

The Munich Agreement and Its Reception in the UK

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce popisuje události Mnichovské dohody a jejího přijetí ve Spojeném království. Nejprve se práce zaměřuje na události v meziválečné Evropě a popisuje různé přístupy k zachování míru, které západní mocnosti využívali. Práce se v této části také speciálně zaměřuje na Nevilla Chamberlaina, jakožto nejvlivnějšího propagátora appeasementu. Stručně popisuje situaci v Československu, kde se hlavně zaměřuje na situaci v Sudetech. Dále práce popisuje události přímo předcházející Mnichovské dohodě, hlavně Chamberlainovi setkání s Hitlerem, které eventuálně vyústilo v Mnichovskou konferenci, kterou tato práce také detailně vyobrazuje. V poslední sekci práce líčí události ve Spojeném království, které následovali po Mnichovské dohodě, s hlavním zaměřením na analýzu názorů Britské veřejnosti a politické sféry. To zahrnuje pohledy členů Konzervativní strany a také vůdců všech ostatních stran v parlamentu.

Klíčová slova: Mnichovská dohoda, Spojené království, Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement, Sudety, Československo

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis details the events of the Munich Agreement and its reception in the United Kingdom. Firstly, the thesis focuses on the events in the interwar period in Europe and describes the different approaches to peacekeeping employed by the Western powers, with a special focus on Neville Chamberlain, as the most influential propagator of the policy of appeasement. It briefly describes the situation in Czechoslovakia with the main focus being on the Sudetenland. Next, the thesis depicts the events directly preceding the Munich Agreement, mainly Chamberlain's meetings with Hitler, which eventually culminated in the Munich Conference, which this thesis also describes in detail. The last section of the thesis details the events in the United Kingdom following the Munich Agreement, with the main focus being the analysis of the opinions of the British public and political sphere. This encompasses the perspectives of Conservative Party members as well as the leaders of all the other parties in the parliament.

Keywords: Munich Agreement, United Kingdom, Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement, Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia

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INTRODUCTION

“We shall have to do the whole thing over again in twenty-five years at three times the cost.” These were the words of British Prime Minister Lloyd George during the Paris Peace Conference.¹ Contrary to the Prime Minister's statement, the public opinion was that the Great War was a war to end all wars. It turned out that Lloyd George was closer to the truth and predicted that the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles sent Germany straight onto a path of extremism and revenge, but what he failed to predict was the series of diplomatic errors by both France and Britain that culminated in the Munich Agreement and eventually the Second World War.

The Munich Agreement stands as a pivotal moment in European history, embodying the failure of international politics, power dynamics, and the spectre of impending conflict. The agreement was signed by Britain, France, Italy, and Germany and allowed Adolf Hitler to annex the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia, seemingly in pursuit of justice for the Sudeten Germans and to avert the threat of war. On the contrary, it did not bring peace to Europe but brought it closer to war.

At its core, the Munich Agreement symbolizes the failure of appeasement as an effective way of preventing international conflicts. And the failure of its greatest propagator British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to notice Hitler's true intention and negotiate fairly on behalf of his allies.

This thesis begins by exploring various peacekeeping strategies employed in interwar Europe, providing a comprehensive overview of the significant events during this period, commencing with the Paris Peace Conference. Subsequently, it delves into the early life of Neville Chamberlain, aiming to offer insights into his character and decision-making that would be later employed. After that, the focus shifts to the events directly preceding the Munich Agreement, such as Chamberlain's Plan Z. The thesis aims to examine the political and public reception in Britain and answer questions such as: Was the British public unified in their opinion of the Munich Agreement? What was the British public opinion on Chamberlain's government after the Munich Agreement? What was the reaction of British politicians to the Munich Agreement? When did Chamberlain realize his mistake and abandon the policy of appeasement?

¹ Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 20.

1 SITUATION IN EUROPE IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

Firstly, in order to understand why the unfortunate events of 1938 happened we must look into the historical context and motivations of the most influential nations in Europe. Starting with the Paris Peace Conference at the end of the First World War, where the Allies redrew borders, created new states and unknowingly planted seeds for future conflicts.

1.1 Results of the Paris Peace Conference

After the economically draining First World War, peace in Europe was secured by the Treaty of Versailles, which demilitarized and economically ruined Germany partially by war reparations, and partially by the occupation of key economic territories such as the Saarland or Danzig.² This mix of factors created the ideal conditions for the growth of extremist ideologies such as communism and Nazism in Germany. Of which the latter eventually took over the country. The fact that this may happen and eventually lead to another world war was not unknown and even at the time criticised by people like the President of the United States Woodrow Wilson or British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, but in the end, their concerns were overlooked, and the sanctions were issued anyway.³

Germany was considered the main participant on the side of the Central Powers in the First World War. It was heavily sanctioned, while their biggest ally Austria-Hungary dissolved into several successor states Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Poland. These successor states were treated differently at the conference and although Czechoslovaks were given all the territories they asked for and the Polish state was created with much care. Austria was reduced to their core territory and Hungary lost even parts that they considered integral, like the Slovak lands, Croatia and Transylvania, where many Hungarians lived, as a part of the Treaty of Trianon.⁴ This sparked a sizable wave of nationalism in Hungary under the new communist government and fear in their neighbours.⁵ With the eventual rise of fascism in Italy in the 1920s it started to look like the sides were set for another conflict of unprecedented magnitude.

² Brendon, *The Dark Valley*, 18-20.

³ Brendon, *The Dark Valley*, 20.

⁴ Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2003), chap. 19, 20, Kindle.

⁵ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, chap. 20.

1.2 French collective security in the interwar period

From the end of the First World War, the French were very keen on making a network of alliances between former allied countries and newly created states like Czechoslovakia and Poland in central Europe, in order to prevent Germany from waging war in the future. The main idea was that Germany would be averse to waging a two-front war again. This plan was not received well by the British, who were more interested in ending the antagonism between the former war parties and felt that further military pacts were not the way to go.⁶ France felt that the defensive pact with only Poland and Czechoslovakia, which was separately signed after the First World War, would not be strong enough to face the German army in the future. Furthermore, Poland and Czechoslovakia themselves were not interested in defending each other in case one of them was attacked. The Poles felt that the German population in the Sudetenland would be a probable cause of conflict in the future, on the other hand, the Czechoslovakian government was apprehensive because the defensive pact with Poland could see Czechoslovakia dragged into war with the Soviet Union. Furthermore, both countries were in a beneficial business partnership with Germany and did not want to jeopardize the promising relationship. Therefore, in the end, no pact between Czechoslovakia and Poland was ever created.⁷

The French timing could not have been worse, as they pushed for these pacts very early after the Great War, and the fact that the Germans were not trying to remilitarize and still acknowledged the Treaty of Versailles was further supported by the Conference at Locarno in 1925. Where France signed further treaties with Poland and Czechoslovakia, and Britain in their peacekeeping role pledged to come to aid whichever one of France and Germany was attacked by the other, but this pledge did not include allies of said countries.⁸ This presented France's allies as scapegoats for Germany if they wanted to evade conflict with the United Kingdom. By the early 1930s, it became apparent to the French that now Nazi Germany might not have the purest intentions and might seek to wage war through either Czechoslovakia or Poland. Of these two, Czechoslovakia seemed like the most realistic option, because of the large German population in the border regions. France, now growing

⁶ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War: The Gathering Storm* (London: The Reprint Society, 1948), 32-33.

⁷ Miloslav John, *Září 1938: Role a postoje spojenců ČSR* (Olomouc: Votobia, 2000), 17-18.

⁸ Churchill, *The Second World War*, 33.

more desperate decided to pursue an Alliance with the Soviet Union. The culmination of this strategic endeavour was the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance in 1935. Subsequently, a treaty between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia was concluded, although this latter agreement was conditioned by French participation in the war.⁹ This diplomatic manoeuvre was met with disapproval from both Poland and Germany. The latter of which used it as a pretence to annul part of the Locarno Treaties and subsequently remilitarize the Rhineland, while Poland used it as a final straw to distance itself from the alliance with Czechoslovakia, furthermore the Polish state agreed on a 10-year non-aggression pact with Germany in 1934. This was deemed a satisfactory safeguard against potential German aggression, which meant the complete failure of the collective security system.¹⁰

1.3 Great Britain and the policy of appeasement

While France tried to keep peace in Europe through a series of strategic alliances that would make any potential war effort from the side of Germany feeble and nonsensical, Brits were trying to avoid conflict by any means necessary. This often involved making concessions to Germany in return for unkept promises of peace. Czechs often falsely associate appeasement solely with the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, but it started much sooner and was more connected with Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and the immediate start of large-scale German rearmament, which violated the Treaty of Versailles.¹¹ The French government desperately tried to stop this process through legal channels, but Ramsay MacDonald's government was more sympathetic to the German cause. They felt that it was unfair that only Germany had limited military personnel, while their neighbours had much larger armies.¹² Furthermore, in the 1920s, the anti-French sentiment grew with the influence of former soldiers, so by the early 1930s, France was no longer viewed as a natural ally to Britain and more as the next warmonger in Europe. Ramsay MacDonald himself famously proclaimed that it was in fact France that was the “peace problem of Europe.”¹³

⁹ John, *Září 1938*, 27-28.

¹⁰ John, *Září 1938*, 24-26.

¹¹ Ruth Henig, *The Origins of the Second World War 1933-1941* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 15-16.

