "to lay a lot of ground work in the Associated Press organization looking toward complete fairness by them." Bingham acceded to Roosevelt's wishes that he should "be on hand to watch every move by the Associated Press control, and to do anything else which you may think desirable," media duty that also included working with the radio networks.⁴¹

After the nomination of Roosevelt and the lull in election-year campaigning before the usual push after Labor Day, Bingham returned to his post in London. Tensions in Europe continued to concern him and, although he would have liked nothing better than participating directly in the campaign, he remained in Britain. Roosevelt reported to Bingham in mid September that "THINGS HERE ARE GOING ALL RIGHT." To make sure that all went smoothly, Bingham assigned Ulric Bell, the *Courier-Journal* Washington bureau chief, and Herbert Agar to write special articles and editorials in support of Roosevelt. Bell kept in close contact with the White House and with "Fairfax," the code name for Roosevelt in the Bingham-Bell correspondence. Bingham also charged Bell with the special task of keeping "a close watch on the AP." As usual, Bingham also made substantial contributions to the Democratic party's election campaign.⁴²

The *Literary Digest* public opinion poll to the contrary, a "Landon-slide" did not materialize in the fall of 1936. With nationwide voter participation at its highest since 1916, Roosevelt won with over

41 Barry Bingham to RWB, 9 April 1936; RWB to Barry Bingham, 22 April 1936, RWB-LC; FDR to RWB, 4 May 1936; RWB to FDR, 5 May 1936, PSF, GB; RWB, FDR Papers; FDR to Jesse I. Straus, 4 May 1936, Roosevelt, ed., *Letters*, 1: 585-86.

42 Bell to RWB, 6 September, 6 October 1936; Bingham Diaries, IV, 5 August, 16 September 1936, RWB-LC; FDR to RWB, 14 September 1936, telegram, 123 Bingham, Robert W./132, Department of State Papers; Dallek, *FDR and American Foreign Policy*, 125.

sixty percent of the vote, winning every state except Maine and Vermont. Ulric Bell's lead article in the *Courier-Journal* the day after the election claimed the results overwhelmingly endorsed liberalism and the New Deal. He scolded Al Smith, Father Charles Coughlin, Congressman William Lemke, Dr. Francis E. Townsend, and "all the other motley Republicans" for their folly in opposing the president. Bingham could not contain his elation in a telegram to Roosevelt: "I have no doubt yours is the supreme achievement since the union of states was formed."⁴³

Bingham immediately made the obligatory resignation from his post; as expected, Roosevelt asked him to stay on. A few days after the election Bingham explained the reaction of the British to Roosevelt. While the average English person "warmly" appreciated Roosevelt's victory, Bingham declared that the "British press service is so bad and so insufficient" that they reported that Governor Alf Landon stood a good chance of winning. Unfortunately, British government officials did not believe Bingham's disclaimers about Landon and, correspondingly, temporized its policies toward the United States for several months prior to the election.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, in the latter months of 1936 Bingham noticed a discernible shift in relations between the United States and Great Britain. A combination of factors led to this. First, the overwhelming re-election of Roosevelt finally convinced the British government that he had a majority behind him. Second, war appeared more ominously on the horizon than ever in late 1936, and Bingham's letters and dispatches often relayed that feeling to Washington. Third, the British experienced difficulty rebuilding their defenses, having particular trouble in their aircraft construction program. Combined with the aggressiveness of Germany, Italy, and Japan, this led to an

43 *Courier-Journal*, 2, 4, 5 November 1936; RWB to FDR, [November 1936], RWB-LC; RWB to FDR, 13 November 1936, PSF, GB: RWB, FDR Papers.

