A disastrous gamble: Czechoslovak-British relations, 1937-1942

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A disastrous gamble: Czechoslovak-British relations, 1937–1942

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University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1994
A Disastrous Gamble:
Czechoslovak-British Relations,
1937-1942

by

Traci Colston Heitschmidt

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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in
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ABSTRACT

The appeasement policy culminated with the Munich Agreement in September 1938 and its effects are still being felt today. Because of his preconceived notions and inflexible world view, British Prime Minister Chamberlain did not listen to the pleas of those who opposed appeasement. He ignored their opinions about military build-up, possible German war aims, or anything else that challenged the viability of his appeasement policy. Ultimately, Chamberlain's tunnel vision caused the destruction of the democratic country of Czechoslovakia and promoted the most destructive war in human history. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze Chamberlain's justifications, the strategies of his opponents (focusing on the British and Czechoslovak opposition), British public opinion, demonstrate the Czechoslovak government's position from 1938 to 1942 and analyze its struggle to reverse the repercussions of an agreement they considered a Diktat.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Second World War, the term "Munich" has been consistently used as an excuse for maintaining nonnegotiable diplomatic positions, such as opposing the seating of People's Republic of China in the United Nations, and maintaining the United States' military stance in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. In July 1955, Vice President Richard Nixon was so concerned that President Dwight Eisenhower, on his return from the Geneva Summit where he had met with British, French, and Soviet leaders, would be associated with Chamberlain and his ever-present umbrella, that he forbade the use of umbrellas at the airport presidential speech. Although probably an overreaction, Nixon feared repercussions if the public associated Eisenhower with Chamberlain and his notorious appeasement policy. Although not as influential today, "myth of Munich" still plays an important role in the world.

1Keith Eubank, Munich. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963): 298. Eisenhower met with the British, French, and Soviet leaders in Geneva to discuss post-war policies including Western occupation of Berlin. Eisenhower staunchly rejected the Soviet ultimatum that the West withdraw their troops from Berlin.
The term appeasement is unpalatable, and political association with it could mean disaster for prospective politicians.

The "myth of Munich" is also of interest to historians who battle over the origins and effects of the Diktat. Some contend that Chamberlain had no choice but to sign the Munich Agreement because the British military remained weak. They believe that Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler did not just trick British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain into agreeing with him but left Chamberlain with no other viable options. Other historians argue that Chamberlain's reasons were justified and the Munich Agreement was ultimately a success because it allowed Great Britain another year to prepare for war. If war had started in 1938 instead of 1939, they believe, Germany probably would have won the Battle of Britain. They argue that the Czechoslovak military was weak and the Soviet Union would not have honored its treaty to come to the aid of Czechoslovakia if the Germans attacked, leaving Britain and France to face the German war machine alone. Some historians have even insisted that Czechoslovakia should be thankful for Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. They compare the 100,000 Czechoslovak casualties during the war

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2 John W. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich: Prologue to Tragedy (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1948).

3 Eubank, Munich.
to the 6,500,000 Polish casualties, claiming that this discrepancy is the result of Polish unwillingness to surrender to Germany without a fight. Other historians contend that the appeasement policy was not flawed but Chamberlain's mistakes were getting involved with the German-Czechoslovak problem and trying to negotiate with Hitler from a weakened position. For these historians, the lesson of Munich is one all democratic countries should study before getting involved with dictators.

The problem with these arguments is the misplacement of responsibility. Although some of Chamberlain's reasoning at the Munich Conference might be understandable, the blame must be laid on his entire policy of appeasement. The appeasement of Germany was a erroneous policy adopted by Chamberlain, culminating with the Munich Agreement, and contributing to the loss of forty million lives in the Second World War.

Chamberlain had several honorable if narrow and mistaken reasons for pursuing appeasement which led to the Munich Conference and the eventual German occupation of the Czech Lands. In the late 1930s, not only the British

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government but other governments around the world considered appeasement a viable option for dealing with Hitler. Chamberlain's and his supporters' reasons for adopting the appeasement policy were diverse. They assumed that Hitler was a "normal" leader of state who could be dealt with in traditional diplomatic terms. They believed Europe could not endure another bloodletting like that of the First World War. There were many British politicians who correctly feared that another world war would surely cause the destruction of the already declining British Empire. 6 Flaws in the Treaty of Versailles, signed after the First World War, were used to justify yielding to German demands, the rationale being to correct the apparent injustices imposed on Germany by the victors after the war.

Although the appeasement policy was publicly and politically sanctioned in Britain until its obvious failure on 15 March 1939, a large minority of people consistently opposed pacifying Hitler at any cost throughout the late 1930s. They too had valid reasons for their political views; primarily they wanted to continue Britain's policy of maintaining the balance of power on the continent. Germany, they feared, was significantly altering this balance and they believed that for the sake of world peace, Germany should be contained.

6 Hermann Rauschning, "Is Chamberlain Right?" Spectator (3 February 1939), 167.
Because of his preconceived notions and inflexible world view, Chamberlain did not listen to the pleas of those who opposed appeasement. He ignored their opinions about military build-up, possible German war aims, or anything else that challenged the viability of his appeasement policy. Ultimately, Chamberlain's tunnel vision caused the destruction of Czechoslovakia and promoted the most destructive war in human history.

Had the Prime Minister not pressured Czechoslovakia into surrendering the Sudeten Lands to Germany, the Third Reich would not have gained control of vital Czechoslovak resources and industries and been able to begin and prosecute the war as long as it did. The Czechoslovak military was well respected throughout Europe, and coupled with the natural barrier mountains in the Sudeten Lands created, it would have posed a considerable threat to the German war machine and possibly hastened the end of the war or prevented its expansion on a worldwide scale. Certainly Hitler appreciated the importance of the Czechoslovak resources in his quest for Lebensraum [living space] and had no concern for continental balance of power. On 15 March 1939, the Wehrmacht occupied rump Czechoslovakia. The German occupiers terrorized the Czechoslovak people, forced the division of the country and the formation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and the puppet state of Slovakia, stripped the territory of its vital industries
and resources, and used the newly acquired strategic position to gain access to Ukrainian oil and to attack Poland. The opponents of appeasement were correct in their analysis of Hitler and his real intentions, but their pleas to prepare Britain militarily for another war and to recognize the military and strategic importance of Czechoslovakia, made no impression on Chamberlain. In 1938 and 1939, Hitler had free rein in Eastern Europe.
CHAPTER 2

ORIGINS OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Democracy of the West today is the forerunner of Marxism, which would be inconceivable without it. It is democracy alone which furnishes this universal plague with the soil in which it spreads. In parliamentarianism, its outward form of expression, democracy created a monstrosity of filth and fire.

--Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf

The modern Czechoslovak state dates from the Paris Peace Conference following the First World War. At this meeting the victorious Entente powers established new countries in East Central Europe in the name of self-determination of peoples as delineated in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points. One of these nascent countries was Czechoslovakia, which was carved out of the former Austria-Hungary. Czechoslovakia's borders were based not only on

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7In the tenth point of his Fourteen Points, Woodrow Wilson argued that the peoples of Austria-Hungary should be accorded autonomy. E.H. Carr, International Relations Between the Two World Wars (1919-1939) (New York: St Martin's Press, 1963), 283.

ethnic claims, but also on historic, strategic, and geographic considerations. Next to Yugoslavia, it was the most heterogeneous of the successor states. The other countries in the region moved toward some form of dictatorship during the interwar period, and by 1936 Czechoslovakia remained the only country in Central Europe in which real parliamentary government, based on the ballot, universal suffrage, and free elections, still survived.⁹

The key element in interwar Czechoslovak foreign policy was collective security. Czechoslovakia's leaders tried not to align themselves with any one major power but rather sought a unified defense against any foreign threat. Edvard Benes, the Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1918 to 1935 and six times chairman of the Council of the League of Nations and once President to the Assembly, was the architect of interwar Czechoslovak foreign policy.¹⁰ He later served as President of Czechoslovakia from 1935 to

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1938 and 1945 to 1948. During the interwar period, Czechoslovakia supported the League of Nations, disarmament, collective security, the Little Entente (comprising Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania), and mutual assistance treaties with France and the Soviet Union. The treaty with France, signed in October 1925, bound France to come to the aid of Czechoslovakia if it were attacked. Czechoslovak leaders also negotiated a defensive alliance with the Soviet Union in May 1935.

During the interwar years, Benes' solid reputation improved his country's international profile. He was respected as a shrewd politician and well known in political circles as a just man. He made numerous trips abroad between 1920 and 1928 and was described by most politicians as a master tactician with a quick mind and an uncanny ability to anticipate opportunities. Benes' circle of acquaintances was wide. The world renowned author and acquaintance of Benes, H.G. Wells, described him

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11 For discussion of his presidency, see for example, John O. Crane and Sylvia Crane, *Czechoslovakia: Anvil of the Cold War* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991), 85.

