**Was Appeasement a Mistake?**

When Hitler annexed Austria, neither the League of Nations nor Western politicians did anything concrete to stop him. When he took over the rest of Czechoslovakia, they again did nothing. It was not until Hitler invaded Poland that the Chamberlain of England and Daladier of France finally did something, but by then it was too late. These countries seemed to let World War II happen. The question is why?

The reason why the rest of the world allowed Hitler and Mussolini to have their way in Europe is that they had no paid a great deal of attention to the events going on in Europe. For North Americans, since Europe was all the way across the Atlantic Ocean, we had a sense of isolationism and seemed at a distance from the events. Another reason is that the governments of the world were following a policy of appeasement. In effect, this meant letting Hitler and Mussolini have want he wanted. The Allies, led by England and France, hoped that eventually Hitler would be satisfied and another war could be avoided.

Appeasement was a popular policy around the world. Many people believe that it was only fair for Germany to get back what it had lost in the Treaty of Versailles. Few people outside of Germany had bothered to read Hitler’s book *Mein Kampf* and did not know his plains for Germany and Europe. Some historians have since criticized the policy of appeasement, but at the time there were only a few people who opposed it. The question remains unanswered, was appeasement a mistake?

**Arguments for the Policy of Appeasement**

1. **Fear of Communism**

The Russian army was forced to withdraw from World War I when a communist revolution in their country forced the Tsar and his family from power. This revolution led to many wealthy people in Russia losing their homes and their money to the new rulers of their country. Under communism, private property was not allowed and millions of people were murdered when the communists used force to make people follow their idea. In fact, there was not a lot of difference between the Communist leaders and Hitler. They were both ruthless in their persecution of political dissidents and non-believers. Many people in Canada believed that Hitler was the strong arm of Europe and he would be able to hold the Soviets back so that they would not be able to take over Europe and the rest of the World.

1. **Fear of another World War**

Many people still had the horrible memories of the First World War. The war had just ended over fifteen years earlier and people could not bear to think of sending their sons or husbands back into a war as dreadful as the one they remembered. Many people would agree to almost anything to avoid such a war. Besides, many people had never even heard of the new country called Czechoslovakia, and they did not think it was worth fighting a war over a country they had never heard of before.

1. **The Allies Needed More Time**

Most world leaders were not pacifists and they did not believe in avoiding war at all costs. For example, the Prime Minister of Canada, Mackenzie King, believed that people should listen to the complaints of Germany but that Canada, England, and other allies should also prepare for war. Most allied countries had decreased the size of their armed forces during the interwar period, where Germany, after Hitler came to power, had been steadily increasing Germany’s military strength. A war with a stronger country was pointless, it only guaranteed defeat. Allied leaders decided that it was better to appease Hitler now so that their military forces could be built up. While England was busy rearming its military, Canada was able to supply them with metal for planes and tanks, raw materials for ammunition and various other supplies and were also able to supply them with chemicals. The time that was bought by appeasement allowed the Allies to be better prepared to fight Hitler and the Axis Powers.

1. **Germany Deserved a Fair Deal**

By the 1930s, many people accepted the fact that the Treaty of Versailles was too harsh on Germany. The conditions set out in the Treaty, people thought, would doom Germany to a future of misery and despair. If there was any sense of justice in the world, Germany should at least be given back the territory and the people it had lost in 1919. Many people felt that they wouldn’t like to be separated within their own countries, so they understood how the Germans felt. Many politicians thought that if the Germans were allowed to be one again they might be content and settle down.

1. **North Americans Had to Want a War**

In 1938, not many people thought that it would be worth fighting over the little country of Czechoslovakia. Public opinion was not united behind the idea of war. It would have been political suicide for international leaders to be overly aggressive with Germany. They would have most likely been voted out of office in the next election. However, when Hitler broke the promise that he had made to the British Prime Minister at the Munich Conference, public opinion took a dramatic swing towards a war to stop Hitler. When Hitler invaded Poland, public opinion changed to general support of the Allies going to war.

**Arguments against the Policy of Appeasement**

1. **Appeasement Encouraged Hitler to be Aggressive**

Much like a kid on the playground, every time Hitler got away with one of his aggressive acts, he became more daring and believed that none of the allied countries would attempt to stop him. There is evidence that Hitler was very unsure and nervous about marching the soldiers into the Rhineland. To his surprise, no one tried to stop him. If the allied countries would have acted then, Hitler could have been stopped, instead they let Hitler push his way around Europe.

