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Media and the ‘Miracle of Munich’

British Media Reports on the Munich Crisis, the Munich
agreement, and its consequences

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1 Introduction

Munich, like Vietnam, is a metonym. If Vietnam is now shorthand for the misconceived cause, obdurately pursued to deadly effect, Munich has sustained for seventy years its meaning of shameful betrayal, weakness, and capitulation.

- Kate McLoughlin¹

In the end of September 1938, about eleven months before the German invasion of Poland, which marked the start of the second World War, the leaders of France, Germany, Great Britain and Italy met in Munich to settle a dispute regarding the so called *Sudetenland* in Czechoslovakia. The Sudetenland, mostly comprised by the districts Bohemia and Bavaria, was home to many German speaking citizens, which prompted Nazi Germany to claim a “historical right” to the region, wanting it to be incorporated in the Greater Germany. Only about six months earlier, in March the same year, Adolf Hitler had a similar policy when he initiated the annexation (German: Anschluss) of Austria.

At the time, both France and Great Britain saw the agreement as a way to avoid yet another war in Europe, and for Germany, it was a great victory and yet another region incorporated into their *Third Reich*. Czechoslovakia, while agreeing with the terms of the agreement under the threat of war, felt betrayed by the Allied powers for not taking a stand against the Nazi regime.

In this thesis, I will look at British newspaper reports regarding the Munich agreement. The aim is to identify the different reactions from the different papers, as well as any British arguments for and against the agreement. I will adopt the theoretical framework of agenda setting, analysing how media sets the agenda in the societal discourse. In this case, it means analysing in what way different British newspapers seek to convey their “reality” regarding the time surrounding the negotiations which led to the signing of the Munich agreement.

¹ McLoughlin, 2008, “Voices of the Munich Pact”, *Critical Inquiry*, spring 2008, p. 543-562, p. 543

1.1 In retrospect – What we know that they didn't

In 2016, almost 80 years after the Munich agreement was signed, it is easy to look back at the actions of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, as well as the actions of France, Germany and Italy, and point at what went wrong. The politics of appeasement can easily be criticized after decades of research within history, political science and other disciplines. We also have a more grand perspective when we look at the events prior to the expansion of the German Reich. Looking back, the imperial ambitions of Hitler were obvious, and it can be hard to see the logic behind the appeasement.

Indeed, the Munich agreement has been considered such a failure that it became a “measurement of failure”, used to be recalled when other politicians have made similar mistakes. As McLoughlin puts it:

“Vietnam was called Richard Nixon’s Munich after George McGovern’s trip to Hanoi; Jeane Kirkpatrick played the Munich card to justify Ronald Reagan’s intervention in Nicaragua; and, most recently, the failure of Munich-style appeasement has been cited in support of the Bush/Blair invasion of Iraq, most notably by Donald Rumsfeld”.²

However, going back to 1938, only 20 years after the First World War, one of the deadliest wars in the history of mankind, the threat of yet another war proved to be one of the most significant variables in foreign relations. It is also important to understand that the British did not think that they could win a war against Germany, and definitely not against Germany and its allies.³ Meanwhile, Chamberlain could not count on the Soviet Union to come to Czechoslovakias aid in case of a German attack. Nor could he count on the help of any German resistance, as Hitler was undoubtedly a popular leader.⁴ Anxiety was rampant when the Sudeten crisis developed, and the leaders of the free world (that is, Great Britain and France) wanted to guarantee a lasting peace, no matter the cost.

² McLoughlin, 2008, “Voices of the Munich Pact”, *Critical Inquiry*, spring 2008, p. 543-562, p. 545f

³ Shepardson, 2006, A Faraway Country: Munich Reconsidered, *The Midwest Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 1, p. 81-99, p. 82

⁴ Ibid. p. 84

By using Czechoslovakia as a bargaining chip, they were hoping to guarantee peace for generations to come, by “correcting” the errors made during the Paris Peace Conference. There was also the issue of British (and French) economy. With a costly world war only 20 years back, the economy was still recovering, and was it not for US support, the economy might have collapsed. This made the prospects of hasty rearmament all but non-existent.

This lack of information and perspective is, of course, even more true for the public and the media at the time. Information shared with the media was (and by all means still is) limited, and for the general population, it is even more true. Today, when many political documents have been made public, we have access to information that was not available to the general public in 1938. Thus, the public was heavily dependent on the media.

1.2 Purpose and Research Question

The main purpose of this thesis is to look at media reports made with regards to the then newly signed Munich agreement. In a pre-digital age, local media outlets had the power to “set the reality”, and shape public perceptions and agenda, and analysing their power over information, we can further our understanding of agenda setting in the age before television and internet. My research question is as follows:

- How did British newspapers depict the Munich crisis, the Munich agreement, and the British role in the negotiations, shortly after the agreement was signed?

This question also leaves open for a secondary question:

- What are the general differences between different newspapers, regarding the way the agreement, and the British role in the negotiations, was reported, and how could these differences be explained?

1.3 Scope and limitations

In the process of going through relevant material, I noticed that there is an abundance of sources that will be helpful to my analysis, to such an extent that I had to limit the scope, with regards to how many days I will cover. Originally, the thought was to analyse the period between September 1st and October 31st, roughly one month before the agreement was signed, until one month after the signing. Instead, I will analyse articles written between September 23rd and October 7th, excluding September 25th and October 2nd, being Sundays⁵. Earlier publications will also be used to provide context, but will not be used as a main part of my analysis. Since the research question prompts me to focus on the time after the agreement was signed, most of the analysis will focus on the period between September 30th and October 7th.

1.4 Previous research

Before moving on to the core of my research, some words need to be said about the previous research related to the Munich agreement, and the politics of appeasement which led to the signing of the agreement. There is, of course, not possible to present all the research on the subject, but I have chosen to present some literature that I found both helpful and relevant to my research.

Vít Smetana, a Czech historian, have written an extensive book (*In the Shadow of Munich. British Policy towards Czechoslovakia from 1938 to 1942*) on the relationship between Great Britain and Czechoslovakia during the time surrounding World War II. This is done by, among other things, going through British parliamentary documents to see how the Czechoslovakian question was discussed within the halls of power.

⁵ Newspapers were not printed on Sundays.

Reading Smetana's book, the distinction between then and today, regarding the issue of German claims on Czechoslovakian territory, becomes apparent. Not only was it conceivable for politicians to let Germany take control over the Sudeten areas, but rather was it desirable.

In 1934, Edward H. Carr, a Foreign Office analyst and famous historian, said that "the Germans needs Sudetenland", and Thomas Inskip, Minister of the Co-ordination of Defence, saw no reason to defend even the existence of a Czechoslovakian republic. Meanwhile, Sir John Simon questioned the very existence of the state, and Sir Joseph Addison, British Minister to Czechoslovakia, telegraphed from Prague of "inferior Slavs" and a nonviable "artificial country".