44 RWB to FDR, 13 November 1936, PSF, GB: RWB, FDR Papers; RWB to Major James S. Iredell, 11 November 1936; RWB to Barry Bingham, 14 December 1936, RWB-LC; FDR to George VI, 19 December 1936, 123 Bingham, Robert W./125, Department of State Papers.

emerging British consensus that the United States could again be their best ally in case of war in Europe.⁴⁵

In his meetings with British leaders, particularly with Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, Bingham stressed the necessity for Anglo-American trade agreements as a beginning for closer general ties. The Imperial Study Group, made up of fifty-five members of Parliament, offered some hope when it urged that the British government seek monetary and trade agreements with America. One prominent member of the group reported to Bingham in early October that after an extensive tour of European capitals, his entourage concluded that "quite clearly our path must lie alongside the United States, and as far away from Europe as possible." Although Roosevelt agreed with Bingham that such moves were welcome, he refused to recognize "unofficial foreign missions of any kind," such as the Imperial Policy Group, fearing adverse reaction in the press.⁴⁶ Again, Roosevelt reacted with no overall foreign policy strategy or agenda.

Bingham was perceptive enough to discern that although there was "a wide-spread, persistent, increasing feeling that it is to their interest to cultivate better relations with the United States," the British government still lacked the will to move in late 1936. In the British effort to improve relations with America, several members of the House of Commons informed Bingham that they were at work forming an organization to promote better understanding with the United States. As part of this obvious change, the House of Commons gave a dinner in honor of Bingham in mid December. In his remarks Bingham suggested that when the English visited the United States they would be well served to explore areas other than the east in order to obtain a true understanding of his country. Two days later the

45 *Courier-Journal*, 26 November 1937; *Foreign Relations, 1936*, 450-51; Nixon, *FDR and Foreign Affairs*, 3: 412-13; Bingham Diaries, IV, 2 December 1936; Sir Evelyn Wrench to RWB, 5 November 1936; RWB to Wrench, 6 November 1936; Roy Howard to RWB, 1 September 1936; RWB to Howard, 9 September 1936, RWB-LC.

46 Bingham Diaries, IV, 19 September, 26 October 1936; RWB to Cordell Hull, 7 April [1936]; RWB-LC; Hull to FDR, 1 August 1936, PSF, GB: 1933-36; RWB to Kenneth de Courcy, 5 October 1936; de Courcy to RWB, n.d. [1936], OF 491, FDR Papers; FDR to RWB, 27 October 1936, OF 491, FDR Papers; Nixon, *FDR and Foreign Affairs*, 3: 449-52.

London Spectator praised such meetings as valuable and editorialized that Britain should never have suspended "token payments" of its war debt. Such admissions represented fulfillment of Bingham's prediction that the United States should bide its time and allow the British "to come to us."⁴⁷

Even as the aggressiveness of Germany, Italy, and Japan increased, events in Britain, for one brief moment, took on an appearance of more style than substance in late 1936 and early 1937. A constitutional crisis developed when Edward VIII, who had followed his father George V to the throne, never having been coronated, ran afoul of the court and tradition by romancing an American divorcee, Mrs. Wallis Warfield Simpson. Bingham rejoiced that the "crisis" had "successfully and triumphantly" concluded with the accession of George VI, someone he believed would bring stability and respectability to the throne. "The Duke of Windsor [Edward VIII] was surrounded by a pro-German cabal and many people here suspected that Mrs. Simpson was actually in German pay," Bingham told Roosevelt.⁴⁸

Bingham's diplomatic duties continued into early 1937. Through early spring he fought a valiant rearguard action in his attempt to keep from having to wear the detested knee breeches at the upcoming coronation of George VI. The court made one concession when they allowed Bingham to wear breeches made of the same material as his coat rather than of silk. Bingham's mild protestations to Roosevelt brought a humorous response from the Oval Office:

My ruling is: that Ambassadors should wear trousers unless the Sovereign of the State to which he is accredited makes a personal demand for knee breeches. I am fortified in this ruling by the pictures I have seen of Comrade Litvinoff in the aforesaid short pants. If Soviet Russia can stand it I guess we can too.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *London Spectator*, 18 December 1936; *London Times*, 16 December 1936; J. Taylor Peddie to RWB, 17 January 1936, OF 491, FDR Papers; Nixon, *FDR and Foreign Affairs*, 3: 461-62, 484-86, 547-49.