¹² Henig, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 17.

¹³ Tim Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2019), 26.

Conversely, not everyone was in favour of letting the Germans rearm. The most vocal early opponent was Sir Horace Rumbold, who was a British Ambassador in Berlin at the time. Rumbold saw the aggressive nature of the Nazi regime and how it could be expanded onto their foreign policy and endanger the entirety of Europe. A second big critic of the German rearmament was a delegate at the Disarmament Conference, Brigadier A. C. Temperley, who called for an immediate combined military reaction in the hope of deterring Germany and preventing future conflict. This of course was not a popular solution, as the British public opinion at the time was against wars of any sort. Therefore, the British governments of the early 1930s mostly consisted of peace-advocating politicians. Moreover, Hitler at the time tried to present himself as a man of peace and made vague promises that Germany might agree with the latest disarmament proposals, so the British government put its faith solely in the Disarmament Conference.¹⁴ The decision not to intensify efforts to stop German rearmament is particularly baffling. Especially because at the time, Britain was attempting to downsize its military and reduce military spending after a significant increase in military spending carried over from the First World War. However, this decision led to the cancellation of the Ten-Year Rule, a policy that relied on Britain avoiding major conflicts. Subsequently, they began a gradual process of upscaling and modernization of their armed forces.¹⁵

The result of the Disarmament Conference in March 1933 was a limitation of continental armies to 200,000 men. This would allow the Germans to legally double the size of their army and reduce the size of the French army. France, who was at this point in a bad economic situation, agreed under the promise that the German army would undergo regular inspections, but in the end, the result of the conference did not last long as in October 1933 Germany withdrew from the Disarmament Conference and with it from the League of Nations in a move that left not only the British stunned.¹⁶

At this point, it became apparent that Hitler might seek war once the rearmament was complete, which convinced the British government to put Germany at the forefront of all long-term defensive planning. Neville Chamberlain, who was the Chancellor at the time in control of the treasury, stood at the forefront of cuts to the military at the start of the 1930s and believed that Germany could still be deterred not by massive military investment, but

¹⁴ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 27-30.

¹⁵ Henig, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 17-18.

¹⁶ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 31.

by strategic investment into key areas of defence, such as the Royal Air Force.¹⁷ But even if the assumption that a strong Royal Air Force would deter Hitler from starting another war, many, including Winston Churchill, saw the proposed increase of about 820 airplanes or forty-one squadrons in four years as not drastic enough to even alert Hitler.¹⁸ Moreover, it was estimated that by late 1936 Germany would surpass Britain in air strength. This in turn made the whole logic of Chamberlain's plan obsolete. This of course did not deter Chamberlain from only a modest increase in military spending for 1935.¹⁹ In this year, it became unnerving to some like the Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon that since Germany left the Disarmament Conference the topic of German rearmament was not dealt with in any capacity.

Wanting to prevent another conflict that they could not afford, the British government wanted to extend an open arm to Germany and bring them back to the League of Nations in exchange for the cancellation of the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles.²⁰ This became partially true with the signing of the Naval Treaty which allowed Nazi Germany to build their fleet up to 35 percent of the British one in an effort to get closer to Hitler. The treaty was signed without the agreement of France. This was problematic not only politically, but it also committed France, who was already economically overextended to commit more spending into their navy as a reaction. Other countries along the Baltics including Russia were also alarmed by the signing of this treaty, which effectively pointed the Nazi war machine their way and it also gave Germany enough fleet capacity to control the Baltic Sea.²¹

The next crucial moment came in March 1936 when 22 thousand Nazi troops marched into the demilitarized Rhineland as a response to the ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact. France was unprepared for this move, but immediately both Czechoslovakia and Poland voiced their support and willingness to meet their obligations according to their alliances.²² On the other hand, the British government was not so keen on the idea of war with Germany. The Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden was more in favour of further concessions to the Nazi regime by accepting Hitler's promise of peace once more and trying to discourage France from pursuing sanctions on Germany, thinking that this would most likely drive Germany

¹⁷ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 47-48.

¹⁸ Churchill, *The Second World War*, 102.

¹⁹ John Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler: Neville Chamberlain and the Origins of the Second World War* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2015), 26-28.

²⁰ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 53-55.

²¹ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, 28-29.

²² Brendon, *The Dark Valley*, 344-345.

into a corner and provoke war. At this point Chiefs of Staff also voiced their concerns that the British army was not prepared to fight the Germans, furthermore, public opinion was more in favour of Hitler occupying the Rhineland. Therefore, the French call to action was met with more of a negative reaction in the UK. It was viewed as Germans taking back what was theirs in the first place. In the end, the French considerably overestimated the strength of the German force occupying Rhineland supported by their defensive mindset and internal political turmoil it became clear that overall, no military action would be taken much to the dismay of Winston Churchill.²³ He later claimed that this was one of the last opportunities to start only a local war and not a full-scale war and that the longer the Allies will wait the more costly the inevitable war will be. Furthermore, he warned that the German occupation of the Rhineland would expose Belgium and Netherlands to German attack and allow Germany to build fortifications on the other side of the Maginot line, which in turn could slow down the French advance if their eastern allies were attacked. All these warnings of course later came to fruition.²⁴

In May 1937, Neville Chamberlain became the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and it was clear from the first day that the policy of appeasement would continue despite the setbacks, criticisms from the opposition and continuous German aggressive expansion.²⁵ At this point, it might have even been the better option, as German rearmament was reaching its peak, while the British military was underfunded, partially even because of Chamberlain's decisions during his stint as a Chancellor of the Exchequer. This fact made the already unpopular option of a quick preventive war less appealing by the day. At this point, it became clear that Hitler's next step was the integration of Austria into the Third Reich, but unlike with Rhineland the British had no legal basis for denying this process. Therefore instead, they tried to negotiate an offer for the exchange of former German colonial possessions in return for the autonomy of Austria. This was never going to work as Herman Göring said while discussing the matter with the British ambassador in Berlin that Germany would not consider the offer for the entirety of Africa in exchange for Austria.²⁶

²³ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 103-104.

²⁴ Churchill, *The Second World War*, 165-178.

²⁵ Adrian Phillips, *Fighting Churchill, Appeasing Hitler: Neville Chamberlain, Sir Horace Wilson, & Britain's Plight of Appeasement, 1937-1939* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2019), 2-4.

²⁶ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 205-212.

1.4 Neville Chamberlain

Neville Chamberlain was born on March 18th 1869, in Birmingham into a large wealthy family. His father Joseph was a politician, and his half-brother Austen was said to become one, but Neville was different. He went through a relatively difficult childhood accompanied by bullying and a lack of affection from his family. Therefore, he was set on becoming a businessman. Soon after completing his education, he was sent to the Bahamas as a part of his father's business venture in the 1890s. In the end, the venture was a failure and Neville returned to England, where he, with the help of his two wealthy uncles, became one of the most prominent industrialists in Birmingham. He was progressive regarding employee benefits and healthcare and was held in high regard by his workers.²⁷

He used his successful business as a starting point to get involved in local politics. 1911 was a pivotal year for Chamberlain as he got married to Anne de Vere Cole, who later encouraged him to surpass local politics and get involved with the national government. At first, he was elected Lord Mayor of Birmingham in 1915 his final stepping stone on the way to becoming a politician, as in 1916 he was offered the position of Director-General of National Service. Sadly, his tenure was not a success and he resigned in 1917. On the other hand, he was elected as a representative in 1918, but he was pessimistic about his political career at this time thanks to his bad relations with former Prime Minister George Lloyd. His big breakthrough came in 1923 when he was appointed Minister for Health in Stanley Baldwin's conservative government.²⁸ Although this stint was brief it gave Chamberlain an important connection in the form of the Prime Minister himself. This meant that Chamberlain always had a place in Stanley Baldwin's governments during the 1920s and 1930s.²⁹ And it must be said that his several stints as Minister for Health were quite successful. Most notably he reformed local government and the Poor Law system in 1929 in a way that was quite progressive for the conservative party.³⁰

In 1932 Chamberlain became the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which was at the time even more crucial position than it usually is. This was due to the fact that Britain was recovering from the financial crisis and the path to a swift bounce back led through the superb policies of the Chancellor. Chamberlain put his business skills to work and had a

²⁷ Graham Macklin, *Chamberlain* (London: Haus Publishing, 2006), 11-15.

²⁸ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 15-23.

²⁹ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 24-26.

³⁰ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 25-26.

successful tenure until 1935.³¹ During this time his growing interest in international politics can also be observed. This is illustrated by his limited liability scheme, which would create an international police force. A limited liability plan was at its core like the French collective security system that he would later refuse to partake in. He also considerably influenced the rearmament program by scaling down the sheer size and focusing it mainly on the air force.³²

During these years his influence expanded, so it was no surprise when he was to become a future leader of the conservative party after Stanley Baldwin's retirement. Even at certain points during Stanley Baldwin's tenure as Prime Minister, Chamberlain assumed the role of acting Prime Minister instead of Baldwin.³³

Neville Chamberlain eventually became Prime Minister on the 28th of May 1937. Unlike many of his predecessors, he did not have the best education in schools like Oxford or Cambridge, but he was diligent and had a track record of significant policies. Nevertheless, Chamberlain is not remembered for the years of exemplary service to the country of Britain preceding his post as Prime Minister. On the contrary, he is remembered for the last three years in which his strong belief in appeasement brought Europe to the brink of war.³⁴

³¹ William R. Rock, *Neville Chamberlain* (New York: Twayne, 1969), 148-149.