12 Ibid, 118.


as a great and world statesman.15 Throughout most of the interwar period, however, Western public opinion remained relatively ignorant of him and the country he represented. However, by the late 1930s, this had changed. In 1938, Ernst Eisenlohr, the German Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, noted:

Czechoslovakia, whose name was formerly almost unknown in Great Britain, where hardly anybody was inclined to bother about Prague's difficulties, today commands a solid block of supporters in the newspaper world, the Liberal and Socialist Parties and their Members of Parliament, as well as in financial circles of the City of London.16

Although it was not a major power, some Western political leaders considered Czechoslovakia "the keystone of the post-war arch [in Europe],"17 because of its strategic geographic position between the East and the West. Czechoslovak armament production, for instance, was bigger than that of Italy. Czechoslovakia was the most industrialized of the East Central European countries; its heavy industrial capacity surpassed that of all of the other East-Central European countries combined. It also


17Seton-Watson, "Czechoslovakia in its European Setting," 110.
had very important chemical industries and an excellent--albeit untested--military. The Czechoslovak army, when fully mobilized, consisted of 1.5 million men; the air force had approximately 1,500 planes; and the Czechoslovak's military leaders estimated it would take three million German troops to overcome them. Not only was Czechoslovakia industrially and militarily important, it was also strategically significant as the gateway to Ukrainian oil, the Danubian basin, and the Balkans. During the interwar era Britain almost completely overlooked Czechoslovakia's industrial and military importance. During the late 1930s, Chamberlain and the Western leaders may have intentionally ignored this importance because of their efforts to avoid war.

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CHAPTER 3
DIPLOMACY OF APPEASEMENT

Though not the mastermind of appeasement, Chamberlain is probably its best-known proponent. Chamberlain chose the diplomacy of appeasement as strategy for avoiding a second world war. As part of a generation of French, British, and German leaders who had experienced the horrors of war either as soldiers or civilians--the so-called "lost generation"--he embraced appeasement as the logical policy for avoiding another international confrontation. These men were products of an era that, while tired of war, was regularly reminded of it by mangled war veterans, war memorials, and ruins of buildings. Some members of Chamberlain's generation feared a repetition of the communist revolutions which took place during and after the First World War. They feared that if another war occurred, all of Europe might fall to Bolshevism. They also believed that since Hitler was violently anti-bolshevik, Germany would serve as a barrier that helped contain communism in Russia. Stanley Baldwin, Chamberlain's predecessor, had declared, "If Hitler moves east, it shall not break my heart."20 In the 1930s, Britain, more than any other country in Europe, had renounced the political extreme of

20 Paxton, Europe in the Twentieth Century, 418.
For Chamberlain appeasement seemed the only logical course for Great Britain to take. He studied problems and issues thoroughly and made decisions following careful analysis. Once he made a decision he took a very single minded approach to solving any problem. Lord Edward Halifax, Chamberlain's foreign secretary from 1938 to 1940 and an advocate of appeasement, remarked:

Anyone who worked with him and I suppose I worked as closely with him as anybody, was bound to be impressed by two things. One was his complete disinterestedness and disregard of any lesser thoughts of self, and the other his unaltering courage and tenacity, once he had made up his mind that a thing was right.  

Chamberlain's appeasement policy embodied this resolve and this tightly focused commitment kept him from listening to any dissenting voices. That he could always get a majority in Parliament made him even more intractable. Various Members of Parliament (MPs) were also appeasers and they staunchly defended Chamberlain's policy, some even after the German invasion of Poland. On 9 October 1939, Howard Williams, an MP and an appeaser, wrote to MP Phillip Noel Baker, a staunch anti-appeaser, that the "pursuit of war to

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the bitter end...cannot possibly lead to any improvement in the condition of the world." He continued, "What is required is a new attitude towards world settlement, based on willing renunciation of privilege and power."²³

Chamberlain believed Nazism was a disease that resulted from the Versailles Treaty and could best be cured by systematically removing the sources of Hitler's frustrations. France, Great Britain, Italy, and the United States formulated the Treaty of Versailles, and the Germans were excluded from the negotiations and allowed to reply only in writing. The treaty dealt ruthlessly with Germany not only in its financial demands but also in placing all the blame for the war on the shoulders of the German people. Article 231 of the treaty, known as the "War-guilt clause," declared that:

> responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.²⁴

Almost before the Treaty of Versailles was signed, German leaders representing most shades of the political spectrum labeled it an unjust Diktat and began calling for its revision. Political voices from outside Germany, including some influential British politicians, soon

²³Howard Williams to Philip Noel-Baker, 4/47, 9 October 1939, NBKR.

supported these calls. In fact, by the end of the 1920s, most educated Britons were convinced that all of the great powers were responsible for the First World War.\textsuperscript{25} Although there was no formal revision of the treaty, the Western powers spent much of the 1930s trying to accommodate Germany in part because of the "unjustness" of the war guilt clause. Many historians claimed "that both Britain and Germany shared responsibility for the outbreak of the war...the Treaty of Versailles was unjust and should be revised."\textsuperscript{26}

Hitler condemned the Treaty of Versailles as the source for many of Germany's problems, such as the worldwide depression which hit Germany earlier and harder than any other European country but which also ended relatively quickly there. The depression was not a direct result of the treaty, but merely an unfortunate event that Hitler used to his political advantage. Hitler's seizure of power came at an ideal time for him, because he took control when Germany was beginning to recover from the depression. He portrayed the Treaty of Versailles as a \textit{Diktat} that forced Germany to take responsibility for starting the First World War when in reality, the Germans believed that no such responsibility existed. When Hitler failed to comply with obligations placed on Germany by the

\textsuperscript{25}Morris, \textit{Roots of Appeasement}, 4.

\textsuperscript{26}Eubank, \textit{The Origins of World War II}, 3-13.
treaty, Western powers and the appeasers excused Hitler's actions as simply righting the wrongs of the Versailles Treaty.

In 1938, Ernst Eisenlohr, the German Ambassador in Prague, informed the German Foreign Ministry that the British government followed a "policy of eliminating points of friction in Europe in such a way as to avoid raising the major problems which lie behind them." Chamberlain believed strongly that his strategy of appeasement was the "only one which is likely to lead us to our goal." He had, of course, plausible, if inaccurate, reasons for adopting this policy. One of the most important was the depression which had hit Europe in 1929. Britain experienced severe social and economic dislocation and Chamberlain believed that domestic issues should take precedence over foreign ones. Foreign policy kept the Prime Minister from concentrating solely on domestic issues. He clung to the hope that by succeeding in foreign policy he would be able to accomplish his domestic goals of revitalizing the British economy.

Once Chamberlain had adopted a strategy for appeasement, he began a strategy to eliminate all opposition to his foreign policy. With his policy in place

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and with a secure hold over the government, Chamberlain wrote confidently in October 1937, "I am quite sure we shall never again send to the continent an Army on the scale of that which we put into the field in the Great War."\(^{29}\) By 1938 he had proved his confidence by gaining control of the British rearmament program and systematically silencing those who opposed him. Two of these critics were Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, and Head of the Admiralty Duff Cooper, both of whom resigned under pressure. On 25 February 1938, Winston Churchill, an ardent foe of appeasement, wrote regretfully of Eden's departure:

> The resignation of Mr. Eden may well be a milestone in history... That there was a complete divergence between Mr. Eden and the Prime Minister was plainly apparent. Mr. Eden adhered to the old policy which we [Great Britain] have followed so long [rule of law in Europe], and the Prime Minister and his colleagues have entered upon another new path.\(^{30}\)

After Eden and Cooper departed, Chamberlain never brought anyone into the cabinet who held views on foreign policy which differed from his own.\(^{31}\)

One of the biggest foreign policy dilemmas Chamberlain faced was the increasing tension between Berlin and Prague.

\(^{29}\)Ibid, 85.


over the Sudeten Germans of Czechoslovakia. Britain was forced to handle the Sudeten German problem because of the French-Czechoslovak treaty that guaranteed French aid if Czechoslovakia were attacked. If France went to war with Germany, then many assumed Britain would follow. By the time Chamberlain had to make major decisions concerning the Sudeten Germans, he was fully committed to his appeasement policy. Germany withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933, remilitarized the Rhineland in March 1936, and effected Anschluss [unification] with Austria in March of 1938 without a hint of disapproval from the British. In fact, Britain condoned the last two as German self-determination and necessary to maintain world peace. Chamberlain remained committed to doing anything necessary to appease Hitler and thereby prevent another world war.

