



Peace For Our Time

England. It was September 30, 1938. A huge crowd had gathered at London's big airport. They were waiting for a plane from Munich, Germany. As the plane slowed down 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. More cheers went up. Then the Prime Minister stepped up to the microphones waving the piece of paper. He spoke to the crowd about his meeting with Adolph Hitler and proudly proclaimed that day that the paper represented "peace for our time". There were more cheers from the crowd. "Good old Neville!!!" "Three cheers for Neville!!!"

France. Another crowd had gathered at an airport in Paris. When the plane came in, the Parisians rushed to it even before it had stopped. Edouard (Edward) Daladier, the French Premier, appeared. Crowds began dancing and cheering. Daladier turned to a man at his side. "The fools," he said. "They don't know what they are cheering."

Czechoslovakia. There were crowds in the cities of Czechoslovakia, too, that day. These crowds were not cheering. Some people had tears

running down their faces. September 30, 1938 was a sad day for the people of Czechoslovakia, especially for the country's Jewish citizens.

Why were the crowds in London and Paris so happy? They believed their leaders saved them from a war with Nazi Germany. They thought Chamberlain and Daladier had made a “deal” with Adolph Hitler. It wasn’t just a deal. It was a bargain, so they thought. The price of this “bargain” was some land that belonged to Czechoslovakia. It was called the Sudetenland.

The Sudetenland was a border area of Czechoslovakia containing a majority ethnic German population. Hitler had wanted this land 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!” And if it wasn’t, he warned, Germany would go to war for it.

By the summer of 1938, people all over Europe were sure that war would break out at any moment. People were very scared. The British and French wanted to prevent war. So, on September 29, 1938, Chamberlain and Daladier flew to Munich, Germany. They had a meeting with Hitler. All Europe held its breath for the outcome. Benito Mussolini, the Italian dictator, also went to Munich. He was Hitler’s ally, and he backed everything Hitler said. What Hitler said was, “If you give the Sudetenland to Germany, there will be no war.” Chamberlain and Daladier argued for hours. Finally, they gave in. Early in the morning of September 30, they agreed to let Hitler take over the Sudetenland. Now Czechoslovakia was doomed. Without the Sudetenland, the Czechs could not defend their country.

There was cheering in London and Paris. People thought peace had been saved. The price of peace is not too high, Englishmen and Frenchmen said, we are not ready for war. We are still fighting the Great Depression. We can’t afford a big army or air force. We can not go to war against Hitler now, even if we wanted to, they said.

While the English and French cheered, the Czechs and Slovaks of Czechoslovakia said the price *is much too high*. To appease Hitler and

keep him quiet, you have paid with our freedom. Because we are a small nation, you have sold us down the river. You will see how wrong you are, they said.

It turned out the Czechs and Slovaks were right. The English and French were wrong. In only a few months, German armies marched in and took over the rest of the country~except for the part that went to Hungary. And another piece that went to Poland. Eleven months after Neville Chamberlain waved his paper to the cheering crowds declaring “peace for our time,” Britain would end up declaring war on Germany. By that time, Hitler was looking for more land. Germany was more powerful than ever. The leaders of France and Britain had made a terrible mistake. Germany had invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. World War II had begun.