

## **The Munich Crisis: Primary Documents**

### **Chamberlain declares peace in our time (September 30, 1938)**

*Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain gives this short statement as he steps off the plane returning from the Munich Conference.*

We, the German Fuehrer 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 the 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.... [W]e are determined to continue our efforts to remove possible sources of difference, and thus to contribute to assure the peace of Europe.

*That evening Chamberlain read this statement to a cheering crowd from the window of his official residence at 10 Downing Street.*

My good friends ... this is the second time in our history that there has come back from Germany to Downing Street peace with honor. I believe it is peace in our time.

*from The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*

### **Duff Cooper resigns (September 30, 1938)**

*Duff Cooper, First Lord of the Admiralty (the civilian head of the British Navy) and a close advisor to Chamberlain, resigned in protest over the Munich Agreement. He describes the events in his autobiography.*

The full terms of the Munich agreement are in the papers this morning. At first sight I felt that I couldn't agree to them. The principle of invasion remains. The German troops are to march in tomorrow and the Czechs are to leave all their installations intact. This means that they will have to hand over all their fortifications, guns, etc. upon which they have spent millions, and that they will receive no compensation for them ... While I was dressing this morning I decided that I must resign...

When I got back to the Admiralty I learnt that there was to be a Cabinet at seven. The Prime Minister arrived at about twenty past seven amid scenes of indescribable enthusiasm. He spoke to the mob from the window. I felt very lonely in the midst of so much happiness that I could not share. The Cabinet meeting lasted little more than half an hour ... [A]fter a few questions had been asked and many congratulations had been offered, I felt it my duty to offer my resignation.

I said that not only were the terms not good enough but also that I was alarmed about the future. We must all admit that we should not have gone so far to meet Germany's demands if our defences had been stronger. It had more than once been said in Cabinet that after having turned the corner we must get on more rapidly with rearmament. But how could we do so when the Prime Minister had just informed the crowd that we had peace "for our time" and that we had entered into an agreement never to go to war with Germany.

The Prime Minister smiled at me in a quite friendly way and said that it was a matter to be settled between him and me. And so it was left ... I dined alone with Diana and went early to bed, but slept badly.

Here the diary stops and it was a long time before I started to write one again.

*from Old Men Forget*

### **The Times of London editorial (October 1, 1938)**

*A London newspaper enthusiastically supports the Munich Agreement.*

No conqueror returning from a victory on the battlefield has come home adorned with nobler laurels than MR. CHAMBERLAIN from Munich yesterday; and KING and people alike have shown by the manner of their reception their sense of his achievement. The terms of settlement in the Czech-German dispute, reached in the small hours of the morning and published in the later issues of *The Times* of yesterday, had been seen to deliver the world from a menace of extreme horror ...

Civilization had been so near to the brink of collapse that any peaceful issue from the dispute of the last months would have been an overwhelming relief; but close examination of the Munich terms, in particular that of the geographical adjustments, shows that they constitute not only a settlement but a hopeful settlement. That they should be bitterly resented in Czechoslovakia must add to the profound sympathy which has always been felt in England with one of the smaller and, as it seemed to many, the more promising countries emerging from the Peace Treaties.

Yet the loss of the Sudeten territories had long been unavoidable, nor was it desirable that it should be avoided ... That on such an issue the whole world should be plunged into war was the monstrous prospect that had to be contemplated until less than three days ago. It would inevitably have been realized if HERR HITLER had insisted on a spectacular "conquest" of the Sudetenland by German troops.

The Czechs would certainly have resisted in arms, nor would any Power have the right to attempt to dissuade them. France would have been drawn in by direct obligations to Czechoslovakia; Great Britain and the Soviet Union would have been certain to come to the help of France; and so the widening conflict would have involved all of those peoples throughout the world who had watched with ever-increasing revulsion the development of brutal methods of national aggrandisement, and thought that the time had come to make a stand against them.

*from The Times, London*

### **Chamberlain defends the agreement in the House of Commons (October 3, 1938)**

*Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain defends the Munich Agreement in Parliament.*

All the elements were present on the spot for the outbreak of a conflict which might have precipitated the catastrophe ... Therefore, it was essential that we should quickly reach a conclusion, so that this painful and difficult operation of transfer might be carried out at the earliest possible moment and concluded as soon as was consistent with orderly procedure, in order that we might avoid the possibility of something that might have rendered all our attempts at peaceful solution useless...

Before giving a verdict upon this arrangement, we should do well to avoid describing it as a personal or a national triumph for anyone. The real triumph is that it has shown that representatives of four great Powers can find it possible to agree on a way of carrying out a difficult and delicate operation by discussion instead of by force of arms, and thereby they have averted a catastrophe which would have ended civilisation as we have known it. The relief that our escape from this great peril of war has, I think, everywhere been mingled in this country with a profound feeling of sympathy... for a small and gallant nation in the hour of their national grief and loss...

In my view the strongest force of all, one which grew and took fresh shapes and forms every day was the force not of any one individual, but was that unmistakable sense of unanimity among the peoples of the world that war must somehow be averted...

Ever since I assumed my present office my main purpose has been to work for the pacification of Europe, for the removal of those suspicions and those animosities which have so long poisoned the air. The path which leads to appeasement is long and bristles with obstacles. The question of Czechoslovakia is the latest and perhaps the most dangerous. Now that we have got past it, I feel that it may be possible to make further progress along the road to sanity.

*from Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*

### **Churchill speaks on the agreement in the House of Commons (October 5, 1938)**

*Winston Churchill, an outspoken critic of the government's policy towards Germany, addresses Parliament on the Munich Agreement.*

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 ... All is over. Silent, mournful, abandoned, broken, Czechoslovakia recedes into the darkness. She has suffered in every respect by her association with the Western democracies and with the League of Nations, of which she has always been an obedient servant.... Many people, no doubt, honestly believe that they are only giving away the interests of Czechoslovakia, whereas I fear that we shall find that we have deeply compromised, and perhaps fatally endangered, the safety and even the independence of Great Britain and France....

I do not grudge our loyal, brave people, who were ready to do their duty no matter what the cost, who never flinched under the strain of last week--I do not grudge them the natural, spontaneous outburst of joy and relief when they learned that the hard ordeal would no longer be required of them at the moment; but they should know the truth. They should know that there has been gross neglect and deficiency in our defences; they should know that we have sustained a defeat without a war, the consequences of which will travel far with us along our road; they should know that we have passed an awful milestone in our history, when the whole equilibrium of Europe has been deranged, and that the terrible words have for the time being been pronounced against the Western democracies:

"Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting."

And do not suppose that this is the end. This is only the beginning of the reckoning. This is only the first sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup which will be proffered to us year by year unless by a supreme recovery of moral health and martial vigour, we arise and take our stand for freedom ...

*from Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*