

What was
"appeasement" essay



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The definition of appeasement is a policy, which is made to keep peace.

However, there are many different definitions. Before the Second World War appeasement was a term which meant ' a way of keeping peace by soothing, quieting and calming. Yet, postwar dictionaries added new meanings to the word. Appeasement came to mean ' gaining peace by buying off other countries' and ' the giving up of principles to avoid war'. This change in views resulted from Neville Chamberlain's act of appeasement and ultimately his failure to keep the peace.

The policy of appeasement began when many Germans believed that Germany's position in the Treaty of Versailles was unfair. Adolph Hitler shared this view; he also believed that many other countries thought the Treaty was unfair on Germany. Hitler began to secretly rearm Germany in 1933 and by 1935 felt confident enough to announce that conscription (compulsory military service) was to be reintroduced. This obvious attack on the Treaty of Versailles left the leaders of Britain, France and Italy feeling suspicious of Germany.

They called a meeting in Stresa in April 1935. However, the only agreement they could come to was that if Germany were to break the Treaty again the nations would act together. In arch 1936 Hitler sent his troops into the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland. This action broke the Treaty of Versailles and was a very risky move by Hitler, if there was to be a war as the Stresa Front agreed then Germany would certainly be defeated.

The risk that Hitler took paid off, Britain and France were so occupied by the Abyssinian crisis and the League of Nations they failed to take action. The

next step taken by Hitler was a crucial one; it stated in the Treaty of Versailles that a union between Germany and Austria was forbidden. Hitler tried to get around this by bullying the Austrian Chancellor, Schuschnigg, to take two leading Nazis into his government. However, Schuschnigg decided to hold a plebiscite (referendum) to decide whether Austria should remain independent. Hitler was furious and ordered his troops to invade Austria and the Anschluss (union between Germany and Austria) was announced. Britain and France responded with only formal protests, this led Hitler to look for more 'living space' in the form of Czechoslovakia and Poland.

Why have historians differed in their views of appeasement in the 1930's? Many historians have many different views on the policy of appeasement and who was to blame. The main reason for this difference in opinion is the time period in which they offered these views and also the period in which they lived through. These two factors affect the opinion of the historians because if a historian made an opinion about appeasement and lived through this period of time, their view would be biased as they have emotional feelings about the view. Therefore the historian's different views on appeasement can be categorized into four time periods.

The first of these periods is during the policy of appeasement. Source F1 shows the first Lord of the Admiralty blaming the policy of appeasement for the start of the war. He mentions how Neville Chamberlain's views were never even mentioned in the meeting with Hitler. He says how Hitler did not seem to yield on any point that he put forward. Source H2 is Lord Halifax's view of appeasement. Unlike the Lord of the Admiralty, Halifax defends Neville Chamberlain and says that he done the best that he could and he

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believed that Chamberlain had done all he possibly could to spare Europe the ordeal of war.

However, he still blames Chamberlain for raising the hopes of the public by using phrases such as 'peace for our time'. The second time period is the post war period; this is where Neville Chamberlain was directly blamed for the outbreak of the war. However, this theory assumes that Britain still had the power to take on Hitler. The 'guilty men' theory, as it was called, viewed the appeasing of Hitler's Germany as the wrong decision to take. The people from source J3 and source F, lived through the second world war and therefore their response is very emotional, they needed to blame someone for this horrific war.

Since Neville Chamberlain died in 1940, it was easy to blame him for the start of the war. The third time period is the 'revisionists' in the late 1950's and 1960's. The people, whose views came from this period, were less harsh on Neville Chamberlain. This may be because their feelings about the war were more subdued and they also had more time to review the information and were more rational in their views.

However they still hold the view that appeasement was not the policy to take in the situation. Source N4 by A. J. P. Taylor, holds the view that Chamberlain was so confident in his policy that he failed to realize that the concessions that he put forward to Hitler could be turned down with no repercussions from both France and Britain. He also states that nothing could have stopped Hitler, he would have marched on from one conquest to the other.

This view is a more concluded and less emotionally charged view than the 'guilty man' theory. The fourth time period is the 'counter-revisionists' from 1970's and 1980's. This time period brought about a more revised opinion and therefore more rational blame. The blame lay again at the feet of Neville Chamberlain however he was not totally blamed, the de-classification of documents such as the cabinet and imperial forces records, enforced the argument that although appeasement was the wrong policy and they misread Hitler's objectives and strategies.

Source O5 tells us how the British Ambassador to Germany, Sir Neville Henderson, was so sympathetic to Hitler and that he was commonly known as 'our Nazi Ambassador on Berlin'. This view shows that during this period the historians had more hindsight and also acted more rationally, their view on appeasement therefore was more revised and not emotionally fuelled. More recent sources seem to hold Neville Chamberlain less responsible. Sources A6 and B7 both defend Chamberlain.

Source A argues that Neville Chamberlain was not a pacifist; he argues that no one linked the rearmament of Germany with Hitler's ambitions. He also states that Chamberlain believed that the British rearmament would make a point to all dictators that the alternative to negotiation was unthinkable.

Source B tells us how popular the Munich agreement was to the British public.