

Appeasement Interpretations

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| <p>Popular Majority view (1937-8)</p> <p>Chamberlain had done well.</p> | <p>Most people approved of Chamberlain's actions- treated as a hero when he returned to Britain after signing the Munich agreement.</p> <p>Only one minister resigned and some ministers (including Lord Halifax) became even stronger supporters of Appeasement than Chamberlain was.</p> | <p>British people were worried about a repeat of war (after the horrors of WWI). Country was not united behind the idea of going to war over Czechoslovakia. This view did not last long- opinion polls showed that most people did not believe Hitler</p> | <p>CHALLENGES: Churchill and political cartoonist David Low.</p> <p>CHURCHILL said: "By repeatedly surrendering to force, Chamberlain has encouraged aggression"</p> |
| <p>Popular and Political View (1939-48)</p> <p>The 'Guilty Men'</p> | <p>Short book published in 1940 called "Guilty Men" by three journalists calling themselves "Cato". Appeasement was a foolish, cowardly and immoral policy.</p> <p>The appeasers were seen as almost working with the dictators. Since 1931, British leaders had made concessions to Japan, Italy and Germany- strengthening them and weakening Britain.</p> | <p>As war went badly for Britain (defeated in Britain, France and with a concern that Britain would be invaded). They looked for a scapegoat and Chamberlain was blamed. Churchill replaced Chamberlain as PM, but there was a struggle between him and Lord Halifax who thought Britain should make peace. Lord Beaverbrook (newspaper publisher) was a close friend of Churchill, opposed Halifax) and it was he who published and promoted "Guilty Men".</p> | <p>This shaped the war people thought about Chamberlain and Appeasement for years to come. Lovegall and Osgood 'American presidents from Harry Truman on have projected an air of uncompromising toughness lest they be branded as appeasers by their political opponents'.</p> |
| <p>Orthodox view (1948-1960s)</p> <p>Churchill's view, Appeasement was a terrible misjudgement and miscalculation even if it was based on good motives</p> | <p>Churchill's view, written in his book <i>The Gathering Storm</i>. He was critical of appeasement but argued that Chamberlain was motivated by good intentions (but had miscalculated and misjudged Hitler).</p> <p>Churchill made it sound like he was the only one to have opposed Appeasement, claiming Chamberlain should have put together a 'Grand Alliance' of Britain, France, the USA and the USSR to stop the Axis powers.</p> | <p>Churchill's own self promotion- in 1943 he said "history will be kind to be because I intend to write it". He'd lost the 1945 General Election and wanted to make sure his historical reputation did not suffer. He also had so much prestige after leading Britain through WWII that his account became the accepted view. No academic historians challenged his account until the 1960s.</p> <p>The Cold War- broke out and Churchill was trying to make sure that people knew they had to stand up to aggressors, like Stalin.</p> | <p>British PM Tony Blair commented on Chamberlain in a speech in 2003 trying to persuade people that Britain should invade Iraq.</p> <p>"In 1938, Chamberlain was a hero when he bought back the Munich Agreement and he did it for the best of motives... He strove for peace... He was a good man who made a bad decision".</p> |

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| <p>Academic revisionist view (1960s-1990s) Chamberlain was in an impossible position and he did the best he could under the circumstances.</p> | <p>A.J.P. Taylor (1961)- Hitler didn't have a clear plan, he grasped opportunities when they came along. We therefore can't blame Chamberlain for not knowing what Hitler had planned- Hitler didn't know himself- how could Chamberlain? Donald Cameron Watt (1965)- Chamberlain faced many different problems and Hitler was just one of them- he had few options and very limited resources. Later in the 1960s other historians began carrying out many other studies (financial, military, relationships with the British Empire) etc. and decided that there was little else Chamberlain could have done on the basis of all these other concerns. Some historians claimed that Appeasement was the right thing to do because it meant Britain had time to build up its armed forces- particularly its air defences and the RAF.</p> | <p>Radical Thinking: the 1960s was a time when many traditional views were questioned. Vietnam War: During the 1960s, the USA's dislike of Appeasement had drawn them into a war in Vietnam which was going badly. New British sources: In 1958, the government passed the Public Records Act. Official government papers could be studied 30 years after they were created rather than 50 years. Historians had access to documents from the Treasury/ armed forces/ Foreign Office etc. (If you look at the Hitler's Actions 1933-9 and Britain sheet all the content in Italics was discovered by the academic revisionists).</p> | <p>Donald Cameron Watt: "Historians are now concerned to understand the processes which German and British politicians went through and the different kinds of advice they were receiving and the pressures that were on them. This is a welcome change from the dismissal of all those involved in Appeasement as stupid, weak and ill-informed".</p> <p>This wasn't a particularly popular view- it was an academic view, that was largely ignored by politicians and the public.</p> |
| <p>Academic Counter-Revisionist view (1990s-2000s) Chamberlain himself was part of the problem. His own personality and assumptions meant that he couldn't deal well with the situation.</p> | <p>Robert Parker was the first to develop this counter-revisionist view, and was joined by others saying Chamberlain was at least partly responsible for Appeasement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He overrated his own abilities in negotiating with Hitler. • Chamberlain couldn't understand Hitler because he wouldn't change his own views about international relations. • Chamberlain ignored the advice of many of his officials and colleagues. • Chamberlain did betray Czechoslovakia. | <p>After the revisionism of the 1960s-90s, academic historians began the revisionism of the revisionism- the counter revisionism. A number of historians did not think that Chamberlain should be let off the hook for Appeasement. In 1989, the Cold War ended and archives from the USSR became more available to historians. The Soviets had captured a lot of German documents revealing the dealings between Hitler and Chamberlain.</p> | <p>This continued to cause arguments among historians who don't have much else to do. Many historians have argued "what alternatives were open to Chamberlain". Some historians (like Niall Ferguson used a complex computer-based historical simulation called The Calm and the Storm to test what might have happened if the Grand Alliance had been called and war declared in 1938. The simulation that the Germans were able to invade England, because England was so weak in 1938!</p> |