

# British Reaction to the Munich Crisis

by David Lilly

*This paper was selected by the Department of History as the Outstanding Paper for the 1993-1994 academic year.*

. . . I want to say that the settlement of the Czechoslovak problem which has now been achieved is, in my view, only a prelude to a larger settlement in which all Europe may find peace.

-- Neville Chamberlain, 30 September 1938 <1>

On 20 September 1938, the world appeared to be on the brink of war. The controversy concerning the 3.5 million Germans living in the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia had been escalated to massive proportions by the German *Fuhrer*, Adolf Hitler. The Nazi dictator, claiming that the Sudeten Germans were being mistreated by the tyrannical Czechs, demanded that they be incorporated into the Greater German Reich on the basis of national self-determination. The Czechs resisted these demands because it would have meant a partition of their country, depriving them of the fortified frontier facing Germany that they acquired when Czechoslovakia was created at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. The Allies gave this frontier to the new Czechoslovak state to contain a possibly resurgent Germany. The Czechoslovaks also resisted because they had faith in their small but well-trained army and in their alliances with France and the Soviet Union.

Great Britain, which was committed to defend Czechoslovakia only if France committed itself as well, feared being dragged into another world war. The British Conservative Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, led the crusade for peace with his attempts to negotiate a settlement to the problem. Chamberlain first sent Lord Runciman, an unqualified politician, to Prague to mediate the dispute and later went to negotiate with Hitler personally at Berchtesgaden and Godesberg. Along with the French Premier Edouard Daladier, Chamberlain formulated Hitler's demands into the Anglo-French Proposals that were grudgingly accepted by the Czechs. This meant the gradual annexation of Czechoslovakian territory into the German Reich, but it appeared that Chamberlain had truly brought home "peace in our time." The euphoria was not to last long. Hitler disregarded the Anglo-French Proposals and demanded immediate annexation of the Sudetenland. All sides mobilized their armed forces in preparation for the seemingly inevitable conflict that everyone feared. Surprisingly, on 28 September, Hitler declared that he would leave open the possibility for a peaceful settlement. Chamberlain immediately accepted Hitler's idea for a Four-Power conference of Germany, Italy, Great Britain and France to mediate the dispute. On 29 and 30 September, a Four Power Conference took place in Munich at which Hitler agreed to accept the modified Anglo-French plan. The Munich Agreement affirmed the gradual annexation of predominantly German areas of Czechoslovakia into the Reich agreed to through the Anglo-French Proposals. Democratic Czechoslovakia was carved up but the peace was saved.

This crisis caused a great chasm in British opinion sharply dividing those who supported appeasement as the preserver of peace against those who regarded it as a humiliating surrender. Despite the almost universal condemnation of Chamberlain's policy which would come later, the majority of the opinions expressed in the printed media at the time advocated appeasement. They wanted the preservation of peace at any cost-- a war would have meant the destruction of civilization and the world as they knew it. They felt that risking a war to protect Czechoslovakia was not worth it, even though some believed that the Czechs were treated unfairly.

### **Views of Appeasement before the Munich Conference**

The appeasement proponents looked back to the Great War and the Treaty of Versailles as the causes of the Sudeten minority controversy. They viewed World War I as useless destruction caused by Allied fear of Germany's power. In their view, the Allies needed their combined strength to defeat Germany; then, by force, they imposed the harsh Versailles Treaty upon Germany while it was weak. They did this to permanently cripple Germany and prevent it from ever threatening the Allies or the balance of power on the Continent again. George Glasgow, writing in the *Contemporary Review*, viewed World War I as having no purpose because the Allies failed to achieve their objective of permanently weakening Germany. Despite defeat in 1918, Germany was again the strongest military power twenty years later. Pointing out that the effect of defeat did not last, Glasgow believed that a world war would have to be fought every twenty years to keep Germany down. <2> He argued that there was no way to stop the inevitable German dominance since defeat in war did not. Lord Elton claimed in the *Fortnightly Review* that it was the Allies who caused the formation of the Nazi party because of the harsh Versailles provisions that aimed to weaken Germany. This harsh treaty, which the Allies failed to revise caused the German people to gravitate towards the ultra-nationalist Nazis. He also criticized the League of Nations for not fulfilling its promise to revise the Versailles treaty. <3>