⁴⁸ Morgan, *FDR*, 486; RWB to Shepard Bryan, 15 December 1936, RWB-LC; RWB to FDR, 5 January 1937, PSF, Diplomatic, GB: 1937-38, FDR Papers.

⁴⁹ *New York Times*, 4 May 1937; RWB to Sir John Wilson Taylor, 18 May 1937; RWB to the Spanish Ambassador, 22 April 1937; FDR to RWB, 18 June 1937; RWB

As the British constitutional crisis was resolved, other events in 1937 only reinforced Bingham's forebodings of war. Early that year Roosevelt signed a new neutrality act in response to the continuing Spanish Civil War. Bingham's advice to retain a "wide measure of discretion" had, by that time, become the consensus of many Americans, who feared complete neutrality to be both impossible and unwise. Although Adolph Hitler confined himself to verbal saber-rattling for the remainder of the year, the Japanese moved one step closer to all-out war in Asia by storming across the Marco Polo Bridge into China in early July.⁵⁰

While the United States and Great Britain could not agree on any action to impede the Japanese in 1937, they moved nevertheless toward closer cooperation. The trend that Bingham sensed in 1936 continued into the new year. Undoubtedly, the re-election of Roosevelt helped. In early January 1937, Bingham reported an obvious British "drive" underway to gain American support, reinforcing "my thesis that events must eventually force the British to come to us." Hull's determination to gain an Anglo-American trade agreement apparently had received the blessing of several leaders in the British cabinet, particularly Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. Neville Chamberlain agreed after he replaced Stanley Baldwin as prime minister in mid 1937. One member of Parliament assured Bingham that "effective economic co-operation between Great Britain and the United States is the only ultimate hope of saving what is left of civilization." Whether from government official or private citizen, in public or in private, the British disposition toward the United States had obviously changed by mid 1937.⁵¹

to FDR, 5 July 1937, RWB-LC.

50 Nixon, *FDR and Foreign Affairs*, 3: 568-69; Offner, *American Appeasement*, 157, 177-79.

51 *London Times*, 29 April, 20 May 1937; Offner, *American Appeasement*, 178, 195-96; Peter Lowe, *Great Britain and the Origins of the Pacific War: A Study in British Policy in East Asia, 1937-1941* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 18, 22; RWB to FDR, 5 January 1937, PSF, GB; RWB, FDR Papers; RWB to Cordell Hull, 6 July 1937, PSF, Diplomatic, GB; 1937-38, FDR Papers; *Foreign Relations, 1937*, 2: 22-23, 81; RWB to Hull, 30 April 1937; Hull to RWB, 25 September 1937; RWB to Ulric Bell, 6 April 1937; RWB to William Murray, 11 March 1937; RWB to Lady Reading, 14

Regardless of the rumors about Bingham's recall, Roosevelt continued his support of Bingham. Bingham reciprocated and through thick and thin never relented in his devotion to Roosevelt. Even during the ill-fated attempt to pack the Supreme Court in 1937, Bingham put a gloss on the effort: "I think you won the war, and that this will mean unlimited benefit to our country." Roosevelt thanked Bingham for his support during the crisis but admitted to "laying low" for the time being.⁵²

The Spanish Civil War increasingly confounded both British and American diplomats in mid 1937. Bingham relayed Eden's belief that "a Franco victory would not jeopardize British interests in the Iberian peninsula" but that an American embargo would "complicate his task" in working toward a peaceful solution there. Bingham accepted Eden's conclusion that anything other than "strict neutrality" by the United States in that conflict "would be regarded by Europe as a gratuitous interference in continental affairs." British policy followed strict neutrality to the point of allowing warring parties in Spain full "belligerent rights at sea." Their rearmament and public-relations efforts to win American approval to the contrary, Hull told Roosevelt that, "The British tories are still tories and in spite of Eden's denial, want peace at any price." Bingham sensed that the continuation of the Spanish crisis generally deepened suspicions among the major nations of Europe.⁵³

Bingham maintained a spirited censure of Germany and her allies. At the annual Pilgrim's Dinner in mid May, he praised Anglo-American efforts for world peace and denounced the militarization of the Axis powers. "They rearmed and for what—for aggression," Bingham charged. "No nation needs bombing airplanes,

October 1937; Robert Boothby to RWB, 11 November 1937, RWB-LC.