³² W. Rock, *Neville Chamberlain*, 92-94.

³³ W. Rock, *Neville Chamberlain*, 103.

³⁴ Walter Reid, *Neville Chamberlain: The Passionate Radical* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2021), 224-224.

2 CZECHOSLOVAKIA BEFORE THE MUNICH AGREEMENT

Czechoslovakia was from its creation in 1918 conceptualized as a multinational state with more regard to the historic territory of the Czech Crown rather than the ethnic makeup of the regions. This left Czechoslovakia with a total population of 14 million including 3 million Germans living mostly in the Sudetenland region, 700 thousand Hungarians on the South Slovak border and 550 thousand Ruthenians in the Carpathian Ruthenia region.³⁵ This meant that there would be more Germans living in Czechoslovakia than Slovaks.³⁶ Therefore, a new Czechoslovak national identity was created to conceal this fact and maintain a substantial national majority.³⁷ Even though Czechoslovakia promised equality to all citizens, which was guaranteed by the constitution. Furthermore, minorities had the right to have their own political parties and participate in politics, which was at the time a rare sight. This did not stop the minorities from feeling mistreated and oppressed by the Czechoslovaks over time.³⁸

Politically the First Czechoslovak Republic was much more diverse than Czechia is now. In the parliamentary elections of 1920, which did not yet include the regions of Teschen and Carpathian Ruthenia, 16 political parties secured representation in the parliament including German, Slovak, and Hungarian political factions.³⁹ Such a diverse makeup often made it very hard for parties to reach a consensus and make an effective governmental program. This can be seen even in the first parliamentary elections, where the five strongest Czechoslovak parties ended up forming a coalition. These parties were from all over the political spectrum and found it very difficult to negotiate even among themselves. This meant that the government was more often than not held together by strong personalities, who could persuade them with their viewpoint, like Edvard Beneš rather than relying on similarities in their political programs.⁴⁰ This could have been partially solved by incorporating like-minded German and Hungarian parties into the government, but the attitude, that the Czechoslovak state must be ruled by Czechoslovaks, prevailed.

³⁵ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, chap. 18.

³⁶ Detlef Brandes, *Sudetští Němci v krizovém roce 1938* (Praha: Argo, 2012), 20.

³⁷ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, chap. 18.

³⁸ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, chap. 18.

³⁹ "Výsledky voleb do Poslanecké sněmovny-1920-2006," Český statistický úřad, Last modified September 30, 2008, <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/vysledky-voleb-do-poslanecke-snemovny-v-letech-1920-2006-n-tgdmp17urw>.

⁴⁰ Jindřich Dejmek, *Politická biografie českého demokrata I: Revolucionář a diplomat* (Praha: Karolinum, 2015), 310-311, 331-332.

This diversified political landscape with many smaller parties created an issue, where over the years no party was able to gain no more than 50 mandates out of the 300 seats available in the parliament, except for the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party in the election of 1920. This problem became most apparent in the election of 1935 where the non-Czechoslovak Sudeten German Party (SdP) of Konrad Henlein won the election, but due to the election system, they ended up with one less mandate than the Republican Party of Farmers and Peasants.⁴¹

Despite these political hardships Czechoslovakia was one of the most developed countries in the World, with many booming industries such as metallurgy, glass, and textiles, which were often backed by French and British investors. Apart from a powerful economic background people in Czechoslovakia enjoyed substantial personal freedoms, such as relatively high freedom of speech, even for minorities. This made Czechoslovakia a very popular destination for people persecuted in Nazi Germany for their own beliefs, or open criticism of the regime, as they could continue to voice their opinion from the relative safety of Czechoslovakia. This in turn made the Czechoslovak state an even more desirable target for Hitler, on top of the economic benefits and manpower that the Sudeten German population presented.⁴²

2.1 Czechoslovak Allies and Foes in 1938

In the interwar period, Czechoslovakia was involved in two systems of alliances based on the most probable enemies in the future. Against Germany it was the French collective security system and against Hungary it was the Little Entente with Yugoslavia and Romania, but this Alliance unlike the one with France and Soviet Union was aimed solely at Hungary, therefore Yugoslavia and Romania were not conditioned to enter a war against Germany, unless Hungary was involved. Even if the scenario of Hungary getting involved in military operations against Czechoslovakia was expected by even Hitler, countries of the Little Entente were still hesitant to go to war against Germany, therefore they proclaimed that their involvement would solely focus on Hungary and that they would not help Czechoslovakia with stopping the German advance.⁴³

⁴¹ Český statistický úřad, "Výsledky voleb do Poslanecké sněmovny-1920-2006."

⁴² P.E. Caquet, *The Bell of Treason: The 1938 Munich Agreement in Czechoslovakia* (New York: Other Press, 2018), 15-20.

⁴³ John, *Září 1938*, 128-131.

On the other hand, the alliance with France seemed somewhat more solid. Even at the start of 1938, the French assured Edvard Beneš that they would honor the alliance, even though their top military staff was not convinced that they could mount an offence that would help Czechoslovakia before they get completely overrun by Germany. Instead, they were expecting the help of the Red Army, which seemed more unlikely by the day, as neither Poland nor Romania wanted to permit the passage of Soviet troops through their lands. Moreover, the Soviets started demanding passage not only through both Poland and Romania but even through the Baltic countries to join the war. Disappointed by the Soviet demands and overall unenthusiasm, French foreign minister Georges Bonnet turned once again to Poland in one last ditch effort to convince the Poles into an alliance with the Czechoslovaks, but Poland at this point was more keen on the prospect of retaking Teschen, which was lost to the Czechs in 1919, so in the end all of Bonnet's efforts were in vain and despite Prime Minister Daladier's assurance on 12th July that they will honor the alliance with Czechoslovakia, France fell under the pressure of Britain and opted for political resolution.⁴⁴

2.2 Situation in Sudetenland

After some minor protests in 1918 most of the Sudeten Germans were determined to be an active part of the Czechoslovak state both politically and socially. Partly even because both Germany and Austria found themselves in a tough economic situation, while Czechoslovakia was relatively stable from the beginning, the prospect of abandoning this relative stability was not appealing to the majority of the populace.⁴⁵ This of course did not stop the minority from joining up into radical parties such as the German National Socialist Workers' Party, which was a fascist party that modelled itself after its German and Austrian counterparts.

German parties in Czechoslovakia, although unsuccessful in joining the government in the election of 1920, continued with their active politics, and were rewarded in the subsequent elections in 1925 and 1929, where multiple German parties were able to become part of the government. Conversely, things started to turn for the worse in 1930, when the effects of the New York Stock Exchange crash hit Czechoslovakia. Since the light industry was mostly owned by Sudeten Germans and was hit the hardest by the crisis, this created a large discrepancy in employment between Czechs and Germans. This meant that Germans grew increasingly unhappy with the mostly Czech government and extremist parties such as

⁴⁴ John, *Září 1938*, 129-135.

⁴⁵ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, chap. 18.

the German National Socialist Workers' Party were gaining a considerable number of supporters compared to years before the crisis. In 1933 the German equivalent of this party led by Adolf Hitler took charge of Germany, which scared the Czechoslovak government and made them dissolve the German National Socialist Workers' Party and persecute some of its members.⁴⁶

It was later reformed by Konrad Henlein as the Sudeten German Party. This new iteration of the party was sure not to overstep the political boundaries like its predecessor, while still carrying the German fascist ideals, such as creating paramilitary groups and advocating for increased autonomy in the German regions of Czechoslovakia.

By 1937 the economic situation in Sudetenland still looked grim and did not recover from the effects of the international economic crisis. This meant that the German unemployment rate was high, and the support of Konrad Henlein was steadily growing to the point where the slight majority of the Sudeten German votes, which he held since the 1935 election, was continually expanding.⁴⁷ This meant that with Hitler's backing, he could now start demanding “self-determination” on the international stage.

To stop the growth of extremism in Sudetenland and help the traditional parties the government decided to partially accept their proposal on 18 February 1937, which consisted mainly of economic help to the German-led industries and some slight increase in autonomy.⁴⁸ This was not even close to the humanitarian aid and job opportunities provided by the Sudeten German Party for the unemployed Sudeten Germans, with the only prerequisite to getting this support was membership in the political party.⁴⁹ On the other hand, if someone decided to openly criticize Henlein's party, scare tactics would be employed to make them stop.⁵⁰ In some places, they even stopped the opposition from running for election completely. Prominent Sudeten German politicians like Wenzel Jaksch plead for increased support to combat the spread of the Nazi ideology in Sudetenland, but the government was slow on fulfilling the promises from February 18th and apprehensive on deciding, whether to give Germans more of an equal position in the state in the hopes reducing the popularity of German nationalism.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Brandes, *Sudetští Němci v krizovém roce 1938*, 16-17.

⁴⁷ Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 26.

⁴⁸ Brandes, *Sudetští Němci v krizovém roce 1938*, 35-38.

⁴⁹ Brandes, *Sudetští Němci v krizovém roce 1938*, 40.

⁵⁰ Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 71-72.

⁵¹ Brandes, *Sudetští Němci v krizovém roce 1938*, 40-45.