The Sudeten German problem concerned the more than three million Germans who lived primarily in highly industrialized border regions of the Czech Lands. The worldwide depression of 1929 hit the Sudeten Lands particularly hard because of the region's dependence on luxury and export goods. After 1933, Germany's new economic emphasis on autarky intensified problems for the Sudeten regions by reducing exports to Czechoslovakia.\(^\text{32}\)

in the Czech-populated interior of the country further complicated the situation, as Seton-Watson, an observer noted,

Rampant unemployment bred political discontent and despair, and the Prague Government was faced by a most difficult situation in which its efforts to relieve distress in any district brought reproaches of discrimination from the others.33

The Sudeten Germans, like the Reich Germans, blamed their economic distress on external factors—the Sudeten's blamed the Czechs and both groups of Germans blamed the Versailles Peace Settlement. The initiation of a common thread of discontent began to tie the Nazis and the Sudeten Germans together, and Hitler was quick to grasp the opportunity.

Hitler was all too aware of the importance of Czechoslovakia. From May 1935, Berlin began to take an active interest in the affairs of the Sudeten Germans.34 Hitler used ethnic determination to make claims against Czechoslovakia on behalf of the Sudeten Germans. When the Führer began calling for all ethnic Germans outside the Reich to come Heim ins Reich [home to the Reich], he specifically focused on the Sudeten Germans because of Czechoslovakia's strategic importance to Germany. No fewer than twelve states in Europe had German minorities, but Hitler targeted only those groups that were useful to him.

33Ibid, 661.

The Sudeten Germans were especially susceptible to Hitler's nationalist rhetoric both because of their difficult economic situation and their discontent with their minority position in Czechoslovakia.

The *Sudetendeutsche Partei* (SdP) (Sudeten German Party) of Czechoslovakia was not originally tied to the National Socialists in Germany, but by the late 1930s Hitler had enlisted most of the SdP leadership in the Nazi crusade. The SdP became increasingly totalitarian, rejecting all other Sudeten German political parties, and in foreign policy followed Germany in opposing the League of Nations, the Little Entente, and the Czechoslovak pacts with France and Russia. Konrad Henlein, the founder of the SdP, "openly welcomed the achievement of 'Greater Germany' and summoned all his co-nationals in the Republic to join a single people's front."[36]

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[36] Seton-Watson, "The German Minority in Czechoslovakia," 664. The Sudeten German Party, formerly the Sudeten German Home Front changed its name to accommodate the Czechoslovak government who claimed that 'front' was not democratic and would not allow participation in elections under that name. The name change came in April 1935 coupled with Henlein's appointment as chairman to the party. In the May 1935 elections the SdP surpassed the votes obtained by the leading government party with 1,249,530, but under the system of
Totalitarianism in the Sudeten German districts did not coincide well with the democracy practiced in Czechoslovakia. According to R. W. Seton-Watson, the foremost British expert on Czechoslovakia during the interwar era, for that country to "renounce foreign alliances [as the SdP demanded it] would be nothing short of national suicide." \(^3^7\) Although strong militarily, Czechoslovakia was reluctant to take on the German war machine without Western support.

National suicide was exactly what Hitler had in mind for Czechoslovakia. Henlein became Hitler's puppet--willing to sacrifice Czechoslovakia for a German \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} [community based on a people or race].

As Seton-Watson noted:

\begin{quote}
In reality they [Sudeten Germans] are merely an excellent tool for the aims of the dynamic policy of the Third Reich, which wants to extend the so-called German "living space" into the Danubian basin and the Balkans.\(^3^8\)
\end{quote}

Although respected, Seton-Watson's views were not widely proportional representation it acquired only 44 seats, one less than the main governmental party, the Czechoslovak Agrarians. J.W. Bruegel, \textit{Czechoslovakia Before Munich: The German minority problem and the British Appeasement Policy} (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 123-24. This is an abbreviated English translation of a more detailed study of Czech-German relations by J.W. Brügel, \textit{Tschechen und Deutsche 1918-1938} (Munich: Nymphenburger, 1967).

\(^3^7\)\textit{Ibid}, 665.

\(^3^8\)Seton-Watson, "Czechoslovakia--The Key to the Danubian Basin," 54.
shared by the British public or government. If the mistreatment of the Sudeten Germans were the main issue for Hitler or Chamberlain then why was little said about the German minorities in Poland, Hungary or Italy, who were ultimately in more dire straits? As a correspondent for the British periodical the *Spectator* wrote on 12 August 1938:

> From none of these countries would it be possible for 30,000 Germans to cross the frontier to Breslau, parade before Herr Hitler, shake his hand or kiss the hem of his garment while their own leader, Konrad Henlein, proclaims his undying love and loyalty to that same Führer.\(^3^9\)

Without Western opposition, Hitler continued to push Henlein to make spiraling and ultimately unacceptable demands on the Prague government. During the spring and summer of 1938, Henlein called for territorial and personal autonomy and complete political freedom to practice Nazi ideology for the Sudeten Germans. Few of the British realized that Henlein was merely a pawn of Hitler's or the logic of Hitler's ultimate plans for Eastern Europe. The majority of the British governmental leaders and most of the British press accepted the Sudeten German "question" as a valid one.\(^4^0\)

Contrary to what the SdP leadership told the world,

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\(^4^0\) "Hitler's Real Objective," *Spectator* (2 September 1938): 361.
the plight of the Sudeten Germans was not that severe, particularly in comparison to the German minorities in Poland or Hungary. As a reflection of Czechoslovak democracy they enjoyed more rights, more civil liberties, and greater political influence than any other minority in Europe. 41 The British government's continued response to the "Sudeten problem" was to advise Czechoslovakia "to treat the German minority with more consideration than heretofore." 42 Chamberlain had already decided that Czechoslovakia was not worth the risk of another world war, as he wrote to his sister on 20 March 1938:

You only have to look at the map, to see that nothing that France or we could do, could possibly save Czechoslovakia from being overrun by the Germans if they wanted to do it...Therefore, we would not help Czechoslovakia, she would simply be a pretext for going to war with Germany. 43

Henlein and Hitler grasped Chamberlain's indifference toward Czechoslovakia and used it to their advantage. The ultimate goal of Henlein and the SdP was not to gain more rights from the Czechoslovak government but to surrender independence and submit to German control. 44 On 28 March


42 Eisenlohr to the German Foreign Ministry, 12 January 1938, DGFP, Series D, Vol II, 98.


44 Hubert Ripka, "Czechoslovakia--The Key to the Danubian Basin," 57.
1938, Hitler told Henlein to raise demands unacceptable to the Czechoslovak government so that Prague would be unable to comply. In a speech to the SdP Congress at Karlsbad on 24 April 1938, Henlein demanded "a special German state with complete self-government and freedom to profess Nazi ideology." A major problem for Prague in submitting to the Sudeten German demands was that the SdP wanted political autonomy, and the Czechs and Sudeten Germans were too intertwined geographically to be easily separated. In addition to the Sudeten Lands, Germans lived in other areas of Czechoslovakia, including Prague and enclaves in Ruthenia and Slovakia. There were about 400,000 Czechs living in predominately German areas and 750,000 Germans living in predominately Czech areas. Autonomy for the Germans in a single geographic unit was simply not feasible. Henlein understood this, as did the journalist and close friend of Benes, Hubert Ripka, who wrote:

The revision of Czechoslovak foreign policy demanded by Henlein amounts in practice to a wish that Czechoslovakia should give up her treaties of alliance...[and] accept a place in the 'German sphere' (*Lebensraum*).

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45Ribbentrop to Eisenlohr, 29 March 1938, DGFP, Series D, Vol II, 204.  
48Ripka, "Czechoslovakia--Key to Danubian Basin," 55.
Seton-Watson noted that Czechoslovakia was "not a 'Corridor' for Russia to reach Germany, but a corridor for Germany to reach the coveted Ukraine, without crossing Polish territory." He argued that Germany, not Soviet Russia, was the country the West should fear. If Germany gained control of Czechoslovakia it would have an open path to Ukrainian oil. Ultimately, Hitler's interest in Czechoslovakia was not over concern for the plight of the Sudeten Germans but for the industrial strength of their country.