1. **The Munich Agreement was a Disaster**

The agreement that the British Prime Minister signed with Hitler was a total failure. The allies were not really attempting to buy more time so that they could rearm and unite behind the idea of war. World leaders had simply been fooled by Hitler. Besides, when war finally did break out, none of the allied countries was ready for war.

1. **Hitler was determined to Attack all of Europe**

In reality, western leaders should have known exactly what to expect from Hitler. After all, Hitler had laid out his blueprint for world domination in his book, *Mein Kampf*, but no one bothered to read it. From the start of his reign in Germany almost all of his speeches and writings said that he wanted to conquer all of Europe. World leaders should have known that his earlier promise of peace were nothing but lies.

1. **Germany was Growing Stronger**

Every time Hitler was able to conquer new territories, Germany grew stronger. When Hitler sent troops into the Rhineland, it made it easier for Germany to defend itself. When Hitler joined with Austria, Germany gained soldiers, gold, weapons, and great deposits of iron ore. With the raw materials that were gained Hitler was able to produce more munitions for his armed forces.

1. **Appeasement Threatened the Soviet Union**

Because the allies did not stand up to Hitler when he invaded Czechoslovakia, Stalin, the leader of Russia, believed that Britain would not help the USSR either if Hitler decided to attack them. This persuaded Stalin that he might as well try and reach an agreement with Hitler and look after the Soviet Union first. This attitude lead to the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. After this was signed Hitler was no able to invade Poland.

**Primary Sources**

**Source A: Hitler’s comment after sending troops into the Rhineland in 1936.**

“*The 48 hours after the march into the Rhineland were the most nerve-racking of my life. If the French had opposed us then we would have had to withdraw. Our forces were not strong enough to even put up with moderate resistance*.”

**Source B: From a speech given by Hitler on May 30, 1938.**

“*I shall only decide to take action against Czechoslovakia if I am convinced that France will not march and that Britain will not intervene in the situation.”*

**Source C: Advice given to the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, by his army generals in 1938.**

“*From the military point of view, time is in our favor. If war with Germany has to come, it would be better to fight in six to twelve months’ time, instead of at this moment*.”

**Source D: Results from public opinion polls in Canada in 1938.**

“*March 1938: Should Britain promise to help Czechoslovakia if Germany invades?*

*Yes: 33% No: 43% Undecided: 24%*

*October 1938: Hitler says that he has no more territorial ambitions in Europe. Do you believe him?*

*Yes: 7$ No: 93%”*

**Source E: From a speech given by Chamberlain in 1938.**

“*When I think of those four terrible years [WWI], and I think of the 7 million young men who were killed, the 13 million who were wounded, I feel it was my duty to strain every nerve to avoid a repetition of the First World War.”*

**Source F: Comments given by Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King after a meeting with Hitler.**

“*Hitler seemed to be a man of deep sincerity and a genuine patriot. Hitler was a simple sort of peasant, not very intelligent and no serious danger to anyone*.”

**Source G: From W. Robson, “Twentieth-Century History,” 1973.**

“*There had been nothing weak or foolish about the attitude of the Western leaders. They tried to settle differences by discussion and conciliation, methods that had been highly successful in the 1920s. Their failure was due to the fact that Hitler took consolation for weakness and found that he could get his own way. He could have been stopped earlier but only at the risk of war. Discussion was the method of gentlemen, which explains why Chamberlain and the Western leaders favored it and Hitler did not*.”

**Activities: Complete the following activities and answers the following questions on a *SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER*. This is a class set, *NO WRITING ON THIS PAPER****.*

1. Read all of the arguments for and against appeasement. Make sure you have a thorough understanding of both sides of arguments. ***With which side do you agree? Explain your answer in a COMPLETE PARAGRAPH (4-5 sentences in length).***
2. After you have read the for and against arguments, study sources A-G. ***Determine which sources are for appeasement and which are against appeasement. Give a quick reason why the source is for or against appeasement.***
3. You have now read a great deal about the policy of appeasement. ***Why did the Allied world leaders follow a follow of appeasement?***
4. ***As an historian, do you think that the policy of appeasement was a mistake or not? Be sure to include references and facts from the sources. You answer must a complete paragraph (4-5 sentences in length).***