

104 "PEACE FOR OUR TIME"



Neville Chamberlain, shown here before a cheering throng on September 30, 1938, believed Hitler to be a reasonable man. Chamberlain hoped their agreement would preserve peace, but instead, it paved the way to war.

It was September 30, 1938. A huge crowd had gathered at an airport near London. They waited for a plane from Munich (MEW-nick), Germany. As the plane slowed to a stop, the crowd began to cheer loudly. The door of the plane opened. There stood Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister. In his hand was a piece of paper. He held it up for the crowd to see. Then the prime minister stepped to some micro-

phones. "I think that it is peace for our time!" he said.

More cheers: "Good old Neville!"

Crowds in Paris

Another crowd had gathered at an airport in Paris. When the plane came in, the Parisians rushed up to it, even before it had stopped. Then Édouard Daladier (ED-wahr duh-LAHD-yay), the French head of government, appeared. Crowds

began dancing and cheering.

Daladier turned to a man at his side. "The fools," he said with sadness. "They don't know what they are cheering."

Crowds in Czechoslovakia

There were crowds in the cities of Czechoslovakia that day, too. These crowds did not cheer. Some people had tears running down their faces. September 30, 1938, was a sad day for the people of Czechoslovakia.

Why were the crowds in London and Paris so happy? They believed that their leaders had saved them from a war with Nazi Germany. Chamberlain and Daladier had made a deal with Adolf Hitler.

The price of this bargain was the Sudetenland, land along the German border that belonged to Czechoslovakia. Hitler had wanted this area for a long time. He gave many warlike speeches about it at Nazi party meetings in Germany.

"The people of the Sudetenland are Germans!" he screamed. "The Sudetenland must be turned over to Germany!" If it were not, he warned, Germany would go to war.



The war's impact hit Britain sooner than most people had expected. These two children wear gas masks to protect themselves during an air raid drill in 1939.

Fears of War

By the summer of 1938, Europeans were sure that war would break out any moment. People were very scared.

The British and the French wanted to prevent war. On September 29, 1938, Chamberlain and Daladier flew to Munich. They had a **summit** (highest level, for top officials only) meeting with Hitler. Benito Mussolini, the Italian dictator, also went to Munich. He was Hitler's ally, and he agreed with everything Hitler said.

Hitler told the British and French that, if they gave the Sudetenland to Germany, there would be no war. He also said that this would be his final demand for territory. He would ask for nothing more. Chamberlain and Daladier argued with Hitler for hours. Finally they gave in. Early in the morning of September 30, 1938, they agreed to let Hitler take over the Sudetenland. In other words, they decided to give in to Hitler to keep peace. Ever since this agreement, their policy has been known as **appeasement**.

No Defense

Now Czechoslovakia was doomed. The Sudetenland was mountainous. The mountains were vital to Czechoslovakia's defense. Without the Sudetenland, the Czechs had no hope of defending their country from invasion.

Unlike the Czechs, people in London

and Paris cheered. Most people in these cities thought that peace had been saved. The price of peace, a part of Czechoslovakia, was not too high, many English and French people said. Besides, they were not ready for war. Neither England nor France was as powerful as Nazi Germany in 1938.

Czechoslovakia had been a small

democracy. Its government had been on good terms with the United States. Now thousands of Czech Americans wept over the fate of their homeland. Some other Americans began to worry more about the threat of war. Yet most Americans were relieved that the peace had been maintained—at least for a while.

The Czechs and Slovaks, on the other hand, believed that the price of peace was too high. To keep Hitler quiet, they said, England and France had betrayed them. England and France would learn how wrong they had been. There would be no way of stopping a man like Hitler from making more demands.

The Czechs and Slovaks were right. The English and the French



Despite his promises of peace to Chamberlain and Daladier, Hitler continued to prepare for war. This parade of Nazi troops in 1938 was a show of military force—and a source of pride for Hitler and his followers.

had been wrong. In a few months German armies marched in and took over most of the remainder of Czechoslovakia.

Hitler wanted more land. Germany was more powerful than ever. The leaders of France and Britain had made a terrible mistake. World War II began with this mistake.



As German troops marched into their Sudetenland hometown in 1938, these people saluted—and wept. Czechoslovakia, now part of Hitler's new empire, was only the first nation to fall.

CHAPTER CHECK

WORD MATCH

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| 1. Neville Chamberlain | a. the Italian dictator |
| 2. appeasement | b. the British prime minister |
| 3. Édouard Daladier | c. highest level, for top officials only |
| 4. summit | d. the French head of government |
| 5. Benito Mussolini | e. the policy of giving in to keep peace |

QUICK QUIZ

1. What promise did Hitler make if he was given the Sudetenland?
2. What was the American position toward the European situation at that time?

THINK ABOUT IT

1. When he returned from Munich, many Parisians greeted Daladier with cheers. What do you think Daladier meant when he said, "The fools. They don't know what they're cheering about"?
2. British and French leaders thought they could appease Hitler by giving him the land he demanded. Do you think government leaders should divide a territory without asking the people who live there what they want? Why or why not?