The advocates of peace argued that the Allies created Czechoslovakia solely to contain Germany and that the British and French organized the League of Nations as an anti-German bloc. Glasgow believed Czechoslovakia was created by Great Power intrigue to dam future German expansion. Lord Elton stated that the Sudeten Germans were given to Czechoslovakia because the French Marshal Foch demanded a military frontier bordering Germany. Elton criticized Dr. Benes, the Czech President, because in May 1919, he had promised that the new Czechoslovakia would be neutral. Instead, Benes allowed his country to get involved in military alliances whose goals were to keep Germany down by force. Elton also claimed that the League of Nations was the alliance created by the victors of World War I to maintain the unjust peace settlement. <4>

The appeasement supporters criticized the peacemakers at the Paris Peace Conference as hypocrites who ignored the plea of the Sudeten Germans for self-determination. They also criticized the Allies and the League for not solving the Sudeten problem before it reached critical proportions. Robert Parker, also writing in the *Fortnightly*, claimed that the Sudeten Germans demanded the right to join Austria on the basis of Point 10 of

Wilson's Fourteen Points which promised the peoples of Austria-Hungary free opportunity for autonomous development. This was refused by the Allies because the Czechs, according to Parker, used questionable tactics to persuade the Entente that they depended on the industrial areas in the Sudetenland. Parker assumed from this that the vanquished can only claim self-determination if it does not injure the interests of the victors. <5> The peace proponents claimed that Germany was again the supreme military and economic power in Europe despite all the hardships thrust upon it. They advocated that Britain should recognize this fact or risk becoming involved in another needless and more destructive war. Glasgow believed that Germany could not be kept down; therefore, Britain must accept it as a strong power.

The advocates of appeasement also argued that the German claim to the Sudetenland. was justified. Many of them viewed it as Germany's destiny to expand and dominate Central Europe. H. Powys Greenwood, a great admirer of Germany, writing for the *Contemporary Review*, was the main proponent of conciliation between Britain and Germany. Greenwood believed that the exaggerated imperialistic goals of Germany were the natural compensation for their being denied expansion and their lack of colonies. He described the German people as energetic and intelligent; not the insatiable monsters aspiring for world conquest that the opposition claimed them to be. Greenwood viewed them as frustrated not only because they failed to establish rule over other peoples, but also because they saw many of their own people living under alien rule. They claimed that Hitler merely wanted to unite all Germans into one Reich and did not aim for world domination. <6>

The proponents of peace also regarded Hitler as rational and therefore believed that he did not want war. J.A. Spender in the *Contemporary Review* contended that the German populace wanted peace, a fact that Hitler could not ignore. Based on his favorable interpretation Hitler's book, *Mein Kampf* Greenwood believed the Nazi rejection of the imperialistic idea of conquering and subjugating other peoples. He stated that Hitler's two foreign policy goals were clearly outlined in *Mein Kampf* to unite the German people and to secure them lebensraum, living room. <7> Greenwood did not see, or chose to ignore, the obvious contradiction in Hitler's goals of securing lebensraum without conquering other peoples. Appeasement advocates had faith in Hitler's statement that he would not be led astray by dreams of world domination since it would endanger the purity of his all German Reich. Greenwood believed that it was Hitler's aim to dominate through political and economic influence and not military force to secure Mitteleuropa under German leadership. Conquest of other nations would have violated Hitler's goal since it would have included other races in the Reich. Germany would have acted as the protector and leader of the Eastern European nationalities and excluded Russian and French influence there. <8>

Peace supporters, claiming that Germany was not aiming at world domination or the breakup of the British Empire, argued that it was coming to the end of its demands in Europe. They also believed that once the German demands were satisfied, Hitler would become less aggressive and begin a new era of peace. Greenwood stated that once Germany renounced trading and colonial ambitions, Britain would have no reason to

fight. He claimed that once Germany's territorial demands were exhausted, Hitler would be prepared to negotiate an understanding with Britain and would agree to arms limitations. Greenwood advocated peaceful relations with Germany since it was only war that could prevent it from claiming its natural demand for dominance and security. <9> Spender supported the idea that Britain must accept Germany as the greatest power in Europe which could not be prevented from playing a dominant role in Central Europe. He added that Nazi battle cries would fade away once peace was established and the Germans were satisfied with their Greater Reich. <10>

