

Chamberlain and appeasement

During the 1930s, Britain and France followed a policy of *appeasement* - they gave Hitler what he wanted in order to keep the peace. So why did Britain and France keep on giving in to Hitler's demands?

Why appeasement?



- As the League of Nations crumbled, politicians turned to a new way to keep the peace - appeasement. This was the policy of giving Hitler what he wanted to stop him from going to war. It was based on the idea that **what Hitler wanted was reasonable** and, when his reasonable demands had been satisfied, he would stop.
- Although historians recognise appeasement in the actions of Britain and France before 1938, the Sudeten Crisis of 1938 is the key example of appeasement in action. Neville Chamberlain was the British prime minister who believed in appeasement.
- In 1938, Germans living in the border areas of Czechoslovakia (the Sudetenland) started to demand a union with Hitler's Germany. The Czechs refused. Hitler threatened war. On 30 September, in the Munich Agreement - without asking Czechoslovakia - Britain and France **gave** the Sudetenland to Germany.

Reasons for appeasement

There were many reasons why Chamberlain appeased Hitler, but here are the main ones:

- The **British people wanted peace** - they would not have supported a war in 1938.
- Many of **Hitler's complaints appeared reasonable** at the time - especially about the Treaty of Versailles.
- **Chamberlain wanted a strong Germany** to serve as a barrier against expansion by communist Russia.
- **Britain's armed forces were not ready for a war**, and they could not have helped Czechoslovakia anyway.
- **Many people admired Hitler**. In 1938, the American magazine 'Time' declared him 'Man of the Year'.
- Chamberlain remembered the **slaughter of the First World War**; he thought another war would destroy civilisation

Results of appeasement

Here are the main
ones:

- **Czechoslovakia was weakened.** Poland and Hungary took other land.
- **Britain gained a year to build up its armed forces,** but so did Hitler.
- **Hitler decided that Britain and France were afraid of him,** and that they would not stop him whatever he did.
- **Russia** decided that Britain and France would never stand up to Hitler, and that war with Germany was inevitable.
- The people of Britain realised that they had been **duped**, and decided that war was inevitable.
- It improved the **war morale** of the British people, who knew they had done everything possible to avoid war.

Invasion of Czechoslovakia

On 15 March 1939, German troops marched into Czechoslovakia. They took over Bohemia, and established a *protectorate* over Slovakia.

Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia was the end of appeasement:

- It proved that Hitler had been lying at Munich.
- It showed that Hitler was not just interested in a 'Greater Germany' (the Czechs were not Germans).
- On 17th March, Chamberlain gave a speech saying that he could not trust Hitler not to invade other countries.
- On 31st March, Chamberlain guaranteed to defend Poland if Germany invaded.

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Why Chamberlain abandoned appeasement

Chamberlain made the Munich Agreement with Hitler to prevent war, but, in the year after September 1938, there were **six factors** pressurising him to abandon his policy of appeasement

Two categories of factors

Things happening in Europe	Things happening in Britain
November 1938: Kristallnacht - attacks on the Jews in Germany.	Churchill's speeches: attacked appeasement as "a defeat without a war".
March 1939: Czechoslovakia - Hitler invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia.	October 1938: Oxford by-election - Chamberlain's Conservatives won, but the anti-appeasement candidate got lots of votes.
May 1939: Pact of Steel: an alliance was formed between Germany and Italy to help each other in times of war.	Lack of trust: Britain was building up its armed forces throughout 1938 and 1939.