THE NEČAS MISSION DURING
THE MUNICH CRISIS: NEČASS
OWN ACCOUNT FROM THE
HOOVER INSTITUTION ARCHIVES

One of the more curious diplomatic episodes of the Munich era was the "Nečas Mission," which was undertaken at the height of the crisis on 16 September 1938, Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš dispatched his Minister of Social Welfare, Jaromír Nečas (1888-1945), with a private message to the head of the French Socialist Party, Léon Blum, stating that the Czechoslovakia would be willing to cede certain German-speaking territories to Nazi Germany. Although the mission became publicly known after World War II, the appended document from the Stefan Osusky Collection in the archives of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University should shed light on the mission, for it is Nečas's own commentary. The document was given to Osusky during the war, and it exists in an English translation, written in a rather turgid and pedestrian style.¹ Although the document speaks for itself, it will be useful to summarize the historiography of the mission for persons interested in Czechoslovakia who are probably not well aware of what has been written on Nečas's trip.

As noted in Nečas's commentary, Beneš summoned Nečas to him in Prague and discussed a certain offer Beneš wished Nečas to make to the French using Blum as an intermediary. Later, Beneš's secretary gave Nečas some handwritten instructions, which admitted the principle of cession of territory to Germany if a plan could be presented to Hitler as part of a final package of

¹ Osusky's papers were given to the Hoover Institution after his death in 1973. They are available for research even though they await further reorganization. As of this writing, Nečas's document, "Remarks about the Political Events before and After Munich," may be found in Box 47, Collection of Stefan Osusky, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University, Stanford, California.
negotiations. Beneš told Nečas not to state that the plan came from him. He ordered him not to say anything of the mission to the Czechoslovak minister to Paris, Štefan Osuský, and he ordered Nečas to destroy the handwritten message—something Nečas did not do.

As the principle of cession of territory would have been politically unacceptable to the Czechoslovak public in 1938, it is not surprising that Beneš omitted any reference to the Nečas mission in his memoirs. The mission became known to the general public only at the end of the war during the testimony of French officials at the meeting of a French parliamentary commission investigating the fall of France to Nazi Germany. Further notoriety to the mission was added in 1958, when the Czechoslovak Communist Party's organ, Rudé právo, published Beneš's written instructions to Nečas in conjunction with the marking of the twentieth anniversary of the Munich crisis. Not to be outdone, when the French Foreign Ministry published the September 1938, volume of the series Documents diplomatiques français, the series included a French translation—with minor differences from the Czech text—although Beneš's instructions were to prepare neither a French document nor an "official" communication of the Czechoslovak government to the French.

The actual impact of the Nečas mission is somewhat difficult to assess. After receiving Beneš’s message, Blum dispatched his former Chef de cabinet, André Blumel, to the French Premier, Edouard Daladier, to disclose both the terms of the message and a map Beneš had sent. Daladier thus had knowledge of Beneš's proposals before 18 September, when he and his Foreign Minister,