Those who endorsed appeasement also viewed the Sudeten Germans as a suppressed minority living under unfriendly alien rule. Robert Parker, writing in the *Fortnightly*, regarded the Czechs as ruthless people bent on dominating the other nationalities under them. He claimed that the Czechs themselves were never oppressed under the humanitarian Habsburg rule, but yet they sought to subject their new German subjects. In his editorial letter in *The Times* (London), Archibald Ramsay described the Czechs as vicious exploiters of the Sudeten Germans and claimed that the vague Czech concessions were just a smoke screen for their continued oppression of the German minority. Parker claimed that they attempted to Czechize the Sudeten territories because of their jealousy of German economic dominance. The Czechs sought to weaken the Sudetens by economic and political oppression. This, combined with their anti-German foreign policy, was the reason for Hitler "hammering at Prague's door." <11>

The peace advocates blamed the Czechoslovaks for not solving the controversy long before it became a volatile issue. An editorial in *The Times* argued that Czech reforms considering the Sudetens should have been carried out a long time ago and claimed that if the problem was addressed earlier, there would have been no crisis. The editorial further stated that the Sudeten problems would probably not have been addressed if they were not championed by Germany. <12> J. A. Spender, writing in the *Contemporary Review*, saw the Czechs as victims of their own mistake of not solving the problem of the Sudeten Germans. He saw the generous concessions by the Czechs during negotiations to solve the controversy as admittance of this mistake. He also placed blame upon Britain, France and Russia for clamping a reluctant minority on Czechoslovakia.

The appeasement proponents supported the claim of the Sudeten Germans as righting a wrong committed at Versailles. Arthur Bryant, writing for the *Illustrated London News*, believed that the Sudetens were subjected to the rule of an alien race due to a humiliating peace treaty. He claimed that they underwent economic suffering that could possibly have been racially motivated. Bryant stated that self-determination could not be denied to them just because the Allies defeated the Germans in a war or disliked them. <13> Ramsay thought it senseless to fight to deny the democratic right of the Sudeten Germans for self-determination. A war, he believed, would cost millions of lives and would be fought so the Czechs could continue to oppress their German minority. <14>

Despite their pro-German line, some of the peace endorsers realized that the Sudeten grievances and German claims of Czech tyranny were overblown exaggerations. However, they still contended that the Sudetens had justified grievances that should have

been addressed. J. A. Spender stated that even though the Sudeten grievances were exaggerated, there were enough to attract the attention of Germany, a close enemy of Czechoslovakia. He also pointed to Lord Runciman's report that stated that the Sudetens would not live as loyal citizens in Czechoslovakia if a moderate settlement was agreed upon. Spender mentioned a message from a correspondent reporting from the Sudetenland in August 1938 that the Germans there truly feared that they were going to be killed by the Czechs. He said that German propaganda caused the overblown fear that was regarded as real to the Sudetens. <15>

The proponents of peace generally believed that the controversy could only be settled by compromise, which to some meant territorial revision. Robert Parker argued that Hitler would not go to war since Czechoslovakia was completely at his mercy but contradictorily stated that the maintenance of Czechoslovakia was important as a barrier to Hitler. J. A. Spender proposed that the Sudeten problem be settled early by negotiation since it may have escalated beyond control. *The Times* advocating territorial revision consistently throughout the crisis, printed on 7 September 1938, an editorial that favored the partition of Czechoslovakia:

. . . it might be worth while for the Czechoslovak Government to consider whether they should exclude altogether the project, which has found favour in some quarters, of making Czechoslovakia a more homogenous state by the secession of that fringe of alien populations who are contiguous to the nation with which they are united by race. <16>

It further stated that the advantages of being a homogenous state outweighed the disadvantages of losing the Sudetenland. John Fischer Williams, in his editorial letter to *The Times*, advocated a plebiscite to resolve the controversy. D.A.W. Hamilton stated his unique solution to the crisis in an editorial letter to *The Times*. He believed the crisis could have been solved without the transfer of territory by the exchange of populations. He suggested that the Sudetens who wanted to join the Reich would be exchanged for the non-Aryans or those with political or religious disagreements with Nazi Germany.