Addison's deputy, Robert Hadow, got his primary information from Sudeten German leaders, including those with Nazi sympathies.⁶ In addition to this, the British government repeatedly overestimated the potential of the German army, which made the fear of war even greater. With a vast empire, increasingly harder to maintain because of conflict, a war would be a catastrophe for Great Britain.⁷

Smetana also, albeit briefly, discusses the British media and its role during the time between the *Anschluss* and the Munich agreement, stating that British newspapers were "an influential catalyst of public opinion", that there was a consensus regarding the subject of the Sudeten crisis, and that appeasement was the right way to move forward. *The Times*, for example, promoted the politics of appeasement, where a lasting peace should be secured at any cost.⁸

Kate McLoughlin's *Voices of the Munich Pact* brings into light a few articles on the crisis surrounding Czechoslovakia, including one from *The New York Times*, where the Czechs are described as the very opposite of the frenzy and blaze Hitler had shown in his speech in Nuremberg speech on September 12th.

⁶ Smetana, 2009, *In the Shadow of Munich. British Policy towards Czechoslovakia from 1938 to 1942*, p. 44f

⁷ Smetana, 2009, *In the Shadow of Munich. British Policy towards Czechoslovakia from 1938 to 1942*. p. 46f

⁸ Smetana, 2009, *In the Shadow of Munich. British Policy towards Czechoslovakia from 1938 to 1942*. p. 47

In the article, the author points out that the people of Czechoslovakia shows a great deal of “self-control and calm nerves”, even in the face of the German threat.⁹

In *A Ghost of Appeasement*, R. Gerald Hughes re-visits the Munich agreement and its legacy. He points out that after the Second World War, the Munich agreement was a source of great shame for the British, and it was often used as an argument for and against certain political stances.¹⁰

Furthermore, the consequences of the agreement was apparent also after the war, as Czechoslovakia – as so many other Eastern European states – became a communist state, arguably since the divide between Sudeten Germans and non-Sudeten Czechoslovakia cut the ties to the West.¹¹ During and after the war, there was an unwillingness to concede that the agreement was a failure, and that the British knew fully well that the “sacrifice” of the Sudeten areas wouldn’t please Hitler, as that would imply that Chamberlain would have been in league with the Nazi regime.¹² It would take until 1990 until the British, through then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, apologized for the agreement and the politics of appeasement in the 1930’s.

Though newspapers have been previously analysed, for example by McLoughlin mentioned above, there have not been any extensive research with regards to more peripheral newspapers and their articles on the topic. What makes this interesting is that the newspapers used in this thesis are local, and therefore did not reach as many readers as, for example, *The London Times*. More about why this is interesting will be elaborated on in sub-chapter 1.6.

⁹ McLoughlin, 2008, “Voices of the Munich Pact”, *Critical Inquiry*, spring 2008, p. 543-562, p. 552

¹⁰ Hughes, 2013, *The Ghost of Appeasement: Britain and the Legacy of the Munich Agreement*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48(4), p. 688-716, p. 690

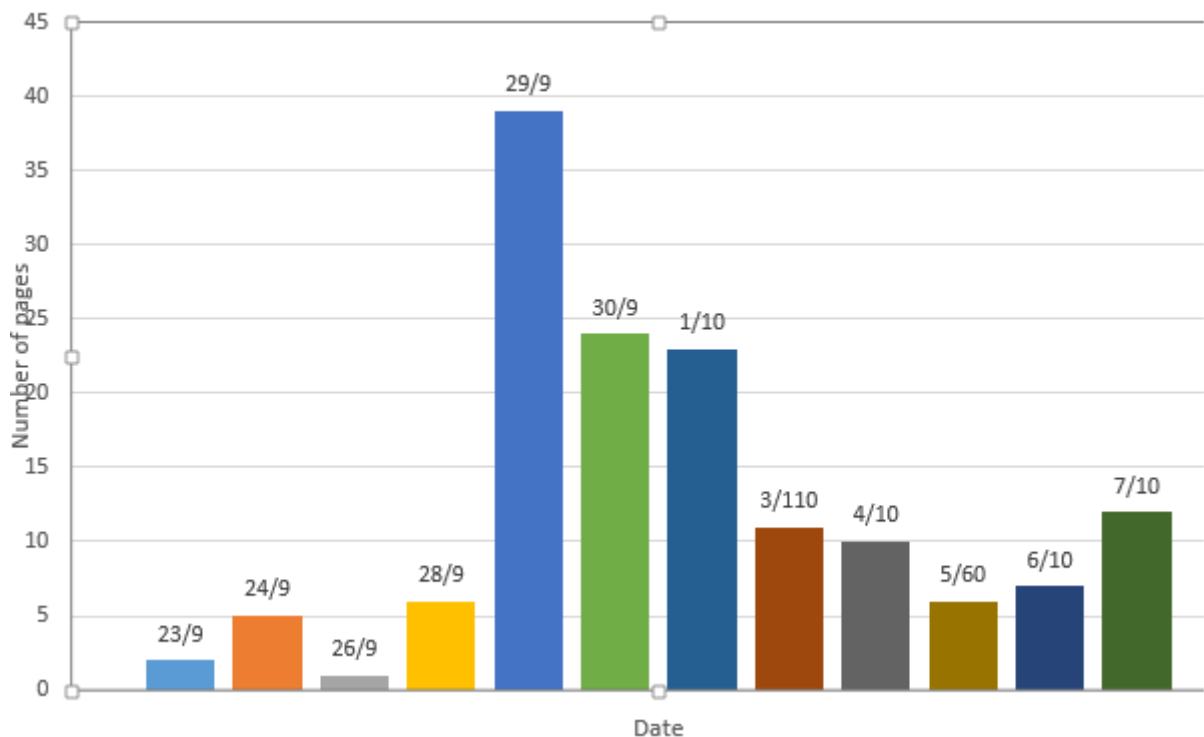
¹¹ Hughes, 2013, *The Ghost of Appeasement: Britain and the Legacy of the Munich Agreement*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48(4), p. 688-716, p. 699

¹² Hughes, 2013, *The Ghost of Appeasement: Britain and the Legacy of the Munich Agreement*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48(4), p. 688-716, p. 706

1.5 Material and method

In this thesis, I have conducted a qualitative text analysis (content analysis), in which I have chosen a sample from a database, which holds relevance to my research question. The material I've analysed was obtained through an online library called *The British Newspaper Archive*. I have used their search engine to find relevant articles that I have used in my research. Since the results are shown in pages, and not separate articles, the quantity of material will be measured in pages instead of the number of articles. Most pages have two or more articles, varying in length, dealing with the subject of the Munich agreement, its prologue and subsequent reactions. In my analysis, I have gone through 195 pages dated between September 2nd and October 7th.

All of them will not be referenced, since some information might not be wholly relevant or provide new information, but nonetheless, all articles have been thoroughly examined. The main period of analysis, September 23rd until October 7th, consists of 146 pages of material, and are divided as follows:



In addition to the numbers of pages listed here, I have analysed another 49 pages of material, dating between September 2nd and September 22nd, a period characterized by a number of relevant events prior to the negotiations that led to the Munich agreement. Since the archive does not contain articles from major newspapers, such as *The Daily Mail* or *The Times*, the articles are often found in smaller newspapers, such as *The Scotsman*, *Northern Whig*, *Western Morning News*, *Dundee Evening Telegraph* and *Hull Daily Mail*.

