

# Was the policy of appeasement justified



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This investigation would bring up the justification, or rather not, of appeasement. Appeasement was a method used by Great Britain and France to try to suppress Germany's threat. The main source I would use to analyze appeasement would be *Mastering Modern World History* by Norman Lowe written in the 1980s. The second source would be *Hitler and appeasement: The British attempt to prevent the Second World War* by Peter Neville written in 2006. Internet articles will also be referenced throughout the investigation. The sources will be evaluated properly with regards for their values and limitations. The investigation will assess the method of appeasement, clearly stating its pros and cons. Appeasement had a great influence on World War II, but the countries involved in it thought it would help prevent it. This investigation aims to see the appeasement through the eyes of Britain and France, and exactly what were they thinking of when they proposed such a questionable method.

## **Section B: Summary of Evidence**

Appeasement was a policy, that first started developing in the 1920s, coined by Britain and later used by France of avoiding war with aggressive powers such as Japan, Italy, and Germany, by giving way to their demands (unless they were too unreasonable). However, appeasement was made an official policy by Neville Chamberlain in 1937. Chamberlain believed that Germany had been treated very badly after World War I, so he thought that Hitler's actions were justified. However the main reason why Chamberlain believed appeasement was an important policy was because he thought that by giving in to Hitler's demands, he could prevent a European war.

Appeasement reached its peak on 29 September 1938. On that date Hitler

invited Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier to a four-power conference in Munich. Here Chamberlain and Daladier accepted a plan written by Mussolini. This plan said that Sudetenland was to be given to Germany and, most importantly, Germany was granted Czechoslovakia. However, this was not the only time Britain and France closed an eye to Germany's actions. In 1936 Hitler rebuilt his army (and also remilitarized Rhineland) which was against the terms of the Versailles treaty. Chamberlain and Daladier did nothing. But that was not all. In 1938 Hitler declared Anschluss on Austria, even though it was clearly stated in the Versailles treaty that Germany was forbidden to team up with Austria ever again. Again, Britain and France did nothing. However when the situation with Sudetenland was getting serious, Chamberlain knew he had to do something. When he had sent a convoy to Sudetenland, he saw that the situation was very dangerous. So he persuaded the Czechs to give Sudetenland to Hitler, thinking it would be the end to Hitler's demands. Chamberlain thought the Sudetenland situation was 'a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing' so he gave in to Hitler, thinking it would prevent a war from breaking out. However, even with such a big gift appeasement failed despite Chamberlain's best intentions. Appeasement was mainly a British policy, and sometimes the French did not agree with its decisions. Chamberlain barely sympathized with Germany and Italy to some extent. He was not the only one who thought that Germany was treated too harshly after World War I and that Italy was cheated on by the Versailles treaty. The French agreed to cooperate with the appeasement policy not only because he was right but also because it was vital for France that the war would not happen. At that time France was desperately dependent on a British lead, and like Sir

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Thomas Inskip (the British Minister for the Coordination of Defense) said the “ French did not want to fight, were not fit to fight and would not fight”.

Appeasement was also seen by both countries as a way out of communism.

In fact at that time there was a big fear of communism coming from Russia, which is also one of the main reasons why Mussolini got elected as the Prime Minister of Italy. Britain and France were fueled by good reasons to try out their appeasement policy, selfish or unselfish, but they could not have known that appeasement would make things just worse.

## **Evaluation of Sources**

Mastering Modern World History is a history course book written by Norman Lowe. Lowe is a freelance British writer and lecturer who used to be the head of history at Nelson and Colne Tertiary College in Lancashire, UK. The book was first written in the 1980s, however it had been constantly updated. The book covers several decades of modern world history: starting from World War One and finishing with the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It provides unique information and it is neatly divided into six parts. An extensive bibliography is offered at the end of the book with over hundreds of books. Obviously Lowe’s agenda was to educate people and to help students from A-level History courses or students who have History as an undergraduate level. There is no apparent distortion of information, although it could be said that Lowe had to take out some information from some topics but those information probably were not relevant. Although no bias is apparent, it cannot be excluded since Lowe is British and he also had previously written a book about British history.