### **Views of Appeasement Opposition Before the Munich Conference**

The opposition to the great movement towards appeasement viewed the controversy in a much different light. They saw the Czechoslovaks as the victims of naked German aggression. In the *Fortnightly*, Elizabeth Wiskemann wrote of her admiration of the democratic Czechs because of their determination in overcoming many obstacles. She believed the greatest danger to the Czechs was German economic pressure that could have strangled their small nation. Mary N. Hawes wrote in the *Contemporary Review* that she believed that the question of the Sudeten Germans had been replaced by the question of whether Hitler's aggressive expansionist dreams would be pampered or opposed. She saw the Sudetens as a convenient excuse for German aggression against a weaker neighbor and claimed that the German propaganda attack began two years earlier spreading false accusations that Czechoslovakia was a base for subversive Soviet activities. <17> S. Grant Duff, writing in the *Contemporary Review*, questioned H. Powys Greenwood's argument that British policy concerning the controversy should be

the same as German policy. He also questioned why Britain was putting additional pressure on the Czechs if Germany was five times stronger than Czechoslovakia. Arthur Willert, in the *Contemporary Review*, stated that if Hitler were successful, he would gain domination of Central and South- Eastern Europe through his ruthless and ambitious diplomacy. He believed that Czechoslovakia was just the latest offensive of the Axis Powers' (Germany, Italy and Japan) plan for world conquest. <18>

The appeasement antagonists also believed that the Sudeten Nazi Party leader Konrad Henlein was merely an opportunist puppet of Hitler. In the *Contemporary Review*, Gerhard Schacher stated that Henlein's party claimed minority rights for itself but did not recognize these fights for democrats, socialists, Czechs or Jews living in the Sudetenland. Mary N. Hawes stated that Henlein's goal of attaining minority fights was secondary to his ideological and nationalistic aim. R.W. Seton-Watson, in the *Fortnightly*, argued that Henlein, encouraged by Berlin, was no longer working for a settlement but for total secession.

The opposition also viewed Czechoslovakia British Reaction British Reaction as extremely important in preventing German expansion. Arthur Willert believed that the weakening of Czechoslovakia would mean another victory for Germany in their quest to be predominant in Central Europe. In the *Fortnightly*, C.F. Melville stated that the Sudeten minority was treated well in comparison to German minorities in Poland or the Italian South Tyrol. Since the best treated German minority was the main focus of Nazi interest, he concluded that Hitler was not interested in German minorities per se, but was interested in them only as a tool in achieving German expansion. <19>

The adversaries to appeasement regarded the Anglo-French Proposals agreed upon at Berchtesgaden and at Godesberg as a betrayal to the Czechs. An editorial in *The New Statesman and Nation* expressed hope that Britain would awaken from the illusion of relief brought by Chamberlain from Berchtesgaden and described the proposals goal as establishing a peace without security or honor. The writer of the editorial also held the Prime Minister responsible for sacrificing the Czechs to appease Nazi aggression. It severely criticized the agreement that it viewed as a surrender because the British and French governments agreed to Hitler's demands without consulting the Czechs. In doing this, it portrayed Britain as a Nazi agent helping Germany conquer Central Europe. Seton-Watson claimed that Chamberlain and Daladier presented the vague Anglo-French plan like a pistol at the head of the Czechs. Christopher Hobhouse writing in *The Spectator*, also saw the agreements as a surrender. He viewed Britain's position as strong before the agreements; it had the support of the world while the German populace was agitating for peace. Hobhouse viewed the leadership as having lost their nerve -- fearing that victory would have cost too many lives and strongly stated that his generation, those under thirty, would have to pay the price for this humiliating surrender. Hobhouse viewed the situation as one worth fighting for and believed that his generation was prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice in war, as many other generations had done before. <20>

Those who opposed giving in to Hitler criticized *The Times* for its vocal suggestions of appeasement and the partition of Czechoslovakia. In an editorial letter to *The Times*,

Nigel Law voiced his opposition in which he claimed that the editorial of 7 September advocating partition affected public opinion abroad. Foreigners believed that *The Times* would never print views that were against those of the British Government. This article, Law argued, convinced public opinion abroad that the British Government advocated territorial revision. R.E. Godfray, in another editorial letter, described his horror of *The Times* editorial in which he argued that Hitler could not be trusted due to the fact he had already broken the Versailles Treaty. Godfray also referred to *Mein Kampf*, in which he claimed that the recovery of the Sudetenland would be an open invitation for further German conquest in South Eastern Europe. He added that it would be suicide to allow Hitler to have the barriers designed to prevent the repetition of German aggression that started World War I. <21>