Even though the lack of publications from bigger newspapers is unfortunate, it is in itself not a problem, since it is also interesting to analyse the peripheral media actors during this time (or any other time, for that matter). It might not give us the large picture in the same way as the national newspapers would, but nevertheless, the number of different newspapers are more than satisfactory to provide a good basis of analysis. Even so, since most articles are purely informative, many newspapers, be it *The London Times* or *The Scotsman*, have the same sources, such as telegrams, statements, etc. The difference in reporting rather lies with *how* this information is mediated, and it is this difference that my analysis explores. It is also worth noting that several newspapers in my analysis had their own correspondents, both in Great Britain and abroad, giving different newspapers different perspectives on the same events. In that regard, there is no difference between different newspapers, no matter the size.

It should also be noted that the author of any given article is more often than not unknown, as they are not signed in the same way as more modern articles. This presents several issues that are worth mentioning, even though they may not affect the analysis itself.

First of all, not knowing the author behind articles makes it harder to take note of any tendencies among different authors, and explore any consistencies (or inconsistencies) between different texts. If authors were presented, I could've more easily assess any personal or ideological "twists" made from article to article. Second, it makes it somewhat harder to differentiate between regular articles, written mainly with the purpose to report news, and editorials, which are more often written from a personal perspective, with a more agenda setting purpose.

However, both of these issues can be handled, and have indeed been handled, by using a more inclusive research question and method. The research question is structured in a way so as to include not only editorials or letters to the editor, but also “pure” news reports. Meanwhile, my method is not only used to identify any ideals or opinions behind obviously tendentious text, but is also used to read between the lines of regular news reports to see if the same event is reported in the same way, independent of the newspaper and, if not, see in what way it is done differently. Therefore, I have analysed *all* texts related to the Munich agreement, as well as articles dealing with the subject of the Anglo-German non-war pact.¹³

Since the articles are often written in a vivid language, more like a form of story-telling than strict news reports, I have chosen to reflect this rhetoric within the analysis, sometimes writing in the same manner. Since one of the main aims of this thesis is to highlight any linguistic/rhetorical differences between different newspapers, it is important to convey these differences in a convincing way. Being in essence a descriptive analysis, it is important not only to convey what was written, but also *how* it was written.

Unlike the quantitative text analysis, the qualitative one uses a more in-depth reading of the material, isolating the relevant from the irrelevant.¹⁴ The method is suitable for analysing texts such as manifestos, novels and newspapers. It is sometimes used in studies related to mass communication, for example by analysing the prevalence of a certain topic within different media sources.¹⁵ For this study, the first step was to choose central terms to find articles that could be of use in my analysis.¹⁶ Second, I have made a “mapping system”, where I systematize my material, putting it in different categories based on sub-questions which will help me to answer my main research question.¹⁷

¹³ These two news were often reported side by side, as they were both signed at the same day, with the presence of Chamberlain

¹⁴ Esaiasson et al, 2007, *Metodpraktikan – Konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*, p. 237

¹⁵ Bergström & Boréus, 2005, *Textens mening och makt – metodbok I samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*, p. 44ff

¹⁶ Such as *Munich, Chamberlain, Czechoslovakia*, etc.

¹⁷ Esaiasson et al, 2007, *Metodpraktika*, p. 238f

For example, the answer to “what does *The Scotsman* write about the Czechoslovakian perspective on the Munich agreement?” will help me see one perspective of the reports. Do they consider this at all? Do they see the Czechoslovakian sacrifice as an appeasement to Germany, or as something necessary to secure peace? Or perhaps both? All such questions are relevant to the bigger picture, and can be seen as units of knowledge, which I use to produce my answer.

Göran Bergström and Kristina Boréus notes that a content analysis often aim to find out “to what extent something is valued as positive or negative and/or if there is a difference in such a valuation between different sources...”.¹⁸ The “something” here is the Munich agreement, and the sources are, as have been mentioned, the newspaper articles I have chosen in my sample. Regarding what constitutes a positive or negative valuation (claim) about the agreement, it is quite straight-forward: Is the agreement condoned or condemned, and in what way? This, then, gives me the answer to my question “How did British newspapers depict the Munich agreement, and the British role in the negotiations, shortly after the agreement was signed?”.

1.6 Theory – Media and agenda setting

Agenda setting theory can be traced back almost a hundred years, to *Public Opinion*, written by Walter Lippmann in 1922, though the term “agenda setting” did not come to life until the second half of the 20th century.

In short, agenda setting is based on the assumption that the media is a main producer of our perception of the world, and “shaping political reality”.¹⁹ Since the people cannot observe the entire world themselves, they often look to media for a “piece of reality”.

¹⁸ Bergström & Boréus, 2005, *Textens mening och makt*, p. 47

¹⁹ McCombs & Shaw, 1972, The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media, *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 2. (summer, 1972), pp. 176-187, p. 176

McCombs and Shaw used the theory of agenda setting in their study of the US 1968 presidential election, looking for a connection between the opinions of the voters and what the media reported on. In their study, they came to the conclusion that the media has significant power on what the voters saw as important issues.

A central assumption within the theory of agenda setting is that truth is a matter of perspective. Thus, in my case, it is the perspectives that the newspapers are publishing that constitutes the “truth”.

However, the content of this piece of reality depends on the distributor, i.e. the media. If newspapers put a lot of effort into reporting about a certain issue, this issue is likely to be perceived as more important.²⁰ The power of media in regards to shaping the agenda has grown significantly since the development of the internet and social media.²¹ Even so, such a development have not changed the principle behind agenda setting. Even in 1938’s Great Britain, most people had access to certain information through media, and newspapers, together with radio broadcasts, were the main sources of information.

So, what place does the agenda setting theory have in my research? First of all, the framework is an essential part of how I read my material, and was used to help me to answer my main research question. Was there any bias concerning the agreement and the British role in the negotiations, and if so, in what way?

Second, the number of articles published any given day gives a certain indication on how prioritized the issue of the Munich agreement is. Also, while analysing the articles, I can see when, and in what way, different perspectives are being brought into consideration. If one newspaper would, for example, write page after page filled with positive responses regarding Chamberlain’s role in the negotiations, while the Czechoslovakian perspective is left out, that tells us a lot about how the paper prioritize what they wish to convey to their readers.

²⁰ Kingdon, 2014, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* (2nd ed.), p. 57

²¹ Buse et al., 2012, *Making Health Policy* (2nd ed.), p. 77

As previously presented, my material consists of local newspapers, which reached only a fraction of the British population. This stands in contrast with newspapers like *The London Times*, which potentially reached millions of readers.²² Not reaching as many readers, small newspapers does not have the same agenda setting potential as bigger newspapers, which might have certain ramifications with regards to priorities, bias, etc.

Of course, since this is not a comparative analysis, where I compare smaller newspapers to bigger ones, I cannot provide any results proving (or disproving) such a hypothesis. However, this research could provide a basis for such a study.