British leaders failed to appreciate Czechoslovakia's industrial worth, geographic importance, strategic location, or Hitler's broader intentions. Chamberlain claimed on 18 March 1938 that Hitler's intent was simply "to include all Germans in the Reich but not to include other nationalities." Thus, just as Hitler considered Henlein a pawn to gain Lebensraum for the German people, Chamberlain used Czechoslovakia as a pawn to appease Hitler. Chamberlain continued to encourage President Benes and the Prague government to do everything in their power to come to terms with the SdP. In June 1938, a British correspondent in Prague wrote:

Under pressure, not only from Germany but

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49Seton-Watson, "Czechoslovakia in its European Setting," 120.

also from the West, to avoid any measures which might be represented as provocative, the Czech authorities have virtually given the Henlein Party a free hand. The Hitler salute has become an every-day greeting, though the Nazi Party and its practices have been officially forbidden since 1933.51

Because it held no treaty with Czechoslovakia, Britain had only its integrity at stake if that country were attacked. France's treaty with Czechoslovakia did not commit Britain to aid Czechoslovakia but Britain was compelled to come to the defense of France if it were attacked; therefore, Britain pressured Paris "to put it to sleep" or bury it [the Czechoslovak-French Treaty].52 In short, Chamberlain felt obligated to "the establishment and the maintenance of peace and the removal...of all causes of possible conflict in the amelioration of grievances between one country and another."53 The British military situation was another important reason for Chamberlain's commitment to appeasement. Britain had demobilized and disarmed after the First World War and was ill prepared militarily for another military confrontation with Germany. This lack of preparation was due largely to the fact that Chamberlain assumed that another world war would look nothing like the first. He projected the air force and the navy as the most

53 Chamberlain, In Search of Peace, 149.
important factors and dismissed the regular army as obsolete. In October 1936, he declared:

I cannot believe that the next war, if it ever comes, will be like the last one,...and I believe our resources will be more profitably employed in the air, and on the sea, than in building up great armies...We should aim at an Army of 4 divisions plus 1 mobile division ....Territorials should be kept for A.A. [antiaircraft] defence.54

On 26 June 1938, Chamberlain wrote to parliament, "[War] we could not do, unless we had a reasonable prospect of being able to beat her [Germany] to her knees in a reasonable time and if that I see no sign."55

Hitler had been preparing for war since his seizure of power in 1933. After the First World War the German army was reduced to 100,000 officers and men who served a twelve-year term of enlistment. Under Hans von Seeckt, chief of the German Army command, the Wehrmacht was turned into a school to train enlisted men and encourage the officers to formulate new tactical doctrines, study foreign military strategies, and produce studies on the uses of new weapons. Seeckt was adept at sidestepping the limitations imposed upon the army by the Versailles treaty and the Allied Control Commission. By 1933, when Hitler seized power, he had a strong foundation on which to build his

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54Taylor, Munich: The Price of Peace, 593.
55Toland, Adolf Hitler, 463.
Having reconstructed German military might, Hitler cunningly used the West's own policy of self-determination to justify Sudeten Germans demands on Prague. Chamberlain, continued to attempt to negotiate with Hitler by treating him as he would a British politician in the Parliament. In a speech on 25 February 1938, Churchill described Chamberlain's new policy as follows:

The new policy is, perhaps, to come to terms with the totalitarian powers in hope that by great and far-reaching acts of submission, not merely in sentiment and pride, but in material matters, peace may be preserved. I earnestly hope that Ministers will take occasion to deny that suggestion and will explain their policy more fully.  

Due to his miscalculation Chamberlain believed that Hitler was a rational human being who would listen to the voice of reason. Even after Germany had remilitarized the Rhineland, pulled out of the League of Nations, occupied Austria, and was drooling over Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain still stubbornly thought that Hitler wanted to solve problems peacefully. He ignored the fact that Germany was heavily armed and was preparing for another war and clung to his mistaken policy of appeasement.

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57 "Good Week for Dictators," 151.
CHAPTER 4

PRELUDE TO MUNICH

British public opinion was not unanimously behind Chamberlain and the supporters of appeasement. Dissenting voices were raised beginning in March 1938 following the Anschluss as the following excerpts from the Times (London) demonstrate:

With the absorption of Austria, Germany is in so commanding a position, politically and economically, that she can envisage self-sufficiency in Europe—self-sufficiency based on the grain and raw materials of Eastern Europe....

and:

Mr. Chamberlain must have pressing reasons for his course of parleying with the dictators, but says there is as much chance of building a safe and settled peace with these ravening wolves as the shepherd of a tempting flock of sheep would have under the circumstances.

Blinded by his own determination to make a mistaken policy successful, Chamberlain also displayed an ignorance of Czechoslovakia in his choice of representatives to


\[60\] "Canadian Criticism of Mr. Chamberlain," Times (London), (23 February 1938): 13b.
mediate the conflict between the Czechoslovak government and the Sudeten Germans. On 3 August 1938, he dispatched Lord Runciman, a wealthy businessman, who lacked knowledge of East Central Europe in general and the Sudeten Germans in particular, to negotiate an accord between the SdP and the Czech government. On 27 July 1938, Halifax told the Parliament that Runciman's mission was "to inform public opinion...but, more important, to act as mediator and bring the two sides together." After a month of contentious meetings between the Sudeten Germans and the Czechoslovak government, on 13 September 1938 Runciman came to the conclusion that the best solution to the Sudeten German dilemma was cession of the major Sudeten enclaves to Germany. Opponents of appeasement rejected Runciman's conclusions, but Chamberlain and his supporter continually ignored these objections. They tried endlessly to silence the dissenting voices and even the London Times correspondent in Berlin who tried to tell "the truth about the Nazis and the futility of appeasement" was dismissed.

The Times correspondent was not the only voice

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62 Chamberlain, In Search of Peace, 164.

reporting Hitler's true intentions. Nigel Law, who once held a position in the British Diplomatic Service, wrote: "...a month ago Hitler explained to his Army Chiefs that his 'political intuition' told him that neither France nor Great Britain (since Parliament was not sitting) would move if he got into Czecho Slovakia quickly." The anti-appeasers persevered in their battle for an audience in the House of Commons but were continually ignored and dismissed as war mongers by Chamberlain's majority. Colonel Wedgwood, an anti- appeaser, pleaded with Parliament on 26 July 1938 to face the reality of Britain's pathetic military preparedness: "...we have secured peace, but ...a peace which can only be maintained ultimately by a war into which we shall go shackled and handcuffed." Wedgwood, like most of the anti-appeasers, did not favor war but wanted to be prepared if it transpired.

Desperate to maintain peace Chamberlain listened to Runciman. The Prime Minister told Hitler in the spring of 1938, "I cannot believe that you will take responsibility of starting a world war which may end civilization for the sake of a few days delay in settling this long standing

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64 Nigel Law to P.V. Emrys Evans, PVEE 58262, 5 September 1938, 55.

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problem. On 14 September 1938, Chamberlain sent a message to Hitler requesting a meeting to discuss the Sudeten Germans, and on 15 September 1938 he traveled to Berchtesgaden. Chamberlain told Hitler that he was "ready to put to the Czech Government your proposal as to the areas [Sudeten Lands], so that they may examine the suggested provisional boundary." Chamberlain left this meeting convinced that Hitler was willing to fight; Hitler, on the contrary, was convinced that Chamberlain was not. The proposals made during the meeting were delivered to Prague on 19 September 1938 and demanded an immediate reply from Benes.

The most difficult aspect of the deliberations for Benes was the knowledge that he was waging an illusory fight. The real issue was not the ills of the Sudeten Germans but the unwillingness of the British and French to go to war for the sake of Czechoslovakia. The Czech leader originally rejected the proposals which meant the destruction of Czechoslovakia but realized that without Allied support the Czechoslovak military could not

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67Chamberlain, In Search of Peace, 166.

68Ibid.

Acutely aware of the dangers of having a weak military, when he took the office of President of Czechoslovakia in 1937, Benes' "first principal reform was to establish a Supreme Council for the Defence of the State." Thereafter, "the Officers' Corps of the army was strengthened and fully equipped [and] in the late summer of 1938 our army,...[was] one of the best in Europe."\(^7\) Benes, unlike Chamberlain, was not blinded by Hitler's rhetoric and had taken concerted measures to prepare Czechoslovakia for war. Since England decided to discontinue its campaign for a balance of power on the continent and France gave up its policy of collective security, Benes's efforts were insufficient when Czechoslovakia was left to defend itself against the German war machine. "Czechoslovakia stood, as it were, for a cause in which Europe and humanity at large were no longer interested."\(^7\) With Britain and France threatening to withhold military support, Benes was forced on 21 September 1938 to accept the proposals.

Hitler and Chamberlain met again in Bad Godesberg, Germany on 22 September 1938. Britain agreed to the peaceful transfer of lands to the Germans; any show of

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\(^7\)Benes, Memoirs of Edvard Benes, 28, 29.

force by the Germans would be just cause for the Czechs to resist. Hitler initially consented to withdraw the German troops from the disputed areas. In a letter to Chamberlain on 23 September 1938 he renounced his earlier agreement:

I am, however, not prepared to allow a territory which must be considered as belonging to Germany, on the ground of the will of the people and of the recognition granted even by the Czechs, to be left without the protection of the Reich. There is here no international power or agreement which would have the right to take precedence over German right.\textsuperscript{72}

Hitler went on to argue that the Sudeten Germans would be virtually defenseless without German protection and set a deadline of 1 October 1938 for the British to accept German terms--promising that if this were granted it would be the last of the German demands and peace would be guaranteed.