At that point, it might have been a little too late as by the start of 1938, after the Anschluss on March 8th, all remaining Sudeten German parties lost hope in reaching an agreement with the Czechoslovak government and merged with SdP. This meant that Henlein could now build up pressure on the German population to make them join SdP. It became a question of either joining the SdP or standing against the German people.⁵² Combined with new paramilitary groups roaming the Sudetenland, complete with guns and marching songs, who harassed non-SdP members, it became almost impossible to live as a German in Sudetenland and not be a member of the SdP. It felt as though the Sudetenland was an autonomous zone, as the police were instructed to act only in situations where the sovereignty of the state was questioned.⁵³

When the Sudeten Germans reached “unity” as Henlein claimed, Hitler instructed him to build political pressure on the Czechoslovak government with unfulfillable demands to position the Sudeten Germans as oppressed in Czechoslovakia in the eyes of the British politicians, but also the world.⁵⁴

2.3 Lord Runciman's mission

The British were hesitant to interfere in the Czechoslovak situation. Maybe because they were swayed by the words of Henlein and Hitler, or maybe they simply did not support the Czechoslovak cause and were more sympathetic to the Germans. This would be further supported by the pressure British diplomats were putting on Edvard Beneš to reach an agreement with the SdP.⁵⁵ And it is quite baffling considering the lengths they were willing to go to save the autonomy of Austria just a few months prior.⁵⁶ In the end, Lord Walter Runciman was dispatched on an unofficial mission to mediate an agreement between the Czechoslovak government and SdP.⁵⁷

Lord Walter Runciman arrived in Prague in early August of 1938 with a sizable entourage and immediately set out to meet with Beneš, who warned him that the problem is less about the wellbeing of the Sudeten Germans and more about aggressive expansion of

⁵² Brandes, *Sudetští Němci v krizovém roce 1938*, 70-79.

⁵³ Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 72.

⁵⁴ Brandes, *Sudetští Němci v krizovém roce 1938*, 97.

⁵⁵ Jindřich Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš. Politická biografie českého demokrata II* (Praha: Karolinum, 2015), 130-134.

⁵⁶ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 205-212.

⁵⁷ Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš. Politická biografie českého demokrata II*, 130-134.

the Nazi regime, but he also showed a willingness to negotiate with the SdP and fulfil most of their demands to save the integrity of the state.⁵⁸

On the other hand, Henlein was instructed by Hitler not to accept any propositions put forward by the Czechoslovak government, regardless of how generous they were. Beneš came up with the so-called “third plan,” which was a plan of concessions to the Sudeten Germans including almost complete autonomy. This proposal was of course unsuccessful and criticised, not only by the Germans but also by the British. Runciman, but also French diplomats were instructed by Lord Halifax, who was Lord President of the Council at the time, to put as much pressure on Beneš as possible to reach an agreement and that if an agreement cannot be reached, he urged the mission to put forward their own proposal to solve the Sudeten problem.⁵⁹

At this point, the German army was situated along the Czechoslovak border waiting for the final breakdown of the negotiations and it was clear to both, Czechoslovaks, and Brits that if an agreement was not reached soon Germans would come to resolve this problem.⁶⁰

Beneš under heavy pressure came up with so so-called “fourth plan,” which unlike its predecessor addressed most of Henlein's demands directly and even made concessions to other ethnic minorities such as the Hungarians or Rusyns. Beneš noted to the British and French diplomats that this plan meant capitulation on our border defences, which they would come to regret later. The fourth plan was well received regardless of the warning even by the SdP, who were unsure whether to follow Hitler's directive with a proposal this generous, as declining might strengthen Czechoslovak foreign support. In the end, SdP used some minor scuffles with the police during the demonstration in Ostrava to break contact with the Czech government.⁶¹

This breakdown of negotiations came just in time for the annual rally of the Nazi party in Nuremberg, where Hitler during his closing speech, on the 12th of September, pledged his support to the Sudeten Germans, which he manipulatively described as “hunted and harried like helpless wild fowl for every expression of their national sentiment.” He then demanded self-determination for these oppressed people that if not granted would mean consequences. Massive protests against the Czechoslovak state commenced all across the Sudetenland,

⁵⁸ Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 78-80.

⁵⁹ Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš. Politická biografie českého demokrata II*, 132-137.

⁶⁰ Jindřich Dejmek, *Nenaplněné naděje: politické a diplomatické vztahy Československa a Velké Británie od zrodu První republiky po konferenci v Mnichově (1918–1938)* (Praha: Karolinum, 2015), 396-398.

⁶¹ Dejmek, *Nenaplněné naděje*, 138-142.

complete with skirmishes with the police, violence on bystanders, and arson, mainly on Czech and Jewish shops. This has completely ruined any chances of a restart in negotiations and effectively ended Lord Runciman's mission. In his final report on the 21st of September, he acknowledged that the fourth plan fulfilled the demands of the SdP and that their breakdown in negotiations was an excuse, but still recommended self-determination for the Sudeten Germans. This report would be later used as a support for The Munich Agreement.⁶²

⁶² Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 78-87.

3 PRELUDE TO THE MUNICH AGREEMENT

The Munich Agreement was an agreement struck on the 29th of September, between four de facto leaders of Europe's biggest powers at the time. Adolf Hitler for Germany, Benito Mussolini for Italy, Neville Chamberlain for the UK, and Edouard Daladier for France. Of these four men most, power was held by Chamberlain, who was at this point balancing the fate of Europe on a knife's edge. One stern no to Hitler's advances could have sent Europe into an early war that might have never reached the scale of the Second World War or perhaps stopped Hitler completely. Nonetheless, Chamberlain decided to stick with the policy of appeasement, like the Prime Ministers before him. The foreign policy employed was crucial, especially because Britain was arguably the strongest power on the continent and had the ability to significantly influence the events preceding the Second World War, more so than France. Therefore, Chamberlain's options must be pointed out while discussing the Munich Agreement.

3.1 Czechoslovak question

Firstly, must be noted the fact that in the first half of 1938, the resolution to the crisis in Sudetenland was not the only thing on Chamberlain's, and therefore the government's schedule, as the Spanish Civil War was still an ongoing hot topic and over in the Pacific the Japanese Empire was effortlessly sweeping through China and was getting closer to Singapore by the day. Still, considerable care went into deciding what to do with the Czechoslovak problem.⁶³

Sadly, British decision-making might have been based on false pretences, as they considered it a question of national oppression that was meticulously planted by Henlein and German representatives, instead of an international question of Nazi aggressive expansion that Beneš was pointing out. Nevertheless, a few possible resolutions were considered by Chamberlain regarding the Czechoslovak questions.⁶⁴

Firstly, the idea of a “Grand Alliance” was put forward with a rare backing of the opposition and was briefly considered, but upon analysis by Chiefs of Staff and Foreign Office experts, it was deemed too risky as they were facing the same problem as France does in the same scenario, and that is that Czechoslovakia would be likely overrun before any British or French help could ever reach it. Seeing as no direct help to Czechoslovakia was

⁶³ Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London: MacMillan & Co, 1946), 347-50.

⁶⁴ Dejmek, Edvard Beneš. kniha II, 125-135.

possible, Chamberlain hinted that the alliance might be more of an undesirable way of getting into war with Germany.⁶⁵ Therefore, he decided against any guarantees towards Czechoslovakia, despite writing in his diary after the Anschluss, that force was the only argument that Germany understood, he was hesitant to use force against Hitler.⁶⁶

Churchill as a prominent supporter of this idea later in his book criticizes the failure of Chiefs of Staff to notice the mountainous Czech borders with the Third Reich that would take a considerable German force to successfully penetrate, which would be unlikely while fighting on two fronts. He continues with the critique of Chamberlain himself, saying that although his false reasoning brought him towards not guaranteeing Czechoslovakia, he guaranteed Poland one year later with a much less favourable outlook.⁶⁷

On the other hand, as Bouverie points out, Britain's military equipment was mostly obsolete, and divisions were understaffed, partially due to Chamberlain's decisions as the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the early 1930s, even his plan for a grand Royal Air Force was advancing at a snail's pace and more recent efforts to accelerate rearmament proved more difficult.⁶⁸ According to Ruggiero, the Trade unions backed by the Labour Party wanted a strong stance against extremist right-wing ideologies in Europe, particularly in Spain and Czechoslovakia. Trade unions argued that if no such measures were taken, then there is not a large threat to national security to warrant their increase in labour like more shifts in production plants, but Chamberlain was hesitant to accept this condition and as a consequence, the rearmament continued to struggle, so Churchill's plan to support Czechoslovakia through a strong attack on Germany from the west was flawed from the beginning, as there was almost no personnel or modern equipment to successfully divert German attention. Churchill's opinion must also be taken with a grain of salt as although he had more military experience than Chamberlain, his track record was not exactly stellar as he was mainly remembered for his disastrous campaign at Gallipoli, which was caused partly by his overconfidence, which might have seeped through in this case as well. Furthermore, even France had to slow down its rearmament, due to financial crises in the 1930s, so none of the armies that would push on Germany from the west were not exactly in excellent condition. Therefore, other political alternatives were more appealing.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 347-350.

⁶⁶ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, 72.

⁶⁷ Churchill, *The Second World War*, 236-240.

⁶⁸ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 230-235.

⁶⁹ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, 73-75.