52 FDR to RWB, 23 July 1937; RWB to FDR, 11 March, 1 August 1937, RWB-LC; Roosevelt, ed., *Letters*, 1:702; RWB to FDR, 12 August 1937, PSF, GB: RWB, FDR Papers.

53 Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (2 vols.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 1: 510-12; Dallek, *FDR and American Foreign Policy*, 143; *Foreign Relations, 1937*, 1: 317-18, 342-43; RWB to Hull, 14 July 1937, PSF, Diplomatic, GB: 1937-38, FDR Papers; Memorandum for the Secretary of State from FDR, 7 July 1937, PSF, Confidential, State Department: 1937-38, FDR Papers.

big tanks and heavy artillery unless it intends to plunder its neighbors."⁵⁴

These remarks paled, however, in comparison with those made a few weeks later at the American Society's annual Fourth of July festivities celebrated at the embassy in London. After a crowd of over three hundred heard Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University, give an appropriately patriotic speech, Bingham's brief remarks left no doubt about his views of Germany, Italy, and Japan. "Let us admit for the moment that the dictatorships are better prepared for war," he explained, "but if the dictatorships are better prepared to begin war, certainly the democracies are better able to finish it." Although Bingham refused to be totally pessimistic about world peace, he faced up to the threat to democracy. In the strongest possible terms he proposed:

If we must deal with people who cannot and will not listen to reason, if we must deal with despotism and people who regard war as a cult and blood and honor as something to teach little children, and who only listen to the argument of force, then we must fall back on that. But my hope is that there must be in these despotisms at least some remnant of reasoning power and of sanity.⁵⁵

Sharp reaction came within hours. Ambassador William E. Dodd in Berlin sent Hull word of strong Nazi press reaction. A Berlin newspaper scolded Bingham for an "inbred Anglo-Saxon habit of playing the schoolmaster." One paper charged that his speech "incited the so-called democracies in almost unbelievable fashion." Another asked: "Should an American ambassador accredited in a European capital make agitated speeches against other European peoples?"⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *New York Times*, 20 May 1937.

⁵⁵ *London Times*, 6 July 1937; *New York Times*, 6, 7 July 1937; *Louisville Times*, 6 July 1937. No copy of the speech has been found by the author in either the Robert Worth Bingham file of the Department of State Papers, the FDR Library, or the Bingham Papers at the Library of Congress. The accounts of his speech come entirely from newspaper sources.

⁵⁶ *Louisville Times*, 6, 7 July 1937; William E. Dodd to Hull, 7 July 1937, 123 Bingham, Robert W./151, Department of State Papers.

The speech also caught the eye of critics in the United States. The *Chicago Daily Tribune*, an old Bingham foe, replied with a front-page cartoon with Uncle Sam remonstrating, "I don't remember ever authorizing him to enter into a military alliance with Great Britain," as a prim Bingham spoke to a circle of English friends in the background. Personal correspondence to Bingham kept up the attack. To "R. Worthless Bingham" one American critic addressed Bingham as "You Bumbling British So-&-So," while another assumed "President Roosevelt will hand you a good stiff kick in the pants."⁵⁷

Not only did Nazi newspapers and Bingham's American critics denounce the 4 July speech, but the State Department also questioned his remarks. Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles submitted a circular letter to Roosevelt, ordering that ambassadors submit all speeches to the department before delivering them. Roosevelt asked for more information as well as a copy of Bingham's speech. No copies were available. Bingham either had no copy of his speech, being spontaneous and made off the cuff, or he destroyed any notes or text. Only newspaper accounts are extant. Attempts by Welles to find a copy elsewhere or obtain one from the London embassy failed. Bingham chose to ignore Welles. More importantly, Roosevelt supported Bingham. Several weeks later Roosevelt displayed no criticism for Bingham's outburst against totalitarianism, declaring: "You are doing a grand job." In a few weeks the incident was nearly forgotten, but Bingham refrained from making such public statements for a time.⁵⁸

