

## Appeasement

**“PEACE IN OUR TIME!”**



Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Great Britain prior to the outbreak of World War II, proclaimed these words in 1939 after the Munich Conference in which he, meeting with Hitler, believed that he had averted another world conflict. Little did he know how wrong he would be.

The policy of appeasement, embraced in vain by Great Britain and France in the 1930s, was ultimately a bid to reach a peaceful understanding with Germany. The major powers were anxious to abort any German influence over Eastern Europe. While the countries of this region were equally anxious, their interests rested elsewhere--unrestricted barter of agricultural products for that of German manufactured goods. As it was, Czechoslovakia remained the sole nation who relied upon support from Great Britain and France.



In 1935, Hitler announced that Germany was undergoing preparations to rearm itself, a fervent violation of the Treaty of

Versailles. In 1936, Hitler continued to disobey the restrictions that followed the Great War by announcing the mobilization of troops in the French-occupied Rhineland. Though the German army was under strict order to retreat in case of resistance, it was a simple victory. With France and Great Britain at odds with one another and a lack of support for France from Great Britain, Hitler was allowed to believe that his defiance of the Treaty of Versailles was tolerable.

Following the German conquest of the Rhineland and Italian success in Ethiopia, there was a great expansion of both the distinction and appeal of the authoritarian orders. The various dictatorial regimes of Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia were quick to



emulate the forms and methods of their Fascist and National-Socialist mentors. Those tyrannical rulers insisted their governments were the embodiments of a new political essence. Just when it seemed the situation could not reach a more volatile state, a cooperation was forged between Hitler and Mussolini, giving the Rome-Berlin axis a concrete foundation.

As the Allies reeled at the thought of a Fascist-dominated Europe, the western democracies were also faced with two alternatives- opposition by force or negotiations which would ultimately end in concessions to Nazi Germany. In August 1938, negotiations began after local German officials asserted that the Sudeten people had been discriminated against by the Czech government. On September 29, 1938, the Munich Pact, which allowed for the cession of four specific districts of the Sudetenland to Germany, was signed.

The transitions of power in the Sudetenland and ensuing actions were overseen by an international commission comprised of delegates from France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Czechoslovakia, and representatives of adjoining German territories. Additionally, Germany, as well as Great Britain and France, agreed to guarantee the new borders of Czechoslovakia. The commission also addressed the issues of the plebiscites. By 1939, it was abundantly clear that the policy of appeasement had rendered ineffective by any standard.

In March 1939, Hitler continued his rampage by invading the remains of Czechoslovakia without resistance from the French or the British. That action, which led to the revocation of the Munich Pact, had two engaging, quite opposing effects. It was Hitler's invasion that finally convinced France and Great Britain that the Fuhrer would not terminate his actions voluntarily. It was also that action which in August 1939 persuaded Stalin of the cowardice of the western allies. That was cited by Soviet statesmen as leading to the non-aggression pact that chiselled Poland into German and Soviet territories.



On September 1, 1939, Hitler invaded Poland, with the firm belief that Britain and France would condone his action. Ironically, in March, 1939, a British-French alliance pledged to aid Poland with all available power "...in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces." On September 3, 1939, Great Britain and France declared war against Hitler and Nazi Germany.



Ultimately, appeasement failed. The commencement of World War II forced the western allies to realize the flaws of the policy of appeasement. Though appeasement appeared to be the solution to all problems, it ensured a peace that would have been very costly to maintain. To a great extent, appeasement was a course that tended to ignore some hard political ideas. The question of the Rhineland

occupation presented differences in diplomatic procedures, testing the durability of the French-British alliance. The western Allies emerged from the war having defeated Hitler and his army in 1945, yet somehow, the word "winner" seems inappropriate.

## Reasons for Appeasement

### **Approval**

Many Conservatives liked and supported Hitler's strong, right-wing government.

### **Britain was weak**

Britain's small army was too weak to go to war in 1938; needed time to re-arm.

### **Communism**

Many Britons saw Hitler as a defence against Russian Communism.

### **Democracy**

The critical factor? Chamberlain was not a dictator with the right to start a war if he pleased. He could not go to war without the support of the people – and until 1939 most people wanted peace, almost at any price.

### **Empire**

Britain could not defend her empire AND fight a war in Europe.

### **France**

Did not want war; and Britain could not fight Germany alone.

### **German propaganda**

claimed that Germans in the Sudetenland and Poland were being mistreated.

### **Home**

The Labour Party wanted to spend on housing and social care, not re-armament.

### **1st World War**

Chamberlain & many others remembered the slaughter of the First World War.

## **Justice**

The Treaty of Versailles *was* unfair and Hitler's Six Steps all seemed reasonable. Other countries were conscripting to reduce unemployment.

## **Kost (= Cost)**

Rearmament meant high taxes, which made democratic leaders unpopular.

## **League of Nations**

Many people believed in the League, and that quarrels could be ended by negotiation.

## **Morality**

It was RIGHT to try everything possible to keep peace: 'War is a terrible thing, and we must make sure that it is the great issues that are involved'.

## **Neville Chamberlain**

misjudged Hitler - he believed that Hitler 'was a man who could be relied on'. Recent research has suggested that, even after March 1939, Chamberlain remained substantially committed to appeasement.

## **Out of sight, out of mind**

Hitler rearmed/ persecuted the Jews etc, *in secret*. Western countries didn't know/ could not be sure.

## **Peace Movement**

Many people, especially young people, wanted peace.

## **Quit**

Hitler promised in 1938 that Sudetenland was the 'last claim I have to make'.

## **Remote**

Czechoslovakia was far away (none of our business?)/ Britain could not help.

## **Spanish Civil War**

Guernica showed what German bombers could do to Britain if there was a war.