²² London population was around 8 million in 1938

2 Historical context

2.1 Re-militarization of the Rhineland, and plans of action

Ever since the end of the First World War, and the treaty of Versailles, Germany had paid dearly for its role in the Great War. Demoralized, demilitarized and economically weak, dissatisfaction grew among its citizens. Looking to the West, seeing only the capitalist, democratic power forcing them to their knees, and to the East, seeing the threat of communism, the growing Nazi party made promises of a *Greater Germany*, which would restore Germany to glory. Even though this idea was praised by the German people, they still feared yet another devastating war, which opted Adolf Hitler to depict himself as a man of peace.²³

The first act of German expansion took place in March 1936, when Germany re-militarized the Rhineland (German: *Rheinland*). This was in direct violation of articles 42 and 43 in the treaty of Versailles, in which it is stated that any military presence is forbidden within the demilitarized zone. Violating this agreement would be "... regarded as committing a hostile act against the Powers signatory to the present treaty and as calculated to disturb the peace of the world".²⁴ It was also in violation of the treaties of Locarno from 1925, which reaffirmed the importance of non-aggression and "territorial status quo".²⁵ This was undoubtedly a risky move, and could've been answered by French military countermeasures.

²³ Charles River Editors, 2015, *The Munich Agreement of 1938: The History of the Peace Pact That Failed to Prevent World War II*, chapter 2: Building a Greater Germany

²⁴ Treaty of Versailles, 1919, article 44, via <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/m-ust000002-0043.pdf>, accessed 2016-11-06

²⁵ Treaties of Locarno, 1925, article 1 and 2, via <http://www.fransamaltingvongeusau.com/documents/d11/h2/1.2.3.pdf>, accessed 2016-11-08

In addition to France failing to produce any countermeasure, Belgium now withdrew from the Locarno pact, and ended their alliance with France and Great Britain, weakening the collective defence of the Western powers.²⁶

Later that year, on November 5th, Hitler held a secret meeting with his top military and political advisers, dealing with the issue of war against (mainly) the Western powers. For Germany to be victorious in such a war, the Eastern front needed to be secured, which would be done by – in one way or another – take over Czechoslovakia and “eliminate them from the very beginning”.²⁷

2.2 *Anschluss*

In the beginning of 1938, Hitler’s plans to further expand his *Greater Germany* proceeded. Since the previous year, Austrian Nazis had increased their presence – and violence – on the streets of Austria, increasing the pressure on the Austrian government. Hitler engaged in what can be considered nothing more than blackmailing, by threatening Austrian chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg, demanding Austria to be absorbed into *the Reich*. Failure to concede such a transition would “force” Hitler to resort to military action.²⁸

Hitler’s sights on Austria weren’t new, but a previous alliance between Austria and Italy delayed any German attempts to intervene. In his war to conquer parts of the African continent, Mussolini was plagued by a persistent resistance, and asked Hitler for help. Hitler offered to help, but on the condition that Italy left its alliance with Austria. Mussolini agreed, thus leaving Austria vulnerable. Being abandoned by Italy, Chancellor Schuschnigg turned to Great Britain for guarantees of protection in the event of German aggression, but to no avail.²⁹

²⁶ Shirer, 1960, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, p. 267

²⁷ Shirer, 1960, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, p. 269

²⁸ Shirer, 1960, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, p. 290ff

²⁹ Charles River Editors, 2015, *The Munich Agreement of 1938*, chapter 3: Austria and the Anschluss

On March 12th, the German army crossed the border into Austria, and it did not take long until the country of Austria ceased to exist, now being part of Hitler's *Third Reich*. Once again, the European powers failed to respond to the German expansion, and it became clear that the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, did not show any interest in halting German expansion.

Not only did Chamberlain look on while Austria was taken over by Germany, but he also made it clear that Great Britain would not guarantee support to Czechoslovakia in case of German aggression. Nor would he guarantee that the British would stand beside France if the French were called upon to defend Czechoslovakia, an obligation given in the Franco-Czech pact.³⁰ With this knowledge, Hitler had certain assurances when it came to his future plans for Czechoslovakia.

2.3 The Munich crisis

In May 1938, many in Europe feared war. In what came to be called the May crisis, the powers of France, Great Britain, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union feared a German attack on Czechoslovakia. In response, the Czechs mobilized, while Britain, France and the Soviet Union stood united against potential German aggression. Even though there were reports of German mobilization along the Czechoslovakian border, no such reports could be confirmed.³¹ However, given the prior actions of the Nazi regime, fear of aggression was hardly unfounded. Nor was it, in retrospect, any surprise that the aggression later came to fruition.

During this crisis, Chamberlain urged the Czech government to grant certain autonomy to some minorities in Czechoslovakia, even if this would mean secession. Furthermore, the British government were open to the idea of the Sudetenland being separated from Czechoslovakia.

³⁰ Shirer, 1960, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, p. 315

³¹ Shirer, 1960, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, p. 323ff

Nor was it expected that the Soviets would come to aid Czechoslovakia, in case of German aggression.³² The unwillingness to aid Czechoslovakia remained strong, and British government officials were blunt, claiming that Czechoslovakia was of no concern, and that France would stand alone if they were to support the country against German aggression.³³ With such clear signals, nothing was to stop Hitler from intervening in Czechoslovakia.

³² Shirer, 1960, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. p. 335f

³³ Charles River Editors, 2015, *The Munich Agreement of 1938*, Chapter 5: Manoeuvring for Czechoslovakia

3 Analysis

Before moving on to my analysis, a few words should be mentioned about the politics of appeasement which characterized Neville Chamberlain's foreign policy prior to the Second World War. As written in the previous chapter, the Germans violated the treaties of Versailles and Locarno without any real consequences. Fearing a new war in Europe, the Western allies (France, Belgium and Great Britain) stood passive in the face of German expansion, and Great Britain, having a weak economy, as well as having a far-reaching empire to maintain, had a lot to lose in a war.

The politics of appeasement was not unique for the Anglo-French alliance: the League of Nations, while condemning actions such as the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, did not react to these aggressions, and even though they imposed economic sanctions on Italy when Mussolini decided to invade Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1935, the results were very limited.³⁴ Ever since the German policy of expansion became apparent, the European democracies – few that they were – still wanted to maintain peace almost at any price.³⁵

After the de-militarization of the Rhineland, and the Anschluss, Chamberlain remained passive, thinking that the best way to avoid a full-scale war is to appease the Nazi regime.³⁶ Such politics gave Hitler few reasons *not* to continue with his plans of expansion, and Czechoslovakia was next in line. When the “diplomatic clash” in Munich commenced, Britons held their breaths, hoping their Prime Minister could maintain peace in Europe. It should though be noted that Chamberlain was often an “active appeaser”. That is, he was often engaged in the foreign politics, always taking a stand for peace during the threats of war.

³⁴ <http://www.history.co.uk/study-topics/history-of-ww2/appeasement>, accessed 2016-11-09

³⁵ Shirer, 1960, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, p. 254

3.1 Anxiety and fear of war (September 1st – September 14th)

In the beginning of September, 1938, lurking disaster had been avoided. On September 2nd, the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* wrote about the situation, and the problems regarding German claims on the Sudetenland. Though the tensions were decreasing, a threat still persisted. Even so, it would, the author argued, be a mistake to assume that all Germans wanted war. More importantly, would they really want a war with Great Britain? In any case, the foreign policy of the British government were to be commended, and “the British public will [...] support the Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary in any moves which may be found necessary.”³⁷

The Scotsman provided its readers with much information on the crisis, having their own correspondent sending regular updates on the situation. There was no doubt in these reports that Hitler was the key figure, having all the power to take “a step which may lead to a settlement of the problem, which, more than any other at the moment, threatens the peace of Europe.”³⁸ At this stage, the role of the British government was limited, and the faith of Europe seemed to depend on the actions of Hitler.