Bingham's correspondence after the Fourth of July remarks revealed his increasing pessimism. He explained his diplomatically intemperate talk by telling friends that he had lost patience. "I thought

57 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 July 1937; "An American Tourist" to RWB, 12 July 1937; William Seymour to RWB, 12 July 1937; John V. Hynes to RWB, 22 July 1937; A. Jukes-Ham to "R. Worthless Bingham," 17 August 1937; M.S. Watts to RWB, 22 August 1937, RWB-LC; Lady Lister Kaye to Hull, 11 August 1937, 123 Bingham, Robert W./155 Department of State Papers.

58 Welles to FDR, 7 July 1937; FDR, Confidential Memorandum, 8 July 1937, PPF 716, FDR Papers; Pierrepont Moffat to Welles, 23 July 1937, 123 Bingham, Robert W./152, Department of State Papers; FDR to RWB, 23 July 1937, RWB-LC.

it was high time that those of us who believe in liberty, justice and democratic institutions should have a word to say to these bloody dictators who repeatedly broadcast their contempt for democracy, which they describe as being rotten, inefficient, and decadent," Bingham told one colleague. He denied having called for a military alliance between the United States and Great Britain, although he desired "a decent and reasonable mutual and beneficial cooperation among the English-speaking peoples." Unfortunately, he believed that the "only language the Japanese and the Germans understand is guns, and neither Britain nor the United States is prepared to go to war." Moreover, he was convinced that "the Germans intend to attack as soon as they think they are ready."⁵⁹

The outburst at the Fourth of July festivities coincided with Bingham's deteriorating health. Indeed, physical pain may well have contributed to his blunt remarks. He complained of a lack of energy, suffering from unexplained pain throughout his body. Nothing seemed to ease his discomfort and, being unable to carry out his diplomatic tasks, he applied for leave from his post in late August. Upon reaching New York, Bingham immediately traveled to Baltimore where old friend Dr. Hugh Young examined him at Johns Hopkins. No cause could be found for his deteriorating health. After a brief stay in the hospital, he talked with Secretary Hull in Washington about world affairs and then traveled on to Hyde Park for a brief conference with Roosevelt. At both places he denied press allegations that either Hull or Roosevelt sought his resignation.⁶⁰

During Bingham's stay at Johns Hopkins, Roosevelt delivered his Quarantine Speech on 5 October. After passage of the Neutrality Act of 1937 with its "cash and carry" proviso, Roosevelt tested domestic opinion in this speech. Branding the Japanese attack on China in

59 RWB to Jan Masaryk, 6 July 1937; RWB to Jess Pope, 20 August 1937; RWB to F.W. Paul, 2 August 1937; RWB to William E. Chilton, 12 November 1937; RWB to Ralph E. Moreton, 23 July 1937; RWB to Dr. William Rienhoff, Jr., 19 August 1937; RWB to Raymond Buell, 15 July 1937, RWB-LC.

60 *Courier-Journal*, 31 August 1937; *Louisville Times*, 30 August 1937; *London Times*, 15 July, 23 August, 1, 2, 18 September, 13 October 1937; *New York Times*, 1, 2, 17 September, 21 October 1937.