Supporting this fact was also Chamberlain and Halifax's opinion that Hitler was only looking to bring all the German-speaking people under one banner and would eventually stop once this was accomplished. It was therefore decided that the best course of action would be to not give any guarantees towards Czechoslovakia and instead try to guide them towards the best possible political settlement with the Germans, as keeping the situation unchanged solely by political measures seemed unachievable. Despite Sir Maurice Hankey pointing out the fact that Czechoslovakia heavily depended on the integrity of its borders regarding mainly the Sudeten part as it contains much of its industry and by compromising this integrity the rest of Czechoslovakia would essentially become a German puppet state, his warnings were swept off the table.⁷⁰

It is also important to note that the prevalent attitude towards Czechoslovakia in the parliament was mediocre at best as President of the Board of Trade Oliver Stanley replied that no British citizen would support a guarantee for Czechoslovakia.⁷¹ In the end, it was more about getting France out of the alliance with Czechoslovakia so that they would not get dragged into a war with Germany over strategically unimportant territory.⁷²

Therefore, it was decided that an unofficial mission of Lord Runciman would travel to Czechoslovakia to mediate an agreement between the two sides, but he was ultimately instructed to put pressure on Beneš to reach an agreement at all costs. The result of this pressure was the “fourth plan” and eventual breakdown in talks between the two parties.⁷³

During the latter stages of negotiations, Chamberlain correctly anticipated the breakdown in talks and devised a trip to Germany, where he would personally negotiate with Hitler to peacefully resolve the situation. Halifax was in disbelief when he heard of this plan, but according to Chamberlain, if this visit was done correctly, it could not only resolve the current situation, but it could also change the political situation in Europe entirely. This visit was named “Plan Z.”⁷⁴

On the 13th of September, only a day after Hitler's speech in Nurnberg, which sparked premeditated riots across Sudetenland, Chamberlain wrote a letter to the Nazi leader proposing a personal visit to Germany as soon as possible to find a peaceful solution to the Sudeten situation. He later wrote to his sister that Hitler proposed coming to England, rather than having the old man travel such a distance. Chamberlain refused this offer as it would

⁷⁰ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 227-235.

⁷¹ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 229.

⁷² Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 62.

⁷³ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 63-65.

⁷⁴ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 66.

take the dramatic element of flying into an almost hostile country to save peace in Europe.⁷⁵ Therefore, it can be assumed that this visit as much as it was supposed to resolve the tense situation surrounding Germany. It was also presumably supposed to be a campaign, which would raise Chamberlain's public opinion.

3.1.1 Plan Z

After a short correspondence, the meeting between the two leaders was decided to be on the 15th of September in Hitler's favourite Berghof in Berchtesgaden. Even though it feels like it, Chamberlain was not the only one boarding the plane that day. Together with him was Sir Horace Wilson, who was Chamberlain's Chief Industrial Advisor and a considerable advocate of appeasement, and to secure an alternative viewpoint for the Prime Minister the plane was also boarded by William Strang, who was the head of the Foreign Office and a firm refuter of the policy of appeasement.⁷⁶

Upon their arrival in Munich, Chamberlain's party was greeted with full honours and even their drive through Munich felt more like a parade, as he was greeted by crowds of people cheering and shouting, some even waving the Union Jack alongside the Nazi flag. The same thing repeated once he boarded Hitler's train, as at every train station and crossing were people greeting the British Prime Minister. After he arrived in Berchtesgaden, he was taken by another column of cars, first to a Grand Hotel and then to his meeting place with Adolf Hitler himself.⁷⁷

Chamberlain later compared himself to a man being called to play poker with a gangster with no cards to play.⁷⁸ This was especially true as Macklin stresses that Chamberlain was influenced by the book *The Foreign Policy of Canning* by Professor Arthur Temperley, which he read before this engagement. This book puts considerable stress on the idea that one should not threaten unless he is able to carry it out.⁷⁹ In this case, it meant that Chamberlain was a man playing poker with a gangster with no cards to play and no inclination to bluff.

When Chamberlain finally met Hitler, he noted that his appearance was common and undistinguished, later in parliament he escalated this description by calling him the commonest dog.⁸⁰ After some small talk, the real discussion began. Chamberlain noted that

⁷⁵ Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 363-364.

⁷⁶ Nicholas Milton, *Neville Chamberlain's legacy: Hitler, Munich and the path to war* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword History, 2019), chap. 12, Kindle.

⁷⁷ Milton, *Neville Chamberlain's legacy*, chap. 12.

⁷⁸ Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 364.

⁷⁹ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 65-66.

⁸⁰ Milton, *Neville Chamberlain's legacy*, chap. 12.

the situation was much worse than expected, as Hitler threatened imminent invasion of Czechoslovakia unless Britain was prepared to negotiate a resolution. Chamberlain could not make a final decision without consulting the government. Hitler gave his word that he would not order troops to advance unless something forced him to.⁸¹ With this Hitler might have hinted at a similar event to the Gleiwitz attack a year later that would give him some justification. All in all, the meeting was proclaimed a success by both sides and Chamberlain returned to London as a hero showered with praise by the public. Despite this resounding success in public eyes, the mood in the political field was not as enthusiastic. For example, Member of Parliament Thomas Inskip wrote in his diary that it felt like the Prime Minister was blackmailed by Hitler.⁸² Indeed, this sentiment was shared among several other Members of Parliament, even Lord Runciman admitted at this point that Henlein had more contact with Hitler than previously anticipated and that perhaps the whole situation is to be reconsidered. Sadly, the majority still stood behind Chamberlain and his sights were set on peaceful political resolution.⁸³

3.1.2 Meeting with the French and Czechoslovak Ultimatum

On the 18th of September Bonnet and Daladier visited Chamberlain to discuss the results of his conversation with Hitler. Chamberlain ended his briefing with a question for the French delegation if the Sudeten Germans should be given the option to secede from the Czechoslovak state. Daladier was opposed to this idea as he noted that this might encourage other minorities within Czechoslovakia to pursue the same deal. Next, the alternatives were discussed. French put forward a proposal that had been secretly thought up by Beneš, where Czechoslovakia would cede some 3500 square kilometres of area that was outside of the border fortifications that had a German majority. If this limited secession of land was combined with population exchanges from both sides it would preserve most of Czechoslovakia's integrity and strategic importance, but Chamberlain argued that this would not be enough. At last, Chamberlain produced what was essentially the same set of demands as he proposed at first, but unlike before the French surprisingly agreed with these demands.⁸⁴ Churchill argues that Bonnet and Daladier simply wanted to shift the burden of the final decision onto Chamberlain and Halifax.⁸⁵ Which on one hand heavily underappreciates

⁸¹ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 67-68.

⁸² Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 69.

⁸³ Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 103.

⁸⁴ Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 100-105.

⁸⁵ Churchill, *The Second World War*, 260-261.

Bonnets' efforts in trying to make a deal with either the Polish or Romanians to let the Soviet forces pass into Czechoslovakia.⁸⁶ On the other hand, failing to strike a deal with either nation might have discouraged the French to the point of complete hopelessness. Regardless, one thing they were both vocal about was not to consult this decision with the Czechoslovaks and present it as an ultimatum, as in case of rejection the Western powers would not offer further support to Czechoslovakia. At first, there was some slight opposition in the British cabinet, but due to a lack of a strong alternative that was not war, the proposal eventually passed.⁸⁷ The proposal to cede all lands containing at least 50% of German population was handed over to the Czechoslovak government on the 19th of September.⁸⁸ Beneš upon receiving this proposal was at first determined to reject it, however, he was informed that rejection would mean that Czechoslovakia would be left alone to deal with the situation. After careful consideration, Beneš begrudgingly accepted the proposal.⁸⁹ In the wake of this Czechoslovak government led by Prime Minister Milan Hodža resigned and the country was to be administered by General Jan Syrový as the Czechoslovaks began preparing for the worst-case scenario.⁹⁰

3.1.3 Godesberg

While Czechoslovakia was in turmoil, Chamberlain was already on his flight to Godesberg, where he was to meet Hitler for the second time. With him was once again Horace Wilson and Ambassador in Berlin Neville Henderson, as well as a team of Foreign Office professionals. Upon meeting Hitler Chamberlain wasted no time explaining how he masterfully persuaded both the French and the Czechoslovaks to agree to German demands. Then in what Caquet describes as a sudden pang of conscience, Chamberlain offered only territories with an 80 percent German majority and territories with a 65 percent majority limit up to international commission's arbitration. This was an interesting move as the deal with the Czech government for 50 percent German majority territory was already public knowledge.⁹¹ Nevertheless, Hitler was not prepared to accept either as according to him the situation had changed. Referring to the ultimate failure of the Henleinist coup started after his speech in Nuremberg. Instead of the agreed 50 percent he presented Chamberlain with a

⁸⁶ John, *Září 1938*, 129-135.

⁸⁷ W. Rock, *Neville Chamberlain*, 148-149.

⁸⁸ Churchill, *The Second World War*, 260-261.

⁸⁹ W. Rock, *Neville Chamberlain*, 149.

⁹⁰ Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 119-120.

⁹¹ Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 120-121.

map of the Sudeten territories that are to be ceded to Germany by the 28th of September. The scope of this territory was much more sizeable than what the British were prepared to cede even in the worst-case scenario. Furthermore, Chamberlain was not able to negotiate any territorial middle ground. The only thing that the British party was able to negotiate was a slight delay in the deadline that the regions were supposed to be transferred to Germany from the 28th of November to the 1st of October. This coincided with the date for the planned invasion of Sudetenland.⁹² As Ruggiero writes the Czechs anticipated the breakdown of the talks and mobilized 500 thousand men as a precaution. Combined with the clever unsecured call from Halifax to Chamberlain to inform him that the cabinet was not in favour of further concessions and that the chancellor should consider if he wants to aggravate the situation. Both events might have spooked Hitler, as he was not fully prepared to wage war with the Western powers and decided not to push the British Prime Minister further.⁹³ Therefore, the talks ended with disagreement, and it looked like Europe would be facing another war sooner than expected.