Western Morning News and Daily Gazette put the same emphasis on Germany’s advantage on the issue, and their diplomatic correspondent wrote that “it is for the German government and Herr Hitler now to say whether real negotiations shall begin or whether the crisis shall continue and perhaps develop.”³⁹

The Derry Journal also reported on the issue, stating that the British government remained passive, waiting for further developments.⁴⁰

³⁶ Charles River Editors, 2015, *The Munich Agreement of 1938*, Chapter 5: Manoeuvring for Czechoslovakia

³⁷ “Anxious Days”, *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 02-09-1938, p. 10

³⁸ “Momentous decisions for Hitler”, *The Scotsman*, 02-09-1938, p. 9

³⁹ “Henlein has talk with Hitler”, *Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 02-09-1938, p. 7

⁴⁰ “Henlein meets Hitler”, *The Derry Journal*, 02-09-1938, p. 9

Reports on the situation were scarce the following ten days, and the reports first became daily news on September 13th. This was not so much due to development of the negotiations regarding the crisis, as it was about the escalation of violence in the Sudeten areas. In the wake of this violence, which had resulted in the death of several Sudeten Germans, Hitler increased his pressure on the Czech government, and the world.

Western Morning News, reporting on Hitler's speech to the Nazi congress in Nuremberg, stating that it gave "no words to lessen fears of war, no word to increase the hopes for peace".⁴¹ Meanwhile, France took measures to meet the ever-present threat of war.⁴²

The Northern Whig and Belfast Post reported about activity in London, where people gathered to show solidarity to Czechoslovakia, and to share their strong criticism of the Nazi regime. It was written about a letter from "the democratic people of London" to an embassy official, which objected to Hitler "insulting [...] the people of and Government of Czecho-Slovakia, to democracy in general, and to Great Britain."⁴³

On September 14th, the headlines were all but optimistic. *The Western Daily Press and Bristol Mirror* reported the situation as being the "gravest since 1914", as clashes between Czechoslovakian Nazis and the authorities in several cities further increased the tensions between Germany and the Czechoslovakian government.⁴⁴ *Sheffield Daily Independent* likewise reported about the escalation, printing their first page with the headline "Europe ready for war" to convey their message of a Europe where "the war clouds are coming nearer".⁴⁵

The ambassador of Czechoslovakia visited (the British) foreign office to reassure himself of British and France support in the crisis.⁴⁶

⁴¹ "Herr Hitler warns Prague", *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 13-09-1938, p. 7

⁴² "France will not be surprised", *Portsmouth Evening News*, 13-09-1938, p. 9

⁴³ "Czech Crisis", *Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 14-09-1938, p. 8

⁴⁴ "Berlin's Blame For Bloodshed", *The Western Daily Press and Bristol Mirror*, 14-09-1938, p. 12

⁴⁵ "Britain Forms Defense Plans", *Sheffield Daily Independent*, 14-09-1938, p. 1

⁴⁶ "Britain Forms Defense Plans", *Sheffield Daily Independent*, 14-09-1938, p. 1

By mid-September, the newspapers were yet to set an agenda for peace, and calm the nerves of the citizens. Indeed, by this time, there was no real reason to report on the British role in the crisis, as the government remained passive. The newspapers were fully aware of the non-existent influence of the British at this point.

3.2 New hope and betrayal (September 15th – September 26th)

On September 15th, Prime Minister Chamberlain travelled to Munich to meet with Hitler, and several newspapers saw it fit to put these news on the first page, somewhat highlighting the significance of this event. *Derby Evening Telegraph* shared a positive view on this development, reporting that Mr. Chamberlain was met with warm greetings in Munich, while crowds of officials, diplomats and journalists, waving the Prime Minister goodbye, wished him good luck in his endeavour.⁴⁷ One of these journalists worked for *The Gloucester Citizen* and shared his story, putting into words a glorious send-off of a Prime Minister they “have never seen before”, with “the brilliant sunshine full upon him”.⁴⁸

For now, the outlook was positive, not only because of the positive outlook of Chamberlain’s role, but also because the fact that the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, shared his optimism, not only about negotiating a settlement regarding the Sudeten crisis, but also in creating good relationships between Germany and Great Britain.⁴⁹

Herbert Watson of *Portsmouth Evening News* wrote about Chamberlain as a “sane leader in a mad world” and “supremely the man of peace”, also witnessing about the optimism printed all across Britain.⁵⁰

Chamberlain’s visit to Munich was short, and he returned home after only one day abroad to consult with his ministry. The faith of Czechoslovakia remained

⁴⁷ “Premier and Hitler talks this evening”, *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 15-09-1938, p. 1

⁴⁸ “A man with job of work to do”, *Gloucester Citizen*, 15-09-1938, p. 1

⁴⁹ “ ‘Talks will bring a solution’ ”, *Hull Daily Mail*, 15-09-1938, p. 7

unknown, and further negotiations regarding the Sudeten crisis were waiting. The Germans had since a while back demanded a referendum to deal with the issue (a referendum aiming to get the Sudeten Germans to vote for leaving Czechoslovakia), which was promptly denied by the Czechoslovakian government.

However, the future were to be determined by the big powers (Great Britain, France and Germany), and *if* a referendum were to be held, it would be through negotiations, and not under threat of German aggression.⁵¹ Many speculations arose about what was being said during the meeting between Chamberlain and Hitler, and the Prime Minister's quick return to London raised thoughts about potential counter-proposals made by Hitler. It was also now the idea of "Four-Power talk",⁵² although tentatively, was reported to become reality in the near future.⁵³

Hitler, who had pushed to have a referendum about Sudeten secession, was now reported to have put forth an even harsher ultimatum. According to French sources, all Sudeten areas with more than 80 percent (Sudeten) German majority should immediately cede to Germany, while areas with more than 50 percent Germans should hold a referendum on the issue. If these conditions were not met he would, it was reported, use force.⁵⁴ The same day, France and Britain had reached an agreement regarding the issue, opting for a peaceful solution, though the policy needed to be developed further.⁵⁵

The news of this agreement was reported by several newspapers, such as *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* and the *Dundee Evening Telegraph and Post*.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Watson, "The man of the moment is a man of peace", *Portsmouth Evening News*, 15-09-1938, p. 8

⁵¹ "Early Meeting of Cabinet", *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 16-09-1938, p. 9

⁵² Talks between Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy

⁵³ "European crisis development", *The Falkirk Herald*, 17-09-1938, p. 9

⁵⁴ "Reported offer by Hitler", *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 19-09-1938, p. 7

⁵⁵ "Countries in complete agreement", *Gloucester Citizen*, 19-09-1938, p. 1

⁵⁶ See: "French cabinet confirms London plan", *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 19-09-1938, p. 1 and "French cabinet's decision", *Dundee Evening Telegraph and Post*, 19-09, 1938, p. 1

With Chamberlain's entrance into the negotiations, British newspapers got more involved in the issue of the Sudeten crisis. On the 15th of September, the number of articles on the subject exceeded, by far, the number of articles published the previous ten days. Naturally, with their own Prime Minister entering negotiations that could shape the years to come, the interest increased. The invitation of Chamberlain was not only seen as proof of the Germans willingness to achieve peace, but also as an acknowledgement of the influence of the British Empire.