Hitler turned the tables on Chamberlain when they met in Bad Godesberg, claiming that if the Czechs did not withdraw their forces from the border lands, the West would be responsible if war erupted. Chamberlain wilted under Hitler's Godesberg ultimatum and claimed that peace was no longer in his hands but in the hands of the Czech government.\textsuperscript{73} Back in Britain, on 23 September 1938 in a national broadcast, Chamberlain said:

However much we may sympathize with a small nation confronted by a big and powerful neighbor, we cannot in all circumstances

\textsuperscript{72}Chamberlain, \textit{In Search of Peace}, 169.

\textsuperscript{73}\textit{Ibid}, 172.
undertake to involve the whole British Empire in war simply on her account....If we have to fight it will be on larger issues than that.\textsuperscript{74}

London and Paris concluded that the only way to avoid another world war was to support Sudeten German demands for self-determination. This would also allow France to disregard its treaty with Czechoslovakia. The British and French governments pressured Czechoslovakia to comply with the demand for immediate transfer of all areas having a population of more than fifty percent Sudeten Germans. The decision was made without the consultation of the British or the French parliaments or the Czechoslovak government.\textsuperscript{75} The Prague government was informed that if we did not accept their [Britain and France] plan for the cession of the so-called Sudeten regions, they would leave us to our fate, which, they said, we had brought upon ourselves. They explained that they certainly would not go to war with Germany just "to keep the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia."\textsuperscript{76}

The British government pledged to defend the corollary Czechoslovak boundaries and promised aid if future German aggression should occur. Bereft of Western allies, Czechoslovakia had no choice but to succumb to the German

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid, 175.

\textsuperscript{75}"Dismemberment of Destruction," \textit{Spectator} (23 September 1938): 465.

\textsuperscript{76}Benes, \textit{Memoirs of Dr. Edvard Benes}, 43.
demands.\textsuperscript{77} A journalist in the British \textit{Spectator} wrote:

So Herr von Ribbentrop was right....[He] assured Herr Hitler that Great Britain did not mean business. The British Government had been ceaselessly insisting that it did...it is tragic that the discovery that they [Britain and France] could not help Czechoslovakia was only made when they had led the Czechs (and all the world) to believe they could...nothing could be more grossly and palpably unfair.\textsuperscript{78}

Churchill and Eden also immediately condemned the act but remained optimistic that a united stand against German aggression might yet succeed.\textsuperscript{79} On 28 September 1938 Jan Masaryk, the Czechoslovak ambassador to Britain, told Halifax and Chamberlain, "If you have sacrificed my nation to preserve the peace of the world, I will be the first to applaud you, but if no, gentlemen, God help your souls."\textsuperscript{80}

After receiving news of Benes' acceptance of German demands, Hitler sent a memorandum to Chamberlain on 28 September 1938 calling a meeting to finalize the concessions. The next day Adolf Hitler, Edouard Daladier, Benito Mussolini, and Neville Chamberlain, representing Germany, France, Italy, and Great Britain, met in Munich to determine the fate of the Sudeten Germans and of

\textsuperscript{77}Chamberlain, \textit{In Search of Peace}, 189.

\textsuperscript{78}"What Hitler's Victory Means," \textit{Spectator} (23 September 1938), 468.

\textsuperscript{79}"Dismemberment or Destruction," 465.

\textsuperscript{80}Charles Loch Mowat, \textit{Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 517.
Czechoslovakia. Neither Czechoslovakia nor its eastern ally, the Soviet Union, was present. The Four Powers concluded an agreement which called for the Czechoslovak government to remove its troops from the specified areas by 1 October 1938 without destroying any existing installations. Occupation of the predominately Sudeten German areas by Reich German troops would begin the same day. Following the occupation, a plebiscite would be held in the annexed lands no later than November to decide on a new government. Finally, the Prague government was to release, within four weeks, both unwilling Sudeten Germans from the Czechoslovak military and any Sudeten Germans being held for political offenses.81 On 30 September 1938, Hitler and Chamberlain signed an Anglo-German Declaration which stated: "We [Hitler and Chamberlain] regard the agreement signed last night...as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again."82 On the morning of 30 September 1938, the Four Powers presented Czechoslovakia with a fait accompli which the Prague government had no choice but to accept. Benes was unable to consult the Czechoslovak parliament or get any insight into public opinion because the Allies

82 The Anglo-German Declaration, DGFP, 30 September 1938, 1017.
demanded his answer within two hours. As Benes noted:

Without our [Czechoslovak] participation and in spite of the mobilization of our whole Army, the Munich Agreement--fatal for Europe and the whole world--was concluded and signed...and then was forced upon us.

Initially Chamberlain believed that his appeasement policy had successfully prevented another war. On 30 September 1938, he told the British people that he had achieved both "peace with honor" and "peace for our time." Chamberlain's opponents were not deceived by Hitler's promises and were disgusted at the grandiose display put on by Chamberlain upon his return from Germany. Arthur Vivian-Neal, who opposed appeasement, described his view of Chamberlain's return:

At this distance from Downing Street the cheering and the flowers seem utterly repulsive, and it seems that we have only been able to buy peace...at the price of the disgrace of France and our dishonour. Does the man [Chamberlain] still suppose that he can match with European dictators?

Obviously he did, for in his speech in the House of Commons on 3 October 1938, Chamberlain claimed a diplomatic victory at the Munich conference, declaring that the ultimatum issued by Hitler at the Godesberg conference was

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84Benes, Memoirs of Dr. Edvard Benes, 43.
85Chamberlain, In Search of Peace, 200.
86Arthur Vivian-Neal to P.V. Emrys-Evans, PVEE 58262, 2 October 1938, 60.
substantially modified in the Munich Agreement.\textsuperscript{87} Moreover, Chamberlain believed that Czechoslovakia now had a greater degree of security than ever before. The majority of the British public supported the policy, and every newspaper in the country praised the Munich agreement excluding the Reynolds' News.\textsuperscript{88} "A consensus supporting appeasement emerged in the weeklies in the course of 1935, and it remained virtually intact until September 1938."\textsuperscript{89} Instead of formulating a thorough foreign policy, Chamberlain chose to follow the consensus, ignoring a vital segment of the government simply because their opinions differed from his own.

\textsuperscript{87}W. Jaksch to [ ] Gillies, NBKR 4/164.

\textsuperscript{88}Taylor, \textit{Origins of the Second World War}, XXVII.

\textsuperscript{89}Morris, \textit{Roots of Appeasement}, 1.
CHAPTER 5

AFTERMATH OF MUNICH

Chamberlain's opponents in the British Parliament were flabbergasted at the Munich settlement. One group of anti-appeasers, led by Duff Cooper, were appalled at the willingness of Chamberlain to sacrifice a country whose military capabilities were so superior. Cooper, when informed of the agreement, resigned his post as Head of the Admiralty and called the Munich Agreement a "miserable scrap of paper..." and added that although he may have ruined his political career by resigning, he could "still walk about the world with my head erect."\textsuperscript{90} Furthermore, Cooper added that agreeing to "the destruction of the only defensible frontier of Czecho-Slovakia, we [Britain] guaranteed that frontier." He added that it made no sense that Britain "had guaranteed the maintenance of what we had just destroyed."\textsuperscript{91} Cooper and others also believed that if the Czechs had fought, Russia might very well have supported them. Most of the anti-appeasers, who in any


\textsuperscript{91}Ibid: 248.
case, lacked Cooper's military expertise, simply realized Britain suffered a terrible humiliation at the hands of Hitler, and assumed the humiliation would not end as long as the policy continued. All the opponents of the appeasement policy believed that war was imminent and Britain would not be able to rearm quickly enough because of Chamberlain's deluded dream of peace. On 16 September 1938 Eden wrote: "I fear that in the end it may boil down to one more surrender which we shall be asked to call 'peace'." In a speech to the House of Commons on 4 October 1938, Lord Lloyd, an M.P. and opponent of appeasement, said:

There can be no peace in the heart of any reflecting man in England when he thinks of what was done to the Czech people last week. Is there nothing worth fighting for? Justice? We have scarcely heard a word about justice in this House."

When an opponent of appeasement asked Chamberlain whether any British military adviser had been present at the conference and whether anyone was consulted before handing over the Czech fortifications and munitions unimpaired to

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92 Paul Emrys-Evans to Lord Salisbury, PVEE 58247, 21 July 1943.

93 Anthony Eden to P.V. Emrys Evans, PVEE 58242, 16 September 1938.

94 Lord Lloyd's speech in House of Commons, PVEE 58247, 4 October 1938.
Germany, the answer was no. Chamberlain was obsessed with maintaining peace. Thus, no one who questioned his appeasement policy was given a platform, no matter how reasonable the criticism.