In contrast to the return from his first visit, there were no cheering crowds and people hailing him as a hero but panicking Londoners preparing for war. This was reflected even in the political scene as heated debates ensued over the topic in parliament. It seemed as though the vocal minority who was against appeasement has now substantially grown as even Halifax, Chamberlain's biggest ally, voiced his concerns and said that an agreement based on the Godesberg proposal is unacceptable. The British Prime Minister on the other hand was satisfied with Hitler's demands and argued that there was little difference between the proposals from a British standpoint.⁹⁴ Chamberlain once again shifted his viewpoint, almost 180 degrees, as in Godesberg he was trying to negotiate a better deal for the Czechoslovaks, but now a much worse one was sufficient. According to Halifax the difference between the two proposals was in principle, as the Anglo-French plan involved an orderly transfer of territories, but the Godesberg ultimatum was anything but that. Halifax then proposed that all the facts should be given to Czechoslovakia and if the French decided to help then Britain should offer full support. This course of action was also supported by the majority of parliament.⁹⁵

⁹² Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 121.

⁹³ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, 91-92.

⁹⁴ Frank McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement and the British Road to War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 66.

⁹⁵ McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain*, 66-67.

On the 26th of September, the French Prime Minister Daladier offered his support to Czechoslovakia and war preparations began for both Britain and France. Chamberlain however did not sit idly by and tasked Horace Wilson to talk to Hitler again and perhaps persuade him to further negotiations. Late on the 27th, the German Chancellor wrote a letter to Chamberlain, in which he showed the willingness to negotiate, Chamberlain hastily replied that he was ready for a third meeting, only this time also including the French and Italian delegations. Chamberlain, with the help of Mussolini, persuaded Hitler to schedule a conference for the 29th in Munich that would be attended by all four of the biggest European leaders.⁹⁶

3.2 Munich conference

The conference was held at the Führerbau reception centre in Munich and was attended only by the four leaders and their closest advisors and interpreters.⁹⁷ William Strang later recalled that the proceedings were unorderly and that there even was no paper or pens to make notes. Furthermore, the British noted that the reception centre was full of Schutzstaffel officers, which created a heavy atmosphere even before the leaders met. Shockingly enough the French and the British made no effort to coordinate their strategy before the conference and the British delegation was unsure as to what stance will Daladier take.⁹⁸ Upon the start of the conference, a compromise was proposed by Mussolini who was supposed to be a neutral mediator. This compromise was drafted by Germans and was more or less similar to the Godesberg memorandum with slightly changed occupation dates, beginning the 1st of October. Firstly, all men agreed that the occupation should not be delayed and that the matter should be solved as soon as possible. Caquet stresses that the most important matter was agreed straight at the beginning with unfavourable terms for Czechoslovakia.⁹⁹ Then Chamberlain asked for a Czechoslovak representative to be present, which was not met with a positive reply from Hitler and the most they could agree on was that a representative should be on standby if needed.¹⁰⁰

After late lunch, which the British and the French ate separately, while Hitler enjoyed his with Mussolini, the conference resumed, and the leaders carefully went through the entire proposal. While Daladier appeared to be defeated and was mostly agreeable with the points,

⁹⁶ Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 370-74.

⁹⁷ Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 175-176.

⁹⁸ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 315-316.

⁹⁹ Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 176.

¹⁰⁰ Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 176.

Chamberlain tried to at least salvage some concessions in the shape of economic compensation for Czechoslovakia. However, Hitler was adamant that such matters were trivial and that he would not waste time on them, therefore, Chamberlain was not able to negotiate any meaningful compensation during the afternoon.¹⁰¹ This inability is also reflected in his letter when he describes the meeting as a prolonged nightmare, even though he noted that Hitler's opening speech put him at ease. Chamberlain also praised Mussolini for his friendly demeanour and solid work as a mediator.¹⁰² In hindsight, this can be considered a fault of the entire British intelligence that failed to either notice or notify their Prime Minister of Duce's strong ties to the German Chancellor and their meetings before the Munich conference.

In the end, the meeting concluded with a signature of paper that had just 8 points in which the evacuation of Sudetenland was explained and that it would commence on the 1st of October and would be complete on the 10th, with the territory ceded mostly similar to that of the Godesberg memorandum. Terms that were unacceptable to the Allies just days prior were now being embraced by their leaders. In addition, the Czechoslovak government was to release Sudeten German prisoners who were imprisoned for political reasons as well as release from service of any Sudeten German members of the police or military who wished to leave.¹⁰³

The only slightly meaningful compensation that the now undefendable Czechoslovakia got was in the Annex to the Munich Agreement and it was a guarantee of the new borders against unprovoked aggression by Great Britain and France. More interestingly though there was also a German and Italian guarantee contingent upon the resolution of the question of Polish and Hungarian minorities.¹⁰⁴ As David Gillard writes, the German and Italian guarantees were basically worthless, as there was no telling what were the conditions that resolved the questions of minorities. Moreover, even the British and the French guarantee was not anything clearly defined, as some of the borders were still in contention and to be decided by an international committee.¹⁰⁵ Even in the case of a war same problems would

¹⁰¹ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 318.

¹⁰² Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 375-377.

¹⁰³ "Munich Agreement," Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky, Accessed February 22, 2024, <https://mzv.gov.cz/file/198473/MunichAgreement.pdf>.

¹⁰⁴ Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky, "Munich Agreement."

¹⁰⁵ David Gillard, *Appeasement in Crisis: From Munich to Prague, October 1938-March 1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2.

arise as before Munich and Czechoslovakia would now be even more indefensible than ever, with the Western armies still being unprepared for a conflict.¹⁰⁶

The last thing there was to do was to communicate the results to the Czech delegation consisting of Vojtěch Mastný, who was a counsellor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Hubert Masařík, Czechoslovak ambassador in Berlin. Although both men have been somewhat informed about the proceedings during the breaks, they were officially informed about the results after the conclusion of the conference.¹⁰⁷ This came in the form of an explanation of all the points by a group of British and French diplomats that included both Chamberlain and Daladier. After a brief clarification of some of the points the whole ordeal was over, and the Czechoslovak delegation was free to return to their newly defined country. Masařík later commented on both Prime Ministers during this exchange. To Chamberlain, he commented that this meeting was unpleasant, but that he was visibly excited about preventing war in Europe, on the other hand, Daladier sat in silence and was the only one to show shame. Not only for betraying their allies but for the weakness of his country as well.¹⁰⁸

Chamberlain's later actions support Masařík's assessment, and it can be concluded that from his point of view, the negotiations themselves were tedious, but a successful affair. He also continued to pursue the resolution of other issues during and after them. Like the debate on the Spanish Civil War with Mussolini, who loosely promised that Italy was going to engage less in Spanish affairs. Though more famously, he had his long talk with the German Chancellor in his flat the next morning about various topics including a more concrete declaration on which would be stated that Germany and Britain wish not to go to war with each other. Indeed, Chamberlain brought with himself just that and made Hitler sign it. The British Prime Minister wrote about it as a friendly conversation and that the Chancellor was eager to give his signature for this cause, on the other hand, German interpreter Paul Schmidt, who was present during this meeting, later recalled that Hitler was not very engaged in the talks and signed the declaration only reluctantly. The German Chancellor also later stated that it was just the piece of paper that meant nothing.¹⁰⁹ According to Chamberlain, it was a piece of paper that should have secured the peace in Europe.

Now with the benefit of hindsight, it can be said that this whole affair was more of a confidence builder for Adolf Hitler than anything else and remarkably might have even

¹⁰⁶ Gillard, *Appeasement in Crisis*, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 174-175.

¹⁰⁸ Caquet, *The Bell of Treason*, 177-178.

¹⁰⁹ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 319-321.

gotten Europe closer to war. This claim is supported by the Nuremberg testimony of Field Marshall Wilhelm Keitel, who stated that strong support of Czechoslovakia by the Western powers would have certainly prevented the attack and that the whole conference was planned to gain time to build an army and mitigate Russia's influence on Europe.¹¹⁰ In the light of these revelations, some authors might have been overly critical towards the events that transpired in Munich, such as Macklin describing the conference as “rape of Czechoslovakia.”¹¹¹ As with every Nurnberg testimony, we must also take Keitel's with a grain of salt, as the invasion might have been considered unfeasible by the General staff despite this Hitler could have ordered the attack anyway. The dyssynchronous relationship of the German Chancellor with the top brass was illustrated many times throughout the war.

The shortcomings of the British policy of appeasement should have been apparent by the time of Munich, but due to Chamberlain's personal beliefs that modern problems are resolved by politics and not war, were overlooked. Stephen R. Rock summarizes these shortcomings beautifully into two points. First was the failure to realize the full scale of Hitler's territorial ambitions. British presumed his territorial ambitions were limited only to German-speaking territories, which turned out to be false. The second was hope that the German government would over time drift towards peace and pacifist decisions through the influence of much less extreme politicians. On the contrary, these politicians were slowly replaced during the 1930s, by their more extreme counterparts.¹¹² Therefore if the presuppositions for successful appeasement policy are wrong then it cannot succeed no matter how much territory they cede. This realization, to the dismay of the Czechoslovak people, came too late.