With Hitler pushing for incorporating Sudeten territory into the German Reich, and the Anglo-French agreement regarding a peaceful solution, the situation in Prague looked grim. Being at the mercy of three super-powers, the Czechoslovakian government had little choice but to accept any terms put forth. All opting for a peaceful solution, the territorial integrity of Czechoslovakia remained under threat, considering that Hitler's offer was technically a peaceful one.

By this time, Hitler was no longer willing to negotiate, and the Czechoslovakian government, now under great pressure from all sides, stated that ceding the Sudetenland to Germany was prohibited under the constitution, and that the question should instead be handled by the Hague Tribunal.⁵⁷

When the news of the Anglo-French agreement reached the Czechoslovakian people, the feeling of betrayal was great. *Western Daily Press and Bristol Mirror* wrote about disheartened citizens feeling that their country had been "sold to the enemy [...] by the nations which for 20 years they had regarded as their closest allies and friends" to avoid war.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, criticism rose among some British politicians. Winston Churchill, who wanted the British to take a firm stand against the Nazis, shared the view of

⁵⁷ "Czechs unwilling to cede territory", *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 21-09-1938, p. 7

⁵⁸ "Czechs bitter at 'betrayal' ", *Western Daily Press and Bristol Mirror*, 22-09-1938, p. 12

betrayal, and said that “the idea that safety can be purchased by throwing a small State to the wolves is a fatal delusion”.⁵⁹

There were also reports about small protests against the British stance on the issue, where a small number of people gathered in Whitehall (a district in Westminster), displaying posters with messages as “Britain’s honour lost to-day will mean Britain’s peace lost to-morrow”.⁶⁰ *Northern Whig and Belfast Post* wrote about Emanuel Shinwell, Labour politician and Member of Parliament (M.P.), who was critical towards the British position, sharing the position that the policy of Chamberlain was a betrayal. He went further, claiming that the greatest danger was “the gradual weakening of democracy and the readiness to yield to force” and that it was the “blackest chapter in British diplomatic history.”⁶¹

Clement Atlee, leader of the Labour party (and future Prime Minister), saw Chamberlain’s actions as something that “profoundly shocked British public opinion”, and recalled the Labour party’s declaration that “the British Government must leave no doubt in the mind of the German Government that it will unite with French and Soviet Governments to resist any attack upon Czechoslovakia”, claiming that a more firm stance against Germany would have the support of the public.⁶² Still, Chamberlain maintained his position, saying that “we must still make great efforts to save the peace of Europe.”⁶³ Even so, it was still Hitler who held all the cards.

Hitler had given Chamberlain a memorandum, where he explained his view on the Sudeten problem, which were to be forwarded to the Czechoslovakian

⁵⁹ “Make stand against Nazi threat”, *Western Daily Press and Bristol Mirror*, 22-09-1938, p. 12

⁶⁰ “Demonstrators at Whitehall”, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 23-09-1938, p. 1 and “Whitehall parade”, *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 23-09-1938, p. 1

⁶¹ “Blackest chapter”, *Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 24-09-1938, p. 8

⁶² “Public Opinion ‘shocked’”, *The Gloucester Citizen*, 26-09-1938, p. 6

⁶³ “Prime Minister’s Statement”, *Dundee Evening Telegram and Post*, 24-09-1938, p. 1

government. Chamberlain also seemed eager to return to London, so that he could initiate talks with his Government about the developments.⁶⁴

As the crisis progressed, and Chamberlain's policy of appeasement continued to dominate British foreign politics, newspaper now made room for opposition. With several prominent politicians taking a firm stance against the appeasement of Hitler, the reports were no longer completely positive or completely negative. The public was now given two sides: the continued prospects for peace, where Chamberlain would be a key figure, and the stances of those viewing the appeasement as treachery (against Czechoslovakia), and a risk, rather than an opportunity.

3.3 A new meeting (September 28th – September 29th)

On September 28th, hope was on the rise. It was widely reported that, in the middle of a speech given by Chamberlain in the House of Commons, the Premier had received an invitation to meet with Hitler to discuss the crisis. *The Gloucester Citizen* wrote about how “every government supporter sprang to his feet and cheer after cheer for the Prime Minister rang out while members again demonstrated by waving official papers.”⁶⁵ *Portsmouth Evening News* reported “remarkable revelations”, informing their readers that Chamberlain had once again been invited to Munich to negotiate.⁶⁶

In the *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, it was written about “the wrong turning”, where the situation was compared to that of 1914, when then foreign secretary of

⁶⁴ “Talks end: Chamberlain home to-day”, *Dundee Courier and Daily Advertiser*, 24-09-1938, p. 7 and “Last-minute bid for peace by Premier”, *Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 24-09-1938, p. 9

⁶⁵ “Peace: The hope”, *The Gloucester Citizen*, 28-09-1938, p. 1, see also “Reported European conference plan”, *The Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 28-09-1938, p. 5; “Prime Minister tells the commons”, *Portsmouth Evening News*, 28-09-1938, p. 12; “Prime Minister to see Hitler again”, *The Hull Daily Mail*, 28-09-1938, p. 1;

⁶⁶ “His efforts to save the world from war”, *Portsmouth Evening News*, 28-09-1938, p. 12

Great Britain, Sir Edward Grey, did his very best to prevent war, and turn Europe towards more cooperation. Just as Grey had failed, so could Chamberlain.⁶⁷

Thursday, September 29th 1938, was met with enormous expectations. The “four-power talk” were to take place in Munich, where Adolf Hitler would host the leaders of Great Britain (Neville Chamberlain), France (Édouard Daladier), and Italy (Benito Mussolini). J. L. Hodson wrote in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, wrote about “the four men [...] who will shape your life and mine”, speculating how the four leaders would shape the times to come. He wrote about Chamberlain as a man with two sides, stating that...