The enemies of appeasement argued that Britain should have regarded the preservation of Czechoslovakia as in their best interests. They insisted that the democracies should have made a stand for Czechoslovakia to prevent future German aggression. Mary N. Hawes hoped that Britain would have realized that Hitler was just using the Sudetens as a cloak for his plans for domination of Central Europe. She advocated that Britain should have stood against obvious German aggression to deter the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Schacher believed that Czechoslovakia was of vital strategic and military importance to Britain. He insisted the collapse of Czechoslovakia would leave the road open for German expansion not only in the south-east, but also towards the Mediterranean, Poland and eventually towards Russia. Willert advocated that Britain must make it clear to Germany that it would make a stand for Czechoslovakia if there was to be any real chance for establishing lasting peace. He advised the democracies to unite against the brute force of the dictators and defend, by force if necessary, what they believe in. Duff argued that Britain should direct a clear intimation to Germany that any attempt to use the Sudeten Germans against Czechoslovak independence would lead to a world war in which Britain would fight at the side of its allies. In an editorial letter to *The Times*, H. Wansey Bayly stated that Britain should take an open stand with Czechoslovakia, Russia, France and Romania against the aggressive ambitions of Germany and Italy. <22>

### **Views of Appeasement after the Munich Conference**

Prime Minister Chamberlain, the greatest proponent of peace, presented his post-Munich view of appeasement in his speech on 3 October 1938 before Parliament. He claimed that he went to Munich to determine the method and conditions of the transfer of territory that had already been agreed upon through the Anglo-French Proposals. Chamberlain believed that he succeeded in implementing an agreed upon plan in a peaceful manner rather than by violence. The Prime Minister called the Munich Agreement a triumph since the four great powers were able to carry out a difficult operation by negotiation instead of by fighting. Chamberlain claimed victory because he felt this agreement was more favorable to the Czechs than Hitler's ultimatum. He stated that Britain should have felt sympathy for the Czechs but claimed that with a new system of guarantees, Czechoslovakia would enjoy greater security than before. Chamberlain also pledged a 10,000,000 pound loan to the Czechs to help them in their difficult transition. The Prime Minister praised Hitler for "swallowing his pride" by taking back his declarations and

consented at the last moment to negotiate the dispute. He claimed that the worldwide desire for peace, not threats, made the peaceful agreement possible. Chamberlain believed that this agreement had laid the foundations for peace and opened up new opportunities for disarmament. <23>

The advocates of peace viewed the Munich Agreement as a great victory and praised Prime Minister Chamberlain for preserving the peace. Lord Elton claimed in the *Fortnightly* that the British populace was grateful for the Munich Agreement that saved them from the specter of war. He insisted that the agreement was a success even if it only postponed war. On 1 October 1938, *The Times* reported enthusiastically about Chamberlain's return from the successful Munich Conference by printing many pictures of huge crowds around 10 Downing Street who cheered the Prime Minister and voiced their appreciation. Arthur Bryant of the *Illustrated London News* praised Chamberlain for preserving the peace and saving the world from destruction. J.A. Spender of the *Contemporary Review* applauded Chamberlain's initiative that brought back the world from the brink of disaster at the last possible moment. The appeasement proponents regarded Munich as the correction of past mistakes and the beginning of a new era of lasting peace. Spender declared that the Agreement was a peaceful and orderly alteration of the Versailles treaty and should not be called a surrender. The peace supporters attacked the opposition to appeasement by calling them bloodthirsty war mongers. Elton fiercely criticized the Labour party the former party of peace for their attempt to push Britain into a worthless war. In the *Fortnightly*, John Armitage argued that the opposition was foolish to have believed that Chamberlain was guided by craven fear into accepting surrender for the sake of peace at any price. He noted that answering force by force would have ignored the people's desire for peace. Armitage went on to criticize Conservative backbencher Winston Churchill because he advocated the bringing of peace with the sword. He claimed that this method had been tried and resulted in World War I. <24> H. Powys Greenwood in the *Contemporary Review* criticized both Churchill and Duff Cooper for their attempt to discredit German intentions and Hitler's honesty.