¹¹⁰ Churchill, *The Second World War*, 274-275.

¹¹¹ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 73.

¹¹² Stephen R. Rock, *Appeasement in International Politics* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 64.

4 RECEPTION OF THE MUNICH AGREEMENT IN THE UK

In the immediate aftermath of the Munich Conference, Chamberlain was ecstatic with both the Munich Agreement itself and his subsequent promise of peace from Hitler. He then proceeded to enjoy the warm departure provided by the people of Munich as he boarded his plane back to England. In his mind, the whole affair was a complete political victory that saved the peace in Europe. In contrast, his right-hand man, Sir Horace Wilson, saw how the agreement was not a visible improvement on the Godesberg memorandum and would eventually face criticism in parliament. He proceeded to commission William Strang, who on the flight back made a list of points that improved the deal compared to Godesberg. The resulting list was long but none of the points amounted to anything significant. Wilson then immediately began writing a rebuttal for Chamberlain in order for him to be able to defend appeasement and preserve the Prime Minister's most prominent political victory.¹¹³ However, History would ultimately judge the Munich Agreement harshly, as it became clear that it had only served to embolden Hitler's ambitions and pave the way for future aggression. Chamberlain's belief in the effectiveness of appeasement would soon be challenged by his political opponents and later Hitler's actions.

4.1 Chamberlain's arrival to the UK

Chamberlain famously returned to the British Isles to the sound of cheering crowds for the second time. The first time it was after Berchtesgaden, then after Godesberg the attitude was grim, as the whole country was preparing for war due to Germany's unreasonable demands. Now after Munich the attitude flipped once more and the crowds were cheering again, while accepting eerily similar terms to that of Godesberg. Nevertheless, he returned to Heston airport as a peacekeeper. In his speech at the airport, Chamberlain hinted that the Munich agreement was only a prelude to a larger settlement that would bring peace to all of Europe. He continued by reading his declaration of eternal peace with Germany in full. After that, he proceeded to Buckingham Palace to meet the King and Queen.¹¹⁴ The Manchester Guardian wrote that the interest in the Prime Minister was so big that it caused traffic problems up until evening because people were hiring taxis to drive around in the hopes of seeing the man himself.¹¹⁵ He ended his day with a speech from a window of his Downing Street

¹¹³ Phillips, *Fighting Churchill, Appeasing Hitler*, 194.

¹¹⁴ W. Rock, *Neville Chamberlain*, 157.

¹¹⁵ Richard Nelsson, "The Munich Agreement - archive, September 1938," *Guardian News*, September 21, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/from-the-archive-blog/2018/sep/21/munich-chamberlain-hitler-appeasement-1938>.

apartment, where he addressed the crowd that had gathered around saying that this is the second time that peace with honour came back from Germany. He then uttered the phrase that he would soon come to regret “I believe it is a peace for our time.”¹¹⁶ While Chamberlain firmly believed that with Munich everything ended there were others, who begged to disagree.

4.1.1 Political reception

Many of the nation's politicians did not share Chamberlain's view of Munich as an unprecedented political victory and assurance of peace. On the contrary, they saw it as a necessary evil that was caused by Britain's unpreparedness to wage war and thought of the agreement as more of a device that bought more time for the army to rearm and be ready for more German aggressive politics.¹¹⁷ This of course created a clash with Chamberlain almost immediately. At first, the former secretary of State for Air Lord Swinton demanded substantial acceleration of the rearmament program in exchange for support of the Munich Agreement. To which Chamberlain responded by waving that piece of paper signed by both Hitler and him and reminded Lord Swinton that peace was secured.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, the scepticism in parliament grew strong and by the end of October, many ministers including Chamberlain's former ally Lord Halifax demanded acceleration of rearmament and an increase in the scope of the whole program. Chamberlain was once again taken aback by these developments as he could not comprehend why the country that secured peace needed to rearm. Instead, he thought that the best course of action would be to get closer to Germany and strive towards the complete political resolution of European issues and eventually even partial disarmament of all countries.¹¹⁹ Additionally, Chamberlain might have been mindful of sending mixed signals to Germany, as increases in arms production might provoke Germany and compromise his most prominent achievement.¹²⁰

Apart from politicians who took the Munich Agreement as a necessary evil to buy time, some criticised the terms of the deal itself such as Winston Churchill during his speech in the House of Commons on October 5th. Churchill at the beginning stated that at Munich, Britain suffered a total defeat that could have been prevented if the government gave a guarantee to Czechoslovakia against unprovoked aggression. He then continued by

¹¹⁶ Nelsson, “The Munich Agreement – archive.”

¹¹⁷ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 340-341.

¹¹⁸ Phillips, *Fighting Churchill, Appeasing Hitler*, 195.

¹¹⁹ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 341.

¹²⁰ Phillips, *Fighting Churchill, Appeasing Hitler*, 202.

criticising the terms of the agreement saying that the Czechs could have hardly gotten a worse resolution, even if they had been left alone. He criticizes Western powers for not being better allies to Czechoslovakia and that their friendship only brought them suffering. He continues to predict that the new mangled state will not be self-sufficient and will sooner rather than later fall under the Nazi regime, maybe even out of spite. He then turned his attention towards the British government and stated that people deserved to know that the defeat without war sustained at Munich was caused by the complete inability to either rearm themselves or stop the German rearmament. He ended by saying that this agreement compromised and fatally endangered the safety and independence of Britain and France.¹²¹ Churchill was not the only one who was thinking this, but he was one of the few conservatives who in this time of celebration was willing to point out the ugly side of Munich and the possible consequences.

The leader of the Labour Party, Clement Attlee, was also not persuaded that the Munich Agreement was a beneficial settlement. He voiced his concerns to the Parliament in his speech on October 3rd. He compared Chamberlain to a captain of a ship, who puts his ship on a collision course and saves it at a last-second invoking the applause of the onlookers. Attlee cleverly criticises Chamberlain's lack of forethought and preparation to answer German aggression. He points out Churchill's Grand Alliance plan as a possible solution to the Nazi problem.¹²² Furthermore, he disapproves of Chamberlain's lack of experience in international politics and the terms he negotiated. He also raises the question of why at any point were the Czechs not invited to negotiate for themselves. Attlee ends his speech by demanding a real peace conference between the nations, not an armistice like Munich, where one side demands and the other complies. He then calls on Chamberlain to make it happen.¹²³

His speech was followed by another from Sir Archibald Sinclair, who was the Leader of the Liberal Party, the third party in the House of Commons. Sinclair believed in the preservation of peace but criticised the terms of the Munich Agreement and the unfairness of the entire negotiation process from Berchtesgaden to Munich. This was mainly due to the lack of Czechoslovak input and ultimatums masked as proposals in the process. He also

¹²¹ "Disaster of the First Magnitude, 1938," America's National Churchill Museum, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/disaster-of-the-first-magnitude.html>.

¹²² "PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT," House of Commons, October 3, 1938, §51-§66, UK Parliament, accessed March 26, 2024, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1938/oct/03/prime-ministers-statement>.

¹²³ UK Parliament, "PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT," House of Commons, October 3, 1938, §51-§66.

pointed out that secession was not even what the Sudeten Germans wanted and would inevitably create a refugee crisis in Czechoslovakia. Sinclair claimed that the proposed ten million pounds of aid would not be enough and that the British Government should do all in its power to keep its word and maintain Czechoslovak political and economic independence.¹²⁴ Furthermore, Sinclair mentioned that the idea of European settlement is unfeasible with Europe now drifting again towards power politics.¹²⁵

The dissatisfaction with the Munich Agreement resonated even with the First Lord of the Admiralty Duff Cooper, who realized what utter defeat Munich was and resigned shortly after Chamberlain's return, stating that Britain should have gone to war, if not for Czechoslovakia, then to stop Germany from dominating Europe by force.¹²⁶ It might have been because of Duff's resignation combined with unfavourable political reception from the opposition that made Chamberlain on October 6th go back on his promise for peace for our time and stated that he was affected by the cheering crowds after a long tiring day.¹²⁷ Furthermore, on October 16th the Prime Minister wrote that by Munich a crisis was averted, but more should be done to put the threat to rest at large.¹²⁸ Hinting at his proposed political settlement that would solve all problems in Europe.

This confusion and chaos that ensued after the Munich Agreement regarding British foreign policy is best summarized by Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who set out to create a paper on the subject. In the end, he was unable to create anything substantial and noted that the only thing he knows is that the old foreign policy was wrong.¹²⁹ This period of uncertainty in approach to Hitler lasted for about two months with heated debates in the parliament, but in the end, it resulted in a new perspective on British foreign policy, where Germany's claims were no longer viewed as valid. Instead, they were viewed as claims of aggressive expansion.¹³⁰

While most of the political sphere was preparing to make the shift away from appeasement, Chamberlain still diligently worked on his plan to reconcile all of Europe with

¹²⁴ UK Parliament, "PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT," House of Commons, October 3, 1938, §67-§77.

¹²⁵ UK Parliament, "PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT," House of Commons, October 3, 1938, §67-§77.

¹²⁶ Walter Reid, *Neville Chamberlain*, 300.