July as an act of lawlessness, Roosevelt argued that the civilized nations of the world should "quarantine" such "bandit nations." In a telegram to Roosevelt, Bingham declared: "Your Chicago Speech Undoubtedly Encouraging And Helpful To All Decent People Throughout The World And May Well Lay Foundation For Their Salvation From The Murderous Brigands Infesting The World." Isolationists like Hearst cried foul, but an increasing number of Americans agreed with the White House and with Bingham. However, this "uncertain feeler," as described by diplomatic historian H. G. Nicholas, failed to bring immediate change, and Roosevelt backed off.⁶¹

After resuming his duties in London, Bingham's health deteriorated again, and he set sail for home on 20 November 1937. Checking into Johns Hopkins, Bingham officially resigned on 8 December. He thanked Roosevelt for the opportunity of serving as ambassador to Great Britain. He predicted that the physicians would find the cause for his "peculiar recurrent periodic form of fever." Although Barry Bingham reported to Roosevelt that his father was "making slow progress," by 11 December the press reported that Roosevelt had already chosen Joseph P. Kennedy, who had vigorously sought the ambassadorship, to replace him.⁶²

Meanwhile, Dr. Hugh Young convinced Bingham and his family that exploratory surgery was needed for an unexplained inflamed abdomen. On 14 December Young and his team of surgeons discovered that Bingham suffered from abdominal Hodgkin's disease. Young immediately understood that there was no hope of saving his old friend's life. After briefly regaining consciousness, Bingham

61 RWB to FDR, telegram, 6 October 1937, OF 491, FDR Papers; H.G. Nicholas, *The United States and Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 87.

62 *New York Times*, 9, 10 December 1937; David E. Koskoff, *Joseph P. Kennedy: A Life and Times* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 114-15, 512; Cole, *FDR and the Isolationists*, 276; Barry Bingham to FDR, 11 December 1937, PPF 716, FDR Papers; RWB to FDR, 8 December 1937, RWB-LC.

lapsed into a coma and died on the third day after the operation at the age of sixty-six.⁶³

Roosevelt issued the a brief statement:

I feel the loss of Ambassador Bingham keenly. He was not only an old personal friend but, as one of the foremost citizens of Kentucky and of the nation, he exercised an active and consistent influence in the cause of decent government and of high ideals in politics. As the Ambassador of the United States to Great Britain he truly represented the best interests of his country. All of us have suffered a heavy loss.

In the end Roosevelt had taken no official action on Bingham's resignation and wrote a note of tribute to Barry with the explanation that his father "died on December eighteenth—still American Ambassador to Great Britain." Of course, Kennedy waited in the wings, having shamelessly lobbied for the post for several months.⁶⁴

Bingham proved to be a perceptive diplomat as United States representative at the Court of St. James's and, though a lover of things English, not merely the uncritical Anglophile his critics scorned. He was not just a conduit of information and an observer but he worked tirelessly for better Anglo-American relations at a crucial time in the histories of both countries. The conditions under which he labored were difficult. When he reached London, American-British relations were strained by the insoluble debt question and the world economic disruptions caused by the Great Depression. He was on the cutting edge of improving relations, while being attacked from critics on both sides of the Atlantic.

This "Kentuckian in Knee Breeches" hated fascism in all its forms. He warned about the dangers of fascism and German militarism and the necessity of a united front by the western democracies against totalitarianism. Events proved him correct. He worked tirelessly to demonstrate American opposition to Hitler and Mussolini.

63 *New York Times*, 15, 16, 19 December 1937; *London Times*, 15 December 1937.

64 *London Times*, 20 December 1937; FDR to Barry Bingham, 22 December 1937, PSF, GB: RWB, FDR Papers.

If Bingham was used by Roosevelt as a diplomat stalking-horse, he cooperated willingly because he implicitly trusted Roosevelt's leadership. He found no alternative to unquestioning support of New Deal foreign policy, while pushing Roosevelt, not always gently, toward closer ties with Britain. If New Deal foreign policy often appeared to drift and follow political expediency, Bingham kept his efforts focused on the future of the United States and the world.

Moreover, he never doubted that Roosevelt saved the United States from the worst ravages of the Great Depression. Bingham never entirely overcame his suspicions of the eastern leadership establishment. The ambassadorship represented not only the highlight of Bingham's career but also symbolized to him the acceptance of himself and his native south into the mainstream of American leadership.