NOTE

J. W. BRUEGEL (London, England)

*Based on a lecture delivered on 19 October 1980 at the Congress of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences in America in Washington, D.C.

not even touched. At a luncheon party on 10 February, with Jan Masaryk and Jaromír Smutný, Beneš’s chancellor, present, Dixon could be a bit less diplomatic. He said that he brought a special message from the British foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, expressing sympathy and the wish that Beneš should say freely to the ambassador what he thought about the future. His honest opinion, Beneš answered, was that the democratic position could be held. He expected—like everybody else—that the Communists would suffer slight losses in the forthcoming elections in May. (The possibility that for this very reason no free elections would be held was obviously not mentioned.) Beneš and Masaryk did not want to admit that Czechoslovak conditions were in any way comparable to the situations in France, Greece, or Italy. The best help to Czechoslovak democracy they saw in an increase in the volume of foreign trade.

Dixon’s impressions were mixed, as he confessed in his dispatch on the meeting. In view of Beneš’s state of health the encounter had been a great effort for the president. Beneš was no doubt “the shrewdest and most experienced leader,” but Dixon was surprised by his “complacency about the weakness of the democratic parties in face of the Communist offensive.” Alluding to the lunch on 10 February which had been their last meeting, Dixon said in a later dispatch in March, “I had an uncomfortable feeling that he was living in a fool’s paradise.”

After having capitulated to the Communists, Beneš left Prague and went to his country retreat at Sezimovo Ústí. He let Dixon know that he could not receive him there, because he would then also have to receive the ambassadors from Communist-dominated countries. As a matter of fact, Beneš received one Western diplomat as visitor at Sezimovo Ústí, namely the United States ambassador, Laurence Steinhardt (1892-1950), who, as doyen of the diplomatic corps, brought official birthday greetings on 28 May and was told about Beneš’s intention to resign the presidency. But Dixon managed to arrange for 26 March a visit to Beneš by Lady Nichols, the wife of the former British ambassador. This was camouflaged as a courtesy and farewell visit without political significance, but Lady Nichols had obviously received detailed recommendations from Dixon as to what questions to ask and what advice to offer. Beneš was repeatedly told by her to go abroad, if ever it was possible. Beneš informed her that during the February crisis he did not re-

5. Telegram of Dixon to Bevin, 26 March 1948, PRO, volume 71287, N 3686/157/12.