¹²⁷ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 340.

¹²⁸ Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 385.

¹²⁹ Andrew Roberts, *The Holy Fox: The Life of Lord Halifax* (London: Head of Zeus, 2014), chap. 14, Kindle.

¹³⁰ Stacie E. Goddard, *When Right Makes Might: Rising Powers and World Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 120.

diplomacy. However, his focus shifted from Hitler to Mussolini because he thought that Duce was the more sincere of the two.¹³¹ Chamberlain's trust in appeasement continued up until the takeover of the rest of Czechoslovakia on the 15th of March 1939, from then on, his demeanour changed into a more aggressive style of negotiations with Germany. That eventually culminated in the Second World War.¹³²

All in all, the political reaction to the Munich Agreement was not all that positive. Apart from Chamberlain and a few others, it seemed like nobody believed in either the agreement or the deal with Hitler that the Prime Minister brought back from Munich. On the other side of the barricade was Churchill with Attlee, who criticised everything that was related to Munich and appeasement. Most of the political scene was undoubtedly conflicted, where they saw the agreement neither as a complete loss, nor as a definitive solution to the German problem, but as an opportunity to fix their own mistakes in the British rearmament program and offer stronger opposition in the future. Furthermore, the Munich Agreement also pushed for the political unity of the country, as is for example reflected in Halifax's attempts to persuade Chamberlain to accept more diverse politicians into cabinet.¹³³ This push for unity is also reflected in Churchill's coalition cabinet straight after Chamberlain's tenure as a Prime Minister.

4.1.2 Public reception

Media undoubtedly shape public opinion and from reading the titles such as big bold "PEACE" from the Daily Express on September 30th one might assume that the British public opinion was firmly behind Chamberlain.¹³⁴ Frank McDonough argues that the view of the media was substantially modified by the hidden censorship at the time. Apart from censoring anti-appeasement news, information about current events was also censored. This is illustrated in the case of Harold Nicolson, who had a program on the BBC that discussed current world events. During the Sudeten crisis, he was advised by the Foreign Office not to report on the Czechoslovak situation.¹³⁵ This was not an explicit form of censorship, where the government would outright ban programs and control news streams, but it was done by

¹³¹ Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 392-394.

¹³² Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 398-403.

¹³³ Roberts, *The Holy Fox*, chap. 14.

¹³⁴ "Daily Express 30 September 1938 Extracts On Peace Making Between Hitler And Chamberlain,"

The Internet Archive, accessed March 6, 2024,

<https://archive.org/details/DailyExpress30September1938ExtractsOnPeaceMakingBetweenHitlerAndChamberlain/mode/2up>.

¹³⁵ McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain*, 124-125.

implicit lobbying to the highest positions in the news outlets.¹³⁶ Editors of the largest national newspapers were asked to put in place some degree of self-censorship to suppress critical assessment of the situation and blindly support Chamberlain's peace-seeking policies.¹³⁷ This censorship in practice can be seen even in the Manchester Guardian article from the 1st of October.¹³⁸ In this article, we can read about cheering crowds all around London welcoming the Prime Minister, but what it does not mention is the 16 thousand Munich protesters gathered in Trafalgar Square.¹³⁹ Similarly, the media has shown that Chamberlain received an incredible number of supportive letters. However, McDonough claims that a simple observation of one of many Munich protests has shown that 800 strongly worded letters were sent to Chamberlain during this protest alone.¹⁴⁰

Even though the censorship and favourable portrayal of events by the media, the Opinion remained split in the middle between support for Munich and its opposition. This opinion split, combined with the constant looming threat of war, created a tense atmosphere in the United Kingdom. An overview of public opinions has shown that women were more supportive of the Munich Agreement and men were more against it. This split is further supported by the words of British politician Richard Law, who wrote that women are the villains in this scenario and that a phenomenon such as Chamberlain's appeasement would not have been possible before they got their right to vote.¹⁴¹

Gender was not the only dividing factor in British society, as Member of Parliament Ronald Cartland who opposed appeasement, found out that there was a split between the opinions of young and old, as the old, who lived through the Great War, more likely supported Chamberlain's appeasement, while the young, who were eager to fight for Britain, opposed it.¹⁴²

The split right in the middle of the British population is further shown in public opinion polls taken at the time by the British Institute of Public Opinion. A survey from November 1938 with a sample size of 1171 people has shown that 47.72 percent were satisfied with Chamberlain as Prime Minister, while 42.82 percent were not. The remaining 9.46 percent

¹³⁶ Anthony Adamthwaite, "The British Government and the Media, 1937-1938," *Journal of Contemporary History* 18, No. 2 (April 1983): 281-283.

¹³⁷ McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain*, 124.

¹³⁸ Nelsson, "The Munich Agreement – archive."

¹³⁹ McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain*, 126.

¹⁴⁰ McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain*, 126.

¹⁴¹ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 336-337.

¹⁴² Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 337.

had no opinion.¹⁴³ In a subsequent survey in December satisfaction with the British Prime Minister rose by around 4 percent.¹⁴⁴ On the contrary, in the preceding poll from February 1938, a similar question was asked if the public was in favour of Chamberlain's foreign policy and 26 percent answered yes, while 58 percent answered no.¹⁴⁵ This means that within a year Chamberlain's public opinion and opinion of his policies rose. Furthermore, he managed to maintain his position in public polls throughout 1939 being slightly above 50 percent for half of the year until it eventually increased to 60 percent with the breakout of the Second World War.¹⁴⁶ Additionally, contrary to Chamberlain's view, who despised Communists, the British public wanted closer ties with the Soviet Union, as is illustrated in the poll from February 1939. In this poll, 86 percent were in favour of getting closer to Soviet Russia and in subsequent survey similar percentage was in favour of a Grand Alliance between Russia, Britain, and France.¹⁴⁷ Although these polls have a limited sample size of around 1000 to 2000 people, they can give at least a general direction that the British public opinion went in after the Munich Agreement. One could only wonder if Chamberlain would have maintained his leading position if the government had not suppressed general knowledge of the European issues and anti-appeasement opinions.

¹⁴³ "British Institute of Public Opinion Polls, 1938," British Institute of Public Opinion, published by UK Data Service, accessed January 16, 2024, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-2037-1>.

¹⁴⁴ British Institute of Public Opinion, "British Institute of Public Opinion Polls, 1938."

¹⁴⁵ Adamthwaite, "*The British Government and the Media*," 291-292.

¹⁴⁶ "British Institute of Public Opinion Polls, 1939," British Institute of Public Opinion, published by UK Data Service, accessed January 16, 2024 <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-2038-1>.

¹⁴⁷ British Institute of Public Opinion, "British Institute of Public Opinion Polls, 1939."

CONCLUSION

The Munich Agreement has its place in history as a reminder of the consequences of appeasement in the face of aggressive expansion. In theory, it temporarily averted immediate conflict and gave the allies more time to rearm. In reality, Germans benefited far more from the agreement.

To answer the first question posed in the introduction, British public opinion on the Munich Agreement was split almost perfectly. This could be due to the lack of information that the public was served, so they could not be fully informed about the context of the situation. Other factors like age and gender played a vital role in splitting the British public opinion into two almost equal halves. This also answers the second question, as once again the public opinion on Chamberlain's government was slightly below 50 percent at the start of 1938 and grew to almost 60 percent by the end of his tenure. In isolation, it might seem like the British public endorsed Chamberlain's decision-making during his years as a Prime Minister, but it must be considered that from early 1939 appeasement was abandoned in favour of a more aggressive foreign policy towards Germany. This might have swayed some of the people, who were opposing Chamberlain initially and created a swing of at least 10 percent during 1939.

The answer to the third question is more negative, as politically the Munich Agreement was heavily criticised by the most prominent politicians from the opposition, but also from Chamberlain's Conservative Party. Politicians like Clement Atlee, Sir Archibald Sinclair, Winston Churchill and Lord Halifax, voiced their concerns over the agreement from all sorts of angles, which in turn left Chamberlain frustrated, as he truly believed in the power of peaceful resolutions. To answer the last question from the introduction, there are no concrete sources that would indicate the exact point, where he would abandon his beliefs, but it would be shortly before the definitive takeover of Czechoslovakia on the 15th of March 1939. From that point on Chamberlain's style of negotiation would no longer encourage German aggression.

Therefore, the most positive thing that could be said about the agreement from the British standpoint was that it led to the adoption of a new more aggressive foreign policy towards Germany in Britain and the abandonment of appeasement. Still, the die had been cast and at that point, nothing could stop the newfound German confidence and disrespect

for their opponents, as Hitler himself said before the invasion of Poland, “Our enemies are small worms. I saw them at Munich.”¹⁴⁸

Hitler is pointing at Chamberlain, who became aware of the events surrounding Munich and gained notoriety. The British Prime Minister lacked formal education in diplomacy and possessed limited experience. Therefore, it is no surprise that when he decided to resolve the issue by himself it was not the most profound resolution. These events tarnished Neville Chamberlain's otherwise respectable legacy.

All in all, the Munich Agreement underpins the necessity of upholding principles and core values, rather than sacrificing them for the sake of temporary peace or false promises. It serves as a cautionary tale about the necessity to stand firm against aggressive expansion, even when the path to conflict may seem less appealing in the short term.

¹⁴⁸ Bouverie, *Appeasement*, 332.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SdP Sudeten German Party