H. Powys Greenwood was the main proponent of peaceful coexistence with Germany who viewed German expansion as natural and inevitable. He claimed that Germany sought to economically and politically lead, not conquer, Eastern and Central Europe. In the *Contemporary Review*, Greenwood accused partitioned Czechoslovakia of attempting to pursue an anti-German policy by acting as a barrier against Germany. He claimed that if the Czechs gave up their French and Russian alliances sooner and moved under German influence, they would have probably avoided territorial loss. Greenwood believed that the German aim was not to revise territorial claims and would have offered the Czechs a favorable commercial treaty if they were willing to make terms. He pointed out that the Germans were planning to establish their equivalent of the Monroe Doctrine in Central and Eastern Europe to protect their newly acquired dominance. It would have regarded any alliance between outside Powers and states in the area as an unfriendly act. Greenwood admired the German plan as the logical response to the economic depression that gripped the world. With their planned and controlled economy Germany solved the problem of unemployment but to keep their economy healthy they needed to solve the problem of foreign trade by securing the export of German goods. Their controlled

economy was unsuited for normal trade and the fluctuating world trade was out of German control. Greenwood believed that if Germany could secure the bulk of its raw materials from countries under her political and economic hegemony and organize their trade along German lines that Germany would be free from the crises of Western capitalism. He claimed that Germany was not conquering but only filling an economic vacuum created at Versailles since the smaller states could not compete efficiently on the world market. <25>

The proponents of peace believed that Germany would be satisfied with their gains and begin a new period of lasting peace. Greenwood predicted that Germany would rapidly become economically and politically dominant in Danubia. Both Greenwood and Elton claimed that the Germans would be satisfied with their *Mitteleuropa* or may lead Danubia in a crusade against Soviet Russia. Elton believed that it would be unlikely that Hitler should turn on the West and there was no reason for Britain to challenge Germany because there were no conflicts between Britain's imperial interests and German dominance in *Mitteleuropa*. He believed that the Nazis would then become more humane and open a new era of assured peace. <26> John Armitage hoped that Germany would stop seeking peace through the weapons of war and Britain would seek cooperation and peace with Hitler.

### **Views of Appeasement Opposition after the Munich Conference**

The appeasement opposition criticized the Munich agreement as a humiliating surrender that did not establish a stable peace. They claimed that the lack of a firm stand by the Government was responsible for the betrayal of the Czechs. An editorial in the Spectator stated that the Munich Agreement averted war, but it did not enact a peace on which confidence could be based. Clement Attlee, the opposition leader in Parliament, claimed that the agreement did not establish peace but was just an armistice in a state of war. He believed that Munich was a tragedy because a civilized democracy was betrayed and handed over to a ruthless dictator. Another editorial in the Spectator stated that the Czechs suffered a great injustice at the hands of Britain and France because Czechoslovakia's economic and strategic interests were ignored and was partitioned on unfair racial principles. In the Nineteenth Century, Harold Nicolson stated that most people initially greeted the Munich Agreement with a sense of relief. He added that once the euphoria wore off, the people felt angry, humiliated and ashamed. Charles E. Hobhouse, writing in the Contemporary Review, described Britons as feeling shame and humiliation due to the Munich Agreement. He believed that Britain's docile lack of decisive action had resulted in a tremendous increase in German power. Duff Cooper in his resignation speech to Parliament claimed that Britain failed to state its position and what it would do during the crisis. This lack of committed action gave Hitler the impression that Britain would not fight.

Some appeasement antagonists also blamed Chamberlain for sacrificing the Czechs to placate aggressive Germany. Hobhouse viewed Chamberlain as having yielded to the rough aggression of Hitler who would then control Eastern Europe. Cooper was wary of Chamberlain's trust in the good will and word of Hitler, the man who flagrantly violated

the Versailles Treaty. Attlee compared Chamberlain to a ship captain who led his ship off course into dangerous waters. He claimed that Chamberlain preserved the peace but also was the one who brought Britain into danger. Cooper believed that had Britain gone to war over Czechoslovakia, it would have been fighting for a higher cause than just protecting the Czechs. He claimed that Britain did not fight for Belgium or Serbia in World War 1, but fought to prevent a great power from dominating the Continent. Cooper believed that this situation was the same; he wanted Britain to have made a firm stand against Germany and have been prepared to fight to preserve the balance of power in Europe. <27>