“We saw him in action yesterday – calm, unruffled, steady, taking almost in his stride the shaping of great history, turning from gloom to that tremendous ray of hope that burst upon us – taking it more calmly than most of those who listened to that modest, most untheatrical voice and manner. But we also heard him over the wireless, too – deeply stirred, deeply indignant, that a world might be plunged to destruction because of failure to settle details of a controversy already largely disposed of.”⁶⁸

He went on, imagining how the meeting would go, and what role the Prime Minister would come to play in the negotiations. Chamberlain was depicted as a logical man, and a lover of birds, flowers and music. Hitler was described as a dreamer, a “prince of demagogues” that can “exercise a powerful effect on all who meets him”, be it through the ruthlessness he showed towards Schuschnigg before the *Anschluss*, or the charming greetings of Mr. Chamberlain.⁶⁹

The Dundee Evening Telegraph, also writing about the meeting that would take place, wrote that if Europe were to escape the lures of war, it would be the fine temper and pertinacity of Mr. Chamberlain that would, more than anything, carry the day.⁷⁰

Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail shared with its readers words from Australian Prime Minister, Joseph Lyons, who commended Chamberlain’s “superhuman

⁶⁷ “Current events”, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 28-09-1938, p. 2

⁶⁸ Hodson, “The four men of Munich”, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 29-09-1938, p. 6

⁶⁹ “The four men of Munich”, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 29-09-1938, p. 6

⁷⁰ “Current events”, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 29-09-1938, p. 2

efforts” in the negotiations.⁷¹ *The Hull Daily Mail* quoted an article from *The Rand Daily Mail*, based in Johannesburg, where Chamberlain was praised for his efforts, and that if the problem was solved, it would “earn for him the everlasting gratitude of the nation which has produced so noble a son.”⁷²

Raymond Burns, being published in both the *Portsmouth Evening News* and *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, shared his notion that it was “inconceivable” that the negotiations in Munich would fail, and that the meeting in Munich illustrated “a cardinal point in British post-War foreign policy – discussion of differences among the leaders of the four Western Powers”. Despite the obvious optimism in the article, Burns did acknowledge that there were still issues at hand, he maintained the position that the meeting in Munich would indeed be a step away from war.⁷³

This optimism wasn’t shared by all, not even, it would seem, the editors of *Portsmouth Evening News*. The headlines on the following page told a different story, where teachers and authorities worried about what would become of the 30,000 school children of Portsmouth in the event of war, and gas masks were distributed across the city.⁷⁴

In a short article in *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, one could read about the crisis on the accounts of two American cabaret artists, Earl Leslie and Flora Duane, who had come from Berlin to London. They told of the Germans as a people that did not want to fight, and that Mr. Chamberlain was regarded “in the light of a hero through whom peace would come.”⁷⁵

On the same page, another article presented Chamberlain as a “remarkable statesman” who had in the past three weeks “established himself as one of the three or four greatest men in British history.” The author shared Burns’ notion that

⁷¹ “World’s Eyes on Munich”, *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 29-09-1938, p. 3

⁷² “The world’s words of relief – and praise for Premier”, *The Hull Daily Mail*, 29-09-1938, p. 10

⁷³ Burns, “Four men at Munich”, *Portsmouth Evening News*, 29-09-1938, p. 6

⁷⁴ “What is to be done about the school children”, *Portsmouth Evening News*, 29-09-1938, p. 7

⁷⁵ “Mr Chamberlain as hero”, *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 29-09-1938, p. 2

it was hard to see how negotiations could fail, and finished the text with “God bless Chamberlain. And God speed”.⁷⁶

The Scotsman, having their own correspondent in Prague, offered another perspective on the issue. In a short, but blunt, article, the author wrote about the scepticism among officials in Czechoslovakia. He wrote that:

“Czechoslovakia would have liked to hear Mr Chamberlain explaining how the map which was drawn up by Herr Hitler would create, in place of this solid and selfcontained Republic, something that could not be called so much a State as a sort of native reserve in Central Europe in which Czechoslovak people would be allowed to eke out an existence entirely at Germany’s mercy.”⁷⁷

Not only did this offer a perspective so distinct from the “at home” optimism, but also told a story about the thoughts of the British appeasement of Hitler and his aspirations. The author further made rhetorical points regarding the feelings of the Czechoslovakian people and its leader, and how the country stood almost forgotten, anxious, and praying for protection, while the big powers were to discuss its fate.

Back in London, not much was needed to lift the spirits of the citizens. The London correspondent of *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* wrote about how the people of London, when reached by the news of a new meeting in Munich, went from a disheartened state to a state of calm and good spirit. After some grim days, laughter had once again returned to the streets of the capital.⁷⁸

As with the previous two weeks of reporting, newspapers conveyed both positive and negative opinions about the current situation, although the positive certainly outweighed the negative. The Czechoslovakian perspective was almost

⁷⁶ “What we think”, *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 29-09-1938, p. 2

⁷⁷ “Prague and Munich”, *The Scotsman*, 29-09-1938, p. 11

⁷⁸ “News of Munich meeting as a tonic”, *Yorkshire post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 29-09-1938, p. 9

lost, and was it not for *The Scotsman*, the picture reaching the public would be that of promise of peace, and a picture of their Prime Minister's potential heroism.

Still, it was these promises that reached the general public, and with *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* and *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* writing about the positive mood in London, the obvious agenda was to raise the spirits of the readers. With the meeting only hours away, expectations were high, and despite some doubts among a few authors, optimism dominated the news reports.

3.4 “Peace for our time” (September 30th – October 1st)

In the early hours of September 30th, what was to be called the *Munich Agreement* was signed by Neville Chamberlain, Édouard Daladier, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. With the agreement, Germany was granted the right to cede the Sudeten German territories, and that Czechoslovakian presence would be continuously withdrawn until 10th of October, when the territory would be under German dominion. In this agreement, it was also conceded that all Sudeten German political prisoners should be released within four weeks.⁷⁹

This, naturally, became the big news of the day in Great Britain, and once again, Prime Minister Chamberlain was hailed as a hero. Thousands of telegrams and letters were sent to Chamberlain's residence, thanking him “for his work in the cause of peace”, and the bells of Westminster Abbey would ring its bells to welcome the return of the Prime Minister.⁸⁰

In the same spirit of cheerfulness, the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* reported about “a dawn of peace” in London, where people no longer had “drawn and anxious faces”.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *The Munchen Agreement*

⁸⁰ “Europe acclaims premier”, *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 30-09-1938, p. 1

⁸¹ “Peace day in London”, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 30-09-1938, p. 1

Though recognizing the success in what had been achieved, *The Dundee Courier and Advertiser* were a bit more restrained in their optimism, writing that “... for the time being, at any rate, the black shadow of war has passed away” and that “there will be a renewal of the outcry that a democratic country has been surrendered to the Dictators”. However, the author also concludes that the agreement is far better than the “unspeakable alternative of delivering over millions of human beings to slaughter.”⁸²

The Gloucester Citizen did not hold back in its praise of their Prime Minister. On the front page, in large, capital letters, it read “PREMIER’S TRIUMPH”, and that peace had now been preserved. The paper praised Chamberlain, writing that “our great Prime Minister has worked incessantly, when all others had well nigh despaired, for the peace which we owe alike to his initiative, his sagacity and his persistence.”⁸³

Portsmouth Evening News were also adamant in their support and acknowledgement of Chamberlain’s role in the negotiation process. Though some credit was given to the other three leaders, Chamberlain was put on the highest of pedestals, even receiving the credit for “bringing about the meeting and paving way for Peace”. The praise continued, and it was written that “history will reserve a special niche for the English Prime Minister, who saw the world slipping into war, and unhesitatingly took bold, resolute, courageous, unprecedented steps to stop the descent and save civilization from ruin all too plainly impending”.⁸⁴

The Western Times shares a similar admiration for their Prime Minister, writing that “thus, once again, has Mr. Chamberlain’s efforts to find a real peace, been appreciated by the very man who seemed bent on war.”⁸⁵ In truth, all knew,

⁸² “Settlement”, *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 30-09-1938, p. 6

⁸³ “Peace – and after”, *The Gloucester Citizen*, 30-09-1938, p. 4

⁸⁴ “The miracle of Munich”, *Portsmouth Evening News*, 30-09-1938, p. 8

⁸⁵ “The world ‘breathes again,’ thanks to a great man”, *The Western Times*, 30-09-1938, p. 8

for it was fresh in memory, that it was Hitler who brought about the meeting when he extended his invitation to Chamberlain.