Peace, however, was not what Hitler wanted. He had pushed Chamberlain at every turn and had been so successful that he was not about to stop at the borderlands of Czechoslovakia. With the Munich Agreement he received more land than he demanded in the Godesberg Ultimatum and he saw no reason to stop there. Chamberlain and Daladier "...could never have realized what they were giving Herr Hitler...the whole of Czechoslovakia...lies henceforth directly or indirectly in the economic grip of Germany." In the ensuing partition of Czechoslovakia, 50 percent of the country's industry went to Germany, and 90 percent of its fuel resources went to Germany or Poland. Germany received about 40 percent of the machine and engineering industries and 25 percent of metallurgical and machine-making, chemicals, leather, timber, foodstuffs, construction, small-scale engineering, and clothing industries. Germany also gained 180,000,000 pounds of fortifications, armaments, factories and buildings, roads,

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95 Mr. Benn to Prime Minister, _Parliamentary Debates, Fifth Series_, vol. 339, 28 September 1938 to 3 October 1938, 312.

and railways. Rump Czechoslovakia, left with little industrially, was reduced to an agrarian economy. Of strategic importance was the fact that the one country that had cut Germany off from Southeastern Europe no longer formed that barrier: "The lynch-pin of the mechanism was always Czechoslovakia. Once that went, Hungary and Poland became fiefs of Berlin." German rule was immediately implemented in the occupied areas and the policy of "No German can be subordinated to a Czech. The German is always the master" was enforced. Even the criteria for qualifying as a German were restricted. Those Social Democrats who spoke German rather than Czech were refused the appellation of "German" because their ideology did not match that of the Nazis. George Kennan, the American Ambassador to Prague, tried to describe the political situation in Czechoslovakia: "I wonder whether it is possible for anyone...to conceive of the chaos which the Munich catastrophe created in political life and political thought." The political and economic life of the Czechs

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99 *Czechoslovakia's Fight*, 16 March 1939, 21.

100 Mary N. Hawes, "Prague in Peril," *Contemporary Review*, (October 1938), 398.

and Slovaks was thrown into complete disarray that would take years to sort out.

Many British remained unmoved when Hitler occupied the Sudeten Lands in October 1938. They believed with Chamberlain that he had done the world a great service by preserving the peace. They took Hitler at his word and apparently believed that Germany would end its demands. Some British politicians justified the sacrifice of independent Czechoslovakia by claiming it was a saison Staat [ephemeral state] which should never have come into existence in 1919. Others realized the strategic importance of Czechoslovakia and were alarmed. Arthur Salter, a Member of Parliament, pointed out on 21 October 1938 that Britain's strength in central Europe was now endangered, for Czechoslovakia was central to the bastion and without it a strong defense would be difficult to develop.102

For the foes of appeasement the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia was futile, war was probable, and because of Chamberlain's foolish policy, England was unprepared militarily to face the German military. Lt. Colonel C.E. Stewart on 27 June 1939 wrote:

The spectacle of a British Prime Minister 'sucking up' to Dictators is neither edifying nor encouraging...When it is evident to the meanest intelligence that appeasement is a

hopeless failure, he [Chamberlain] persists in his fatuous efforts--a fine fellow indeed to lead this People and Country at such a time as this.\textsuperscript{103}

On 1 October 1938, Benes was informed via his ambassador in Berlin, Vojtech Mastny, that Marshal H. Goering, head of the Luftwaffe, commanded Benes' resignation as President of Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{104} On 5 October 1938, Benes, concluding he could better help his people from a country not dominated by Germany, resigned his post.\textsuperscript{105} Despite Benes' flight and the obvious debacle, Chamberlain and his disciples as late as 9 March 1939 were notifying the British press that foreign affairs were taking a turn for the better.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{103}Lt. Colonel C.E. Stewart to P.V. Emrys-Evans, PVEE 58248, 27 June 1939, 65.

\textsuperscript{104}Benes, Memoirs of Dr. Edvard Benes, 50-51.

\textsuperscript{105}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{106}Wickham Steed, "What of British Policy," Contemporary Review (June 1939), 644-645.
LONG ROAD TO RECOGNITION

Unfortunately, World events did not take a turn for the better—Hitler did not stop with the Sudeten lands. On 15 March 1939 German troops rolled into rump Czechoslovakia and 16 March a Reich law was passed making Bohemia and Moravia a Reich protectorate and Slovakia a German puppet state.\(^{107}\) On the very day that German troops entered the protectorate, Chamberlain said:

> that there are no differences, however serious, that cannot be solved without recourse to war, by consultation and negotiation, as was laid down in the declaration signed by Herr Hitler and myself at Munich.\(^{108}\)

Even after Chamberlain was informed of the rape of Czechoslovakia, he and the majority of the parliament voiced no regret but were concerned mainly with defending the Munich policy. It was left to Eden to emphasize the significance of Hitler's move into Czechoslovakia to the British parliament. Eden also called for a cementing of national unity, and highlighted the importance of collective security against Germany's aggression. He continued by asking if there was any M.P. who still believed that Hitler would not make any more demands or

\(^{107}\)George F. Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 96.

that there would not, if left unchecked, be another victim of Germany who was left to choose between resistance or surrender.\textsuperscript{109} Although Chamberlain maintained a majority in parliament, public opinion in Great Britain began to shift. An journalist in the \textit{Spectator} on 17 March 1939 wrote: "Nothing would create more confidence than the entry of Mr. Churchill and Mr. Eden into the Cabinet."\textsuperscript{110} Even the London \textit{Times}, which had previously supported Chamberlain and his policy, on 15 March called its lead article "The Destruction of Czechoslovakia."\textsuperscript{111} The appeasement policy was dead; and even Chamberlain was not sufficiently deluded to believe it could persist. Chamberlain pledged Britain's support to Poland, and in a speech at a National Service rally, Eden endorsed the change in policy: "We cannot afford any more relaxation. I hope to heaven we have no more optimistic speeches about golden ages. We can all of us recognize the golden age when we see it."\textsuperscript{112} A.H. Richards, the General Organizing Secretary of the Anti-Nazi Council, formed to combat Nazi propaganda and to help its victims, wrote to Churchill on 18 March 1939, "At long last it would appear the Prime


\textsuperscript{110}"The Rape and After," \textit{Spectator} (17 March 1939), 433.

\textsuperscript{111}Wickham Steed, "What of British Policy," 644.

\textsuperscript{112}Eden, \textit{Memoirs of Anthony Eden}, 56.
Minister recognizes that you cannot shoo off dictators with an umbrella.\textsuperscript{113}

Although Chamberlain changed his opinion of Nazism and ended his appeasement policy, it was not until September 1939 that he thoroughly perceived the need for decisive action. He said:

\begin{quote}
I trust I may live to see the day when Hitlerism has been destroyed and a liberated Europe has been reestablished. The people of France and Great Britain are alike determined to put an end once and for all to the intolerable strain of living under the perpetual threat of Nazi aggression.\textsuperscript{114}
\end{quote}

Chamberlain had finally modified his sentiments toward Hitler but he still staunchly defended the Munich agreement as legitimate--for to denounce it would mean admitting his entire policy of appeasement had failed.

Benes was determined to rescind the dictates of the Munich agreement. After a brief sojourn to the United States where he served as a Professor at the University of Chicago, he moved to London on 18 July 1939, joining several former members of the Czechoslovak government already there.\textsuperscript{115} Upon his arrival he was welcomed with a party given by Eden and Churchill and attended by other opponents of appeasement, including various politicians,


\textsuperscript{114}“Prague-London Letter,” 4/172, NBKR, 8.

\textsuperscript{115}Benes, \textit{Memoirs of Edvard Benes}, 81.
the leader of the Labour Party, Seton-Watson, and several journalists, all honoring him and condemning Munich. Churchill gave the opening speech and promised "that the peace which still has to be established will not be made without Czechoslovakia." The battle for Benes and the Czechoslovak government-in-exile would continue but they were not alone in their fight--those who had condemned the appeasement policy all along were still by their sides.

Benes' first order of business was to set up a Czechoslovak legation. The primary objective of the legation was to gain political recognition from the other Allied powers and thereby place the Czechoslovak government-in-exile on an equal basis with other exiled governments. Additionally, he wanted the French and British to repudiate all the consequences of the Munich Agreement, to guarantee Czechoslovakia's pre-Munich boarders, and to arrange an appropriate resolution to the Sudeten German problem. On his brief visit to the United States he was assured by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State, and by Republican and Democratic political leaders that America would never acknowledge the violence committed against Czechoslovakia and would cooperate with efforts at

\[116\text{Ibid, 82.}\]

resolution. On 19 September 1939, Benes opened political negotiations with Halifax but was unable to surmount any solid commitment to official recognition. The British government was unwilling to make any type of political promise to Czechoslovakia for fear of future consequences. Chamberlain's government refused to admit that their foreign policy had been severely partial and gravely flawed.