The opposition to cooperation with Hitler feared the increased power of Germany and viewed Czechoslovakia as just the beginning of Nazi conquest. Attlee described the agreement as a great victory for Hitler. He stated that the Nazi dictator had become paramount in Europe, overturned the balance of power and destroyed the last bastion of democracy in Eastern Europe. The Labour leader declared that this had opened up new doors for German expansion since he defeated and reduced his opposition to impotence. Nicolson stated that not only Hitler had eliminated the Czechoslovak menace at Munich but also had made it a political and economic dependency of the Reich. R. C. K. Ensor argued in the *Spectator* that Hitler gained more without war than he could have gained by going to war. In the *Nineteenth Century*, Paul Anderson insisted Germany won a great warless victory by only the mere threat of war. He believed that Germany acquired many economic and political advantages and would soon increase the pressure on other countries. Anderson claimed that the incorporation of 800,000 Czechs into the Reich was a blatant contradiction to Hitler's statement that he did not want foreigners in the Reich. An editorial in the *Spectator* stated that German strength was increased while its opposition was weakened. <28> The editorial writer stated that the Germans were planning to bring the rest of Czechoslovakia into its economic orbit. Anderson stated that since Germany gained fifty percent of Czech industry, Czechoslovakia was economically dependent on the Reich which meant that the political independence of the Czechs was negligible. Anderson argued that because the Czech bulwark was gone this was just the beginning of German expansion and predicted that Germany would next attempt economic penetration in Central Europe, the Balkans and the Near East. <29>

The opponents of appeasement also viewed the agreement as a great defeat for Britain. They believed that Britain lost its prestige abroad and the confidence of the small states of Europe. Cooper believed that Britain lost the esteem of all the countries that trusted it and added that Britain was left with the huge and difficult commitment to defend Czechoslovakia's new frontier. <30> Nicolson believed that British prestige declined due to Munich because they abandoned the Czechs. He stated that the smaller powers would be compelled to capitulate under German aggression after seeing the experience of the Czechs. <31> Ensor claimed that because of the Czech example the smaller states of Europe were helpless against Hitler. He predicted that Belgium could no longer refuse passage of German troops, thereby eliminating Britain's historical concern for the Low Countries. <32> The opponents of appeasement advised that Britain should adjust its foreign policy to meet the realities of post-Munich Europe. Nicholson advocated that Britain should re-arm and seek good relations and policy coordination with France and

the Soviet Union. He suggested that Britain should seek agreements with Germany and Italy as well. <33> A *Spectator* editorial advocated that Britain should remain committed to France and increase ties with Soviet Russia and suggested that Chamberlain should pursue disarmament. The editorial hoped that Hitler was true to his word when he declared that Germany had no more territorial ambitions. <34> Cooper advocated increased rearmament and the maintenance of a larger army. <35>

### Conclusion

The Munich crisis sparked a great controversy in Britain. It caused a vast rift in public opinion over the causes, nature and solution to the Sudeten minority problem. The majority of the opinions expressed in the printed media at the time advocated appeasement. Most of the appeasement advocates had probably lived through the Great War and saw the tremendous damage and loss of life it caused. They most likely did not want a repetition of senseless destruction caused by a local dispute. The proponents of peace generally regarded this controversy as a leftover from Versailles. They regarded the problem as just the Sudetens demanding their justified right of self-determination and could not allow Britain to fight a war to deny this to the German minority in Czechoslovakia. Those endorsing appeasement did not regard Nazi Germany as a threat. They believed that the Germans were rightfully freeing themselves from the unjust Versailles settlement and taking what was justifiably theirs. Munich was a victory in their opinion since it preserved the peace. They believed Germany would be satisfied with its gains, agree to disarmament and cooperate in a peaceful Europe.

The opponents of appeasement took a much broader view of the controversy. They believed that the controversy was much more than a German minority demanding self-determination. The appeasement antagonists viewed the Sudeten situation as just a cover for Hitler's dreams of conquering Europe. They regarded Hitler as a ruthless, totalitarian dictator who couldn't care less about the rights of the Sudeten minority in Czechoslovakia. They argued that the German *Führer* was only using them as a pawn in his plans for dominating Central Europe. The opponents of peace with Germany viewed the Nazis as a menace to both Britain and the Continent. Before the Munich Agreement they strongly advised Britain to make a strong, open stand for Czechoslovakia, along with France and the Soviet Union. They regarded Munich as a humiliating surrender in which Britain sacrificed the gallant Czechs to appease German aggression.