On the other hand, Hitler and appeasement. The British attempt to prevent Second World War was written in the 2000s and by Peter Neville. Peter Neville's book is not a course book, it is complicated and not adequate for students. It offers deep insight into Chamberlain's policy and everything surrounding it. Neville is also British, and a lecturer who taught history at the University of the West of England, Queen Mary and Westfield College and Wolverhampton University. The book has an introduction and twelve chapters. Neville's agenda was to discredit the theories that say that Chamberlain's policy of appeasement failed due to incompetent leadership and bad decision making. He also maintains that the appeasement policy was rational considering the domestic and international situations facing Britain at the time. Even though he provides evidence for his claim, there is visible bias in his words.

### **Section D: Analysis**

After the World War I, many people viewed the treatment of Germany was too harsh. Germany had a huge amount of reparations to pay, and many countries, including Britain, thought it was unfair. It was a common thought that an economically stable Germany would do only good to Europe and the rest of the world. And, on a moral point many people felt compassionate towards the Germans. So it comes as no big surprise that Chamberlain set the policy of appeasement. However, it cannot be said that his motifs were only noble. The reason why Britain, and eventually France, was so taken with appeasement were also a bit selfish. Britain hoped that if Germany would regain its economic stability, a collaboration between Britain and Germany could be formed. If Britain would help Germany shine again, Germany would

feel in debt with Britain. It was not all about economy though. After the World War I, the whole Europe began shaking with the thought of communism. Russia was a big threat to everyone, and some people did not care for measures to go against communism. A lot of important British people felt Nazism and Hitler were smaller evils considering communist Russia. They hoped that if they helped Hitler's Germany, he would help them with communism. But most importantly, the reason why Chamberlain brought up appeasement is simple: Britain was not ready to go to war. British generals told Chamberlain that if a world war was to break out, Britain would definitely be at loss. After the Great Depression, Britain was in a much too weak state to engage into another world war. The Depression hit Britain hard and the government felt it was not desirable to spend too much money on the military. Public opinion also played a big role in the creation of appeasement. The public felt that the arms race was one of the reasons why World War I happened, so many people felt like Germany and Britain had to come to an agreement. The portrayal of Hitler in British magazines did not help. The editor of The Observer J. L. Garvin interviewed Hitler in 1936 and said that "Hitler was genuinely anxious for understanding with the British". Britain was also extremely afraid of conflicts with other countries. That is why, pressured by the public and by the evidence in front of his eyes, Chamberlain thought that forming the policy of appeasement would be a good thing. He was convinced that appeasement would make the chances of a war breaking out less likely. However, appeasement only made the war break out faster. Hitler would have invaded Czechoslovakia anyway, but thanks to Sudetenland it was basically given to him on a silver platter. Although many people are quick to blame Chamberlain and appeasement for

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the breaking out the war, he cannot be entirely blamed. How was he to know that Hitler was so ambitious? Chamberlain thought that with giving him Sudetenland Hitler would be satisfied. Chamberlain's biggest mistake was not creating the policy of appeasement, but underestimating Hitler.

## **Section E: Conclusion**

Neville Chamberlain was very much criticized for appeasement. He is a controversial figure in modern history, but people are quick to throw the blame at him. Even though appeasement is essentially wrong, as is giving in to a stronger person or a bully, he had no other choice. He was in front of a crossroads: helping out the enemy or risking a war that would destroy Britain. Even though he did not know that both of those choices would lead to the same thing, he chose what he thought was best for the British people at the time. People saw him as a coward, and he was not much respected after he resigned (“ He was given a choice between war and dishonor. He chose dishonor and he will have war anyway” – Winston Churchill). However, appeasement was the only reasonable solution that he had at that time, and he should not be blamed for trying to do his best for his people.

Word count: 1, 839

## **Section F: List of Sources**

### **Books:**

Lowe, Norman. *Mastering Modern World History*. 4th ed. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005. Print.