Immediately after Britain declared war on Germany, Benes sent telegrams to the Prime Ministers of Poland, France, the British Dominions, and Great Britain, informing them that Czechoslovakia had legally existed after 15 March 1939 and had been at war with Germany since that date. Benes added that Czechoslovakia would fight along side the other Allied powers and began organizing the Czechoslovak liberation army which would aid other Allied forces. Benes received replies from all the prime ministers, welcoming the Czechoslovak support, except from France and Poland which considered Czechoslovakia extinct since 15 March

\[118\] Ibid, 83. Although the United States promised to cooperate, the U.S. was still very isolationist in 1939 and made it clear to Britain, through the American Ambassador to Great Britain, that the U.S. would not act militarily unless directly threatened and certainly had no intentions of going to war to save Czechoslovakia. Taylor, Munich: The Price of Peace, 766-67, 848-52. For more detailed description of Roosevelt's foreign policy see, Robert Dallek, Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945 (New York, 1965).
After a brief visit to France, where Benes was slighted by Daladier, who was still embarrassed by Munich, the Czechoslovak leader met with fellow exiles: Stefan Osusky, the former Czechoslovak Minister to Paris, General Sergej Ingr, Dr. Eduard Outrata and Dr. Herbert Ripka. Daladier was unwilling to recognize a government he considered extinct, so Benes was forced to deal with lesser French officials and was only able to establish a Czechoslovak National Committee with restricted capabilities. The Committee was grudgingly recognized by France on 17 November 1939 and by the British on 20 December 1939. Masaryk in a broadcast to Prague tried to encourage those remaining in the protectorate that the "Committee" or "Council" was working to regain Czechoslovakia's pre-Munich status and boundaries. On 18 November 1939 he wrote, "a National Council, which has been given full powers to represent our nation in all the Allied countries...and will remain a devoted and humble servant of your sacred cause." The National Committee, however, did not have all the privileges of a recognized government-in-exile and was limited in what it could accomplish.

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France had once again failed its former ally Czechoslovakia and politically handicapped Benes and Masaryk even more. The legacy of Munich continued to haunt the Czechoslovak government, even in exile.

After his brief dealings with the French, Benes decided that his time was best spent lobbying the British government. Even though the British had renounced the appeasement policy, their comprehension of the plight of a small nation like Czechoslovakia was very limited. In the words of Masaryk, "It is not easy for the large British nation to understand what it means for a small nation to be fighting for the preservation of its national existence."12

Czechoslovakia was a small nation surrounded by Germans on three sides and had been fighting for survival since the day it was formed. Most Britons could not comprehend the Czechoslovaks' fate, making the National Committee's job ever more difficult.

Although the National Committee had to temporarily remain in Paris to successfully organize the Czechoslovak Army, Benes returned to London. Members of the National Committee were comprised of Slovaks, Czechs, socialists, communists, German Social Democrats, and several other groups. The communists were initially involved, ceased to cooperate with the committee when the German-Soviet treaty was signed on 23 August 1939, and then rejoined when

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12Ibid, 2.
Germany invaded the Soviet Union. The Sudeten German Social Democrats, led by Wenzel Jaksch, also withdrew their cooperation when Benes began to pursue the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans when the war ended.\textsuperscript{123}

Although the majority of the Committee was in Paris, Benes and Masaryk began negotiations with the British government in London. Rumors of a German invasion of France were circulating and Benes believed that the Committee would have to be permanently moved to London. On 26 April 1940, Benes opened talks through a meeting with Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under Secretary of State in the British Foreign Office. Benes asked for approval of a Czechoslovak Government in London made up of participants of the National Committee and additions which would make it representative of all the official dealings of the Czechoslovak people. Deliberations with the British Foreign Office continued through July with extensive correspondence and recognition promised in June.\textsuperscript{124}

The primary issue for Benes and the Committee became rescuing the Czechoslovak army from France so it could continue to fight with the allies for the remainder of the


\textsuperscript{124}Benes, \textit{Memoirs of Edvard Benes}, 102.
war. Benes wrote to Eden, who had become head of the Dominions office and was then appointed Secretary of State for War under Churchill's government on 12 May 1940.\textsuperscript{125} He informed Eden that British military support was crucial in evacuating Czechoslovak troops from France to Britain. Eden agreed and promised to help in the rescue and after overcoming several obstacles, Czechoslovak troops arrived in Britain on 14 July 1940.\textsuperscript{126} Upon their arrival, Eden sent them a message welcoming them to Britain and promising the defeat of their common enemy, Germany.\textsuperscript{127}

With the Czechoslovak forces on British soil, the urgency for recognition of a government became even more essential. Benes sent a letter to Halifax on 9 July 1940 asking for recognition of a Provisional Czechoslovak Government with a complete state organization. The government would consist of: Dr. Edvard Benes, President, Dr. Jan Sramek, Prime Minister, and twelve others. The government would also include a Czechoslovak State Council which would consist of representatives of various political Czechoslovak groups and would act as a kind of parliament.\textsuperscript{128} In response, Halifax agreed to recognize the Provisional government but emphasized that the British

\textsuperscript{125}Eden, \textit{Memoirs of Anthony Eden}, 73-74, 112.

\textsuperscript{126}Benes, \textit{Memoirs of Edvard Benes}, 103-05.

\textsuperscript{127}\textit{Ibid}, 105.

\textsuperscript{128}\textit{Ibid}, 106-07.
government did "not intend to engage themselves in advance to the recognition or future support in the fixing of whatever future boundaries in Central Europe."\textsuperscript{129}

Essentially, the British government, which still consisted of several members of Chamberlain's devotees, were still unwilling to recognize the pre-Munich boarders of Czechoslovakia. Churchill was in a bind because in war time he needed undivided cooperation from the Parliament and a total denunciation of Chamberlain's foreign policy could have caused internal squabbling which could be disastrous at a time when unity was crucial.\textsuperscript{130} As a compromise, therefore, the provisional government was not invited to become one of the Allied governments. The procrastination by the British especially irritated Masaryk, the foreign minister, who signed when writing to his friends in the British government, "Provisionally yours" and "asked whether the Czechoslovak airmen who were killed flying over Britain were provisionally dead."\textsuperscript{131} "Provisional" was all the British government would concede the Czechoslovak government for fear of having to defend its pre-Munich borders after the war. Provisional status was not enough to satisfy Benes, but he realized its

\textsuperscript{129}Ibid, 109-10.

\textsuperscript{130}Ibid, 203.

importance in securing the ultimate goal of full recognition and continued his quest.

The British government did not admit that Munich was the reason it refused to give total recognition to Benes' government but used other excuses instead. The most pronounced demand the British government put on the provisional government was to ascertain complete solidarity of all political Czechoslovak groups. This proved to be an enormous task for Benes because of the puppet government in Slovakia which the British gave recognition preceding the war and the submissive Emil Hacha government in the protectorate also the recipient of British recognition. A further concern of the British were the exiled Sudeten Germans with leaders like Jaksch, and the communists who objected to being under Benes' jurisdiction. Jaksch and other Sudeten Germans objected to Benes plans for expelling "disloyal" Sudeten Germans after the war. The Czechoslovak communists blamed Benes for collaborating with other "capitalist governments" at Munich since they believed Czechoslovakia should have fought in September 1938. A resolution sent to Benes on 15 December 1940 by the

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133 Paul E. Zinner, Communist Strategy and Tactics in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1948 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 57-58, 79. After the German attack on the Soviet Union relations between the communists and Benes improved rapidly and five communists were appointed to the State Council (parliament-in-exile).
Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia said, they deemed Benes to be in the "service of British imperialism." It continued in saying that they considered the resurrection of the old coalition in the form of a Czech emigre 'Government' is a complete disclosure of his [Benes] plans to re-establish the capitalistic rule of the Czech bourgeoisie and at the same time a new manifestation of the total decrepitude of the political representatives of the Czech bourgeoisie.\(^\text{134}\)

To many communists, Benes, not Chamberlain was the villain of the Munich Agreement and they adamantly refused to cooperate in a government with him. Recognition of Benes as their President would mean the resignation of the Hacha government in Prague and could provoke the Nazis into inflicting dreadful repercussions upon those peoples still living in those areas. Even Hacha was unwilling to face the possible German retribution so refused Benes' request, putting Benes in a very difficult position with the British government since he had assured them that he possessed complete cooperation with the Hacha government.\(^\text{135}\)

Moreover, some of the emigrants who blamed Benes for the fate of their country intentionally tried to undermine the

\(^{134}\)Benes, Memoirs of Edvard Benes, 160-61. In a memo on 23 June 1941, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union the Czechoslovak communist attitude was completely reversed.

efforts of the provisional government.

Only after several near catastrophes, and only after the British government realized its demands for complete unity of all political factions, was recognition promised to Benes' provisional government. Furthermore, differences of status between the Czechoslovak Provisional Government and that of other exiled nations caused so many uncertainties and problems that the British Foreign Office agreed to put an end to the chaos. The process promised to be a smooth one, as well, because Eden had succeeded Halifax as Foreign Minister on 23 December 1940 and he was in favor of full recognition for Benes' government.136

On 10 April 1941, Masaryk and Benes met with Eden and tried to stress the importance of full recognition. It could not only right a dreadful wrong but also reassure the other smaller countries in Eastern Europe of Britain's faithfulness.