On 1 September 1939, less than one year after Munich, Germany invaded Poland. Britain, who committed itself to Poland after Hitler violated the spirit of Munich when he invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, declared war on Germany two days later. The appeasement opponents, especially Winston Churchill, who were ridiculed as war mongers during the crisis, were vindicated. The world today, over fifty years after the Munich Pact, has the great advantage of hindsight in judging the crisis. It will be very interesting to see who will be vindicated in the Bosnian crisis. Will those who advocate non-intervention be the heroes or the Chamberlains of the 1990's? Only history can judge.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> "The Nation Thanked," *The Times* (London), (1 October 1938): 12c.
- <sup>2</sup> George Glasgow, "Foreign Affairs," *Contemporary Review*, 154 (July 1938): 103.
- <sup>3</sup> Lord Elton, "Mr. Chamberlain and His Enemies," *Fortnightly*, 150 (Dec. 1938): 687.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 687.
- <sup>5</sup> Robert Parker, "The Czech Crisis: The Background," *Fortnightly* 150 (Oct. 1938): 402
- <sup>6</sup> H. Powys Greenwood, "Germany and England," *Contemporary Review*. 154 (July 1938): 4.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- <sup>10</sup> J.A. Spender, "Munich- Before and After," *Contemporary Review*, 154 (Nov. 1938): 522.
- <sup>11</sup> Parker, p. 403.
- <sup>12</sup> Editorial in *The Times* (London), (5 Sept. 1938): 13b.
- <sup>13</sup> Arthur Bryant, Editorial in *The Illustrated London News*, (10 Sept. 1938): p. 430.
- <sup>14</sup> Archibald Ramsay, Editorial Letter in *The Times* (London), (13 Sept. 1938): 8b.
- <sup>15</sup> Spender, p. 514.
- <sup>16</sup> Editorial in *The Times* (London), (7 Sept. 1938): 13c.
- <sup>17</sup> Mary N. Hawes, "Prague in Peril," *Contemporary Review*, 154 (Oct. 1938): 393.
- <sup>18</sup> Arthur Willert, "The Crisis," *Contemporary Review*. 154 (Oct. 1938): 388.
- <sup>19</sup> C.F. Melville, "The Czech Crisis: The Foreground," *Fortnightly*, 150 (Oct. 1938): 392.
- <sup>20</sup> Christopher Hobhouse "A Younger Point of View," *Spectator*, 161 (23 Sept. 1938): 474.

- <sup>21</sup> R.E. Godfray, Editorial Letter in *The Times* (London), (13 Sept. 1938): 8a.
- <sup>22</sup> H. Wansley Bayly, *The Times* (London), (10 Sept. 1938): 11e.
- <sup>23</sup> Neville Chamberlain, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 339 (3 Oct. 1938): 40-50.
- <sup>24</sup> John Armitage, "The Peace Approach," *Fortnightly*, 150 (Nov. 1938): 524.
- <sup>25</sup> H. Powys Greenwood, "Germany After Munich," *Contemporary Review*, 154 (Nov. 1938): 525-6.
- <sup>26</sup> Elton, p. 692.
- <sup>27</sup> "Facing the Facts," *Spectator*, 161 (Oct. 1938) 593.
- <sup>28</sup> Duff Cooper, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 339 (3 Oct. 1938): 29-40.
- <sup>29</sup> Paul Anderson, "The Expansion of Germany," *Nineteenth Century*, 124 (Nov. 1938): 554.
- <sup>30</sup> Cooper, p. 29-40.
- <sup>31</sup> Harold Nicolson, "After Munich," *Nineteenth Century*, 124 (Nov. 1938): 522.
- <sup>32</sup> R.C.K. Ensor, "Hitler's Next Move," *Spectator*. 161 (Oct. 1938): 602.
- <sup>33</sup> Nicolson, p. 524.
- <sup>34</sup> "The Price of Peace," *Spectator*, 161 (Oct. 1938): 549.
- <sup>35</sup> Cooper, p. 29-40.

[Return to the 1993-4 Table of Contents](#)