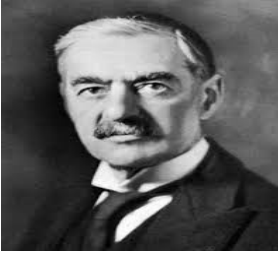


Two Opinions on Appeasement



Neville Chamberlain was the Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1937 to 1940, as Great Britain entered World War II. In the late 1930's, Chamberlain became most associated with appeasement, a policy designed to concede to short-term demands to avoid long-term consequences. He signed the Munich Agreement in 1938, relinquishing a region of Czechoslovakia to the Nazis as long as Hitler promised to stop invading other countries. In 1939, Hitler invaded Poland and Britain declared war on Germany. Chamberlain, who had lost political support, resigned in 1940.

Upon his return to London after signing the Munich Agreement in 1938, Chamberlain made the following statement:

"We, the German Führer and Chancellor, and the British Prime Minister, have had a further meeting today and are agreed in recognizing that the question of Anglo-German relations is of the first importance for our two countries and for Europe. We regard the agreement signed last night and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again. We are resolved that the method of consultation shall be the method adopted to deal with any other questions that may concern our two countries, and we are determined to continue our efforts to remove possible sources of difference, and thus to contribute to assure the peace of Europe."

"My good friends, for the second time in our history, a British Prime Minister has returned from Germany bringing peace with honour. I believe it is peace for our time...Go home and get a nice quiet sleep."

Two schools of thought exist as to why Chamberlain pursued appeasement. One is that he honestly thought that he could address the grievances that he believed Germany rightly held after the Treaty of Versailles, and if he was seen as being fair to German concerns, then he could stop Europe from declining into war. Another theory is that Chamberlain believed that appeasement was worth trying but that war was inevitable. He also realized that Britain was not well prepared for war and that he needed to buy time to improve Britain's military position.

Although the vast majority of British people agreed with the government and its policy of appeasement, there were some individuals who disagreed. One of those individuals was Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty in Parliament. Churchill believed that Hitler could not be dealt with because his aims and objectives were not rational. As such, no amount of appeasement would satisfy the man - he would always want more. In a speech to Parliament on October 5, 1938, Churchill strongly criticized the actions of the British government in signing the Munich Agreement and the policy of appeasement:



"I will begin by saying what everybody would like to ignore or forget but which must nevertheless be stated, namely, that we have sustained a total and unmitigated defeat.... We in this country, as in other Liberal and democratic countries, have a perfect right to exalt the principle of self-determination, but it comes ill out of the mouths of those in totalitarian states who deny even the smallest element of toleration to every section and creed within their bounds... It is the most grievous consequence of what we have done and of what we have left undone in the last five years - five years of futile good intentions, five years of eager search for the line of least resistance, five years of uninterrupted retreat of British power, five years of neglect of our air defences... You must have diplomatic and correct relations, but there can never be friendship between the British democracy and the Nazi power, that power which spurns Christian ethics, which cheers its onward course by a barbarous paganism, which vaunts the spirit of aggression and conquest, which derives strength and perverted pleasure from persecution, and uses, as we have seen, with pitiless brutality the threat of murderous force. That power cannot ever be the trusted friend of the British democracy."

Following Neville Chamberlain's resignation in May 1940, Churchill became prime minister. His speeches and radio broadcasts helped inspire British resistance, especially the active opposition to Adolf Hitler. He led Britain as prime minister until after the German surrender in 1945 and is considered to be the one of the most influential Britons of all time.