On 18 April, 1941, Benes handed Eden a memorandum comprising of five requests: "Full diplomatic recognition de jure for the Czechoslovak government," thus legalizing the government. The designation of a British Minister Plenipotentiary to the Czechoslovak Government (previously Bruce Lockhart acted as a 'delegate'). Equality with other Allied governments. Use of official titles such as, "Czechoslovak Republic" and the "President of the

Czechoslovak Republic." Finally, the end of the provisional character of the government and the resumption of the Czechoslovak Constitution after the war.\textsuperscript{137} On 19 April 1941 Benes' luck changed and Churchill visited the Czechoslovak troops and Benes was able to seize the occasion to hand him a summary of the requests given to Eden. Churchill was taken by the vision of the exiled troops and was further moved when the troops sang "Rule Britannia" upon his departure. "I thought it rather moving--all those poor exiles, the tiny remnant of an army ... so pleased to be visited and eager in their welcome."\textsuperscript{138} Churchill gave the letter to Eden and wrote, "I do not understand why the Czechs could not have the same status as the other allies. They deserve it."\textsuperscript{139} Eden agreed and gave it to the Foreign Office for additional action. The granting of these requests would put an end to the Munich Agreement, making it obsolete, and guaranteeing Czechoslovakia its pre-Munich borders after the war. On 24 June 1941, Benes sent a message to Hacha asking him to resign and assuring him that the

\begin{quote}
\textit{time for such a change has come...You at home can hardly save anything, while it can only help us here and for the future this will mean the salvation of the unity of the nation}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{137}\textit{Ibid}, 124-25.


\textsuperscript{139}Taborsky, "Politics in Exile, 1939-1945," 328.
at the worst moment in history.\textsuperscript{140} Benes needed the official resignation of the Hacha government so he could consolidate control in London.

After a month of negotiations and debates, Eden and the British government complied with all the demands except the legal continuity of Czechoslovakia, meaning that the pre-Munich borders were not guaranteed. With Chamberlain's legend continuing to curse Czechoslovakia, the British government refused to "recognize or to support any future frontiers whatsoever in Central Europe."\textsuperscript{141} Excluding the guarantee of the pre-Munich borders, British recognition was granted on 18 July 1941. The Soviet Union simultaneously recognized the Benes government and on 31 July 1941 the United States followed suit.\textsuperscript{142}

But Benes' fight was not over, for although the Czechoslovak government-in-exile was now equal with the other exiled Allied governments, the British still did not guarantee the pre-Munich boundaries of Czechoslovakia. The continued existence of several defenders of appeasement in the Churchill government made the process very long and exhausting for him but he was tenacious and unwilling to

\textsuperscript{140}Jiri Dolejal and Jan Kren, eds., Czechoslovakia's Fight, 46-47.

\textsuperscript{141}Benes, Memoirs of Edvard Benes, 126.

\textsuperscript{142}Taborsky, "Politics in Exile, 1939-1945," 328. Pertinent U.S. documents still listed the Czechoslovak government as provisional but was amended on 26 October 1942.
accept an agreement he considered a Diktat. His fight for legal continuity of the First Republic was based on two principles: The Czechoslovak government under intense pressure to sign the agreement made it legally invalid according to the Czechoslovak Constitution. Furthermore, on 15 March 1939, with the German invasion the agreement was automatically destroyed. Gaining British recognition of these two points was not an easy task and negotiations between Benes and Nichols dragged on, preying Benes' patience. On 9 April 1942 he told Nichols that the Munich Agreement stood between their two countries and must be resolved. He added,

I am afraid that you Englishmen with your lack of political imagination and foresight do not realize what could be the consequences of your attitude in postwar Central-European and overall European continental politics.143

Benes' threats did not stop there, on 4 June 1942, he told Eden that it was time to eradicate Munich for the deliberations were "prolonging themselves indefinitely and they are beginning to have a bad influence on our mutual relations."144 Characteristically, Eden agreed, promised to take over the issue himself, and in July 1942 made Benes


144Benes, Memoirs of Edvard Benes, 204.
a proposal.

The proposition disavowed the Munich Agreement from 15 March 1938, the date it was violated by the Germans. The British government, also refused recognition to anything concerning Czechoslovakia in the agreement nor any alterations in the Czechoslovak frontiers since 1938. Furthermore, the British government further assured Benes that it would not be influenced in future negotiations by the events of 1938. Benes had finally obtained British recognition of his countries' pre-Munich frontiers but still did not secure the legal continuity of his country. Benes and his government, however, decided to drop the issue of legal continuity, and told Eden that they would accept the terms of the agreement with a few minor alterations. The final draft was presented by Eden to the Parliament on 5 August 1942, ending any further negotiations between the British and Czechoslovak governments concerning the Munich Agreement.145

145Ibid, 206-08. The issue of legal continuity of the First Republic and "invalidity ab initio" of the Munich Treaty continues between Czechoslovakia and Germany. In prolonged negotiations which preceded the treaty of 11 December 1973 establishing normal diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and West Germany, the question of "invalidity ab initio" was simply left open. J.K. Snowden, The German Question 1945-1973 Continuity in Change (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975): 275, 370; and Lawrence L. Whetten, Germany's Ostpolitik: Relations Between the Federal Republic and the Warsaw Pact Countries (London: Oxford University Press, 1971) 17, 19, 121, 169-71.
Edvard Benes devoted his life from 1918 to 1948 to shaping and enriching Czechoslovakia with democratic principles and trying to guarantee the survival of the principles he and several others worked so hard to establish. Collective security, a concept Benes believed decisive in avoiding another world war, proved to be a very demanding task. Czechoslovakia's five neighbors, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, and Poland, were all hostile. The Little Entente, including Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Rumania, was one of Benes' undertakings but proved ineffective. His diplomatic relations with the West and with the Soviet Union remained strong throughout the interwar period. The alliance system Benes established seemed foolproof but failed miserably because his allies first abandoned him and his country and then helped in its dismemberment.

On 15 March 1939, Benes thought he was vindicated, for it was obvious to most of the world that appeasing Hitler was futile. Benes realized all along that the decision made at Munich was only the beginning of Hitler's quest for Lebensraum and that Czechoslovakia was not the last victim of his campaign. He believed that:
The whole policy which led to Munich was brought to the height of absurdity, was demonstrated to be wholly impracticable and fundamentally wrong while all those who (whether they believed in it or not) initiated and sponsored it were shown to be altogether credulous, entirely frivolous and manifestly ridiculous.\textsuperscript{146}

Recognition of mistakes and especially one so huge as the policy of appeasement with its culmination at Munich was not an easy thing to admit, so even after it was obvious to most of the world that Chamberlain had made a grave miscalculation, the British leader and his disciples were unwilling to admit the complete failure of their policy. What Benes thought would be an immediate reversal of the Munich Agreement turned into a much longer and more wearisome task. All the politicians who formulated the Munich Agreement were still in power when the war began, making it difficult for Benes to correct the repercussions of the \textit{Diktat}.\textsuperscript{147}

The appeasement policy caused the political, social, and economic desolation of Benes' once stable country.

\textsuperscript{146}\textit{Ibid}, 197.

Czechoslovakia's natural barriers were circumvented, leaving an unobstructed passage for Hitler's forces to march into the once defensible country and terrorize its peoples. Chamberlain's policy of appeasement was shallow, irrational, and inflexible. Eden, Churchill, Cooper, and other opponents of the appeasement policy were experienced politicians, well versed in foreign policy and military strategies. They were constantly ignored and stifled by Chamberlain and his followers. Appeasement developed into a policy with only one goal—avoiding war at any cost—even if it meant sacrificing a blameless country. For Chamberlain, Czechoslovakia was only a "far away country of which I know nothing"—a country that could be sacrificed to avoid another world war.

Had Chamberlain succeeded and Hitler not gone on to attack Poland in September 1939, Chamberlain might today be hailed as a great hero and diplomat. By sacrificing Czechoslovak independence to Germany as a form of restitution for the injustices of the Versailles Treaty in 1938, Chamberlain would have prevented another world war. Appeasement would be hailed as a great strategy when dealing with dictators. Unfortunately, the Sudeten lands and Czechoslovakia proved to be another, and in fact extremely critical, step in Hitler's march toward world war. Those who opposed Chamberlain's appeasement policy were correct in their characterization of Hitler and his
intentions. Chamberlain's great gamble in isolating himself from his opposition and making a deal with a dictator, proved to be a disastrous mistake not only for the Czechs but also for the entire western world. In the words of Benes, "In the whole of history of world diplomacy there are few errors so fatal, so far-reaching in their consequences for all the world as this one!"\textsuperscript{148}
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