Neville, Peter. *Hitler and appeasement. The British attempt to prevent Second World War*. Cornwall: MPG Books Ltd, 2006. Print. Extracted from < <https://assignbuster.com/was-the-policy-of-appeasement-justified/>

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Russia: A Complete History., 1996-2010. Amazon. com, Inc. < <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Russia-Complete-History-Peter-Neville/dp/1842126784> >

## **Section G: Appendixes**

### **Source 1: Neville Chamberlain's speech to the British people held on September 27, 1938.**

From < <http://www.historyguide.org/europe/munich.html> >

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First of all I must say something to those who have written to my wife or myself in these last weeks to tell us of their gratitude for my efforts and to assure us of their prayers for my success. Most of these letters have come from women — mothers or sisters of our own countrymen. But there are countless others besides — from France, from Belgium, from Italy, even from Germany, and it has been heartbreaking to read of the growing anxiety they reveal and their intense relief when they thought, too soon, that the danger of war was past.

If I felt my responsibility heavy before, to read such letters has made it seem almost overwhelming. How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing. It seems still more impossible that a quarrel which has already been settled in principle should be the subject of war.

I can well understand the reasons why the Czech Government have felt unable to accept the terms which have been put before them in the German memorandum. Yet I believe after my talks with Herr Hitler that, if only time were allowed, it ought to be possible for the arrangements for transferring the territory that the Czech Government has agreed to give to Germany to be settled by agreement under conditions which would assure fair treatment to the population concerned. . . .

However much we may sympathize with a small nation confronted by a big and powerful neighbor, we cannot in all circumstances undertake to involve the whole British Empire in war simply on her account. If we have to fight it

must be on larger issues than that. I am myself a man of peace to the depths of my soul. Armed conflict between nations is a nightmare to me; but if I were convinced that any nation had made up its mind to dominate the world by fear of its force, I should feel that it must be resisted. Under such a domination life for people who believe in liberty would not be worth living; but war is a fearful thing, and we must be very clear, before we embark upon it, that it is really the great issues that are at stake, and that the call to risk everything in their defense, when all the consequences are weighed, is irresistible.

For the present I ask you to await as calmly as you can the events of the next few days. As long as war has not begun, there is always hope that it may be prevented, and you know that I am going to work for peace to the last moment. Good night. . . .

Since I first went to Berchtesgaden more than 20, 0000 letters and telegrams have come to No. 10, Downing Street. Of course, I have been able to look at a tiny fraction of them, but I have seen enough to know that the people who wrote did not feel that they had such a cause for which to fight, if they were asked to go to war in order that the Sudeten Germans might not join the Reich. That is how they are feeling. That is my answer to those who say that we should have told Germany weeks ago that, if her army crossed the border of Czechoslovakia, we should be at war with her. We had no treaty obligations and no legal obligations to Czechoslovakia and if we had said that, we feel that we should have received no support from the people of this country. . . .

When we were convinced, as we became convinced, that nothing any longer would keep the Sudetenland within the Czechoslovakian State, we urged the Czech Government as strongly as we could to agree to the cession of territory, and to agree promptly. The Czech Government, through the wisdom and courage of President Benes, accepted the advice of the French Government and ourselves. It was a hard decision for anyone who loved his country to take, but to accuse us of having by that advice betrayed the Czechoslovakian State is simply preposterous. What we did was to save her from annihilation and give her a chance of new life as a new State, which involves the loss of territory and fortifications, but may perhaps enable her to enjoy in the future and develop a national existence under a neutrality and security comparable to that which we see in Switzerland to-day. Therefore, I think the Government deserve the approval of this House for their conduct of affairs in this recent crisis which has saved Czechoslovakia from destruction and Europe from Armageddon.

Does the experience of the Great War and the years that followed it give us reasonable hope that, if some new war started, that would end war any more than the last one did?

One good thing, at any rate, has come out of this emergency through which we have passed. It has thrown a vivid light upon our preparations for defense, on their strength and on their weakness. I should not think we were doing our duty if we had not already ordered that a prompt and thorough inquiry should be made to cover the whole of our preparations, military and civil, in order to see, in the light of what has happened during these hectic

days, what further steps may be necessary to make good our deficiencies in the shortest possible time.

[Source: Neville Chamberlain, *In Search of Peace* (1939), p. 393; and *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons* (London: HMSO, 1938) vol. 339, 12th vol. of session 1937-1938, pp. 361-369, 373.]