Great Britain itself was also commended, for its calm and resolution during the crisis. “Great Britain is still not afraid if being great” and “a weak Britain would be a danger to the world [...] and any nation which may dream of aggression or wantonly provoke disorder is thus warned that there is one great force on the side of Peace which cannot be either ignored or overawed”.⁸⁶ In the same paper, on the same page, Herbert Watson also praised Prime Minister Chamberlain, as well as the nation as a whole. Chamberlain’s accomplishments wasn’t only a great achievement on behalf of Great Britain, but a victory for all mankind.⁸⁷ So harmonious was the situation in fact, that children in Bradford had seized gas masks, previously distributed as a precaution, using them as toys, simulating war in the trenches that had been dug to protect from potential air raids.⁸⁸

The Scotsman’s correspondent in Prague once again tried to convey a Czechoslovakian perspective, pointing out that they had no say in the negotiations which would shape the future of their country. While Londoners cheered on the streets, celebrating the peace so courageously secured by their Prime Minister, the hopes of peace were nowhere near the minds of the Czechoslovakian people. At the centre of the dispute, the general opinion was “that Mr Chamberlain does not in the least understand the type of man he is dealing with in Herr Hitler, and is allowing himself to be misled by facile optimism.”⁸⁹

Not surprisingly, September 30th was seen as a great day for Great Britain. War had been averted, and there was no doubt among journalists and editors around the country who was the man of the hour. Their Prime Minister had returned not only with a solution to the Sudeten problem, bringing an end to the

⁸⁶ “The world ‘breathes again,’ thanks to a great man”, *The Western Times*, 30-09-1938, p. 8

⁸⁷ “A victory for mankind”, *Portsmouth Evening News*, 30-09-1938, p. 8

⁸⁸ “Gas masks as toys”, *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*”, 30-09-1938, p. 8

⁸⁹ “Britain’s new proposals accepted by Prague”, *The Scotsman*, 30-09-1938, p. 11

crisis which had haunted Europe for months, but also with a document that would guarantee peace between Germany and Great Britain.

Once again, it was *The Scotsman* who provided a dissenting view, giving the impression that it was Hitler who won, and not the British. For others, the agenda was to put Chamberlain, and in extension the British people, at the centre. After the meeting in Munich on the 30th, Chamberlain had visited Hitler three times in less than three weeks. Not once had Hitler come to London, and not once had Hitler conceded to any counter-proposals that would give him any less than dominion over the Sudeten areas. Yet, the “reality” conveyed by the newspapers where almost in unison regarding Chamberlain’s diplomatic prowess.

As a new month commenced, news of the agreement kept on dominating the newspapers. Like so many others, *The Dundee Courier and Advertiser* raised Chamberlain to hero status. The unwavering willingness of the government, and among the British people, were surely admirable, but it was the Prime Minister who should be the recipient of the praise. However, it was not only Chamberlain’s efforts in itself that earned him credit. Going to war to challenge the German claim would, the author argued, be going to war for a bad cause. The author goes as far as to say that Hitler had an “unchallengeable right on his side”, and that the very creation of the Czechoslovakian republic after the First World War was “one of the great blunders, if not one of the crimes, of the war treaties.”⁹⁰

Of course, the seemingly endless cheers for the Prime Minister was not only due to the Munich Agreement, but also due to the freshly signed (By Hitler and Chamberlain) Anglo-German no-war pact, which would secure peace between the two great powers.

With one visit to Munich, Chamberlain had not only brought the Sudeten crisis to an end, but had also made sure that the people of Great Britain need not

⁹⁰ ”The peacemaker”, *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 01-10-1938, p. 4

fear war, Sudeten crisis or not. It was, as Chamberlain put it, “peace in our time”.⁹¹

Some remained sceptical, however. In the *Gloucester Citizen*, one author wondered why the Home Secretary asked the people to go on with the Air Raid Precautions (ARP), why gas masks were still distributed and why the trenches that had been dug should not be filled in. The author worried there was perhaps “some unexpected hitch [...] lurking somewhere in the shadows to cheat all our hopes, to undermine confidence, to withhold the final ratification of the Munich Peace Pact, and even plunge Europe into war?”⁹²

The Gloucester Citizen was one of several newspapers to offer more than praise, and the Czechoslovakian sacrifice was not ignored. One of few European democracies were now to cede territory to the German dictatorship, and the author noted that it was just as much a surrender to the intimidations of Hitler, as it was a victory: “The power and the will of the German dictator has prevailed over the will of the free people...”⁹³ This was one of a few, often short, articles dealing with a Czechoslovakian perspective. More often than not, the voices acknowledging the sacrifice made by, or rather imposed on, the small republic, were all but lost in the deafening cheers of the British people celebrating the peace secured by their Prime Minister.

Some newspapers also made space for criticism from other members of Parliament, such as Harold Nicholson, member of the National Labour party, who considered the signing of the Munich agreement a surrender, and that it would only give peace for six months. Instead, Nicholson had hoped that Chamberlain would have taken a “firm line” in Munich, to show the world that democratic faith was stronger than fascist conceptions.

Instead, Britain succumbed to German pressure, betraying “a valiant little country and a great democratic idea.”⁹⁴ Meanwhile, *the Gloucestershire Echo*

⁹¹ “British-German ‘no war’-pact”, *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 01-10-1938, p. 5

⁹² “To seek peace – and ensure it”, *Gloucester Citizen*, 01-10-1938, p. 4

⁹³ “The destiny of Europe”, *Gloucester Citizen*, 01-10-1938, p. 12

⁹⁴ “Six months’ peace!”, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 01-10-1938, p. 7

reported that Duff Cooper, a long-time critic of the appeasement policy of Chamberlain, resigned as First Lord of the Admiralty, as a protest to the Munich Agreement.⁹⁵

The Scotsman dedicated almost four pages to the new developments, and despite the “good news”, the peace was viewed more as a result of Czechoslovakian surrender, than as something achieved by Chamberlain and the other leaders. By “turning the other cheek”, it was indeed Czechoslovakia that prevented war, since turning down the agreement would result in war.

Even so, the wisdom and tenacity of Chamberlain was commended, as there was nothing he could have done to save Czechoslovakia. Thus, the Munich agreement was necessary to negotiate a lasting peace. Not only was it seen as a fair trade to give the Sudeten areas to Germany in exchange for peace, but the very existence of Czechoslovakia was put into question: “It suited French policy in 1919 to make Czechoslovakia as powerful as possible to be a guard upon Germany’s southeast flank [...] Was it worth a European war to confirm and repeat the mistakes of the Peace Conference?”⁹⁶

On the issue of Czechoslovakia, the correspondent in Prague had other thoughts than the author of the article cited above. The sacrifice which was deemed necessary by Britain brought nothing but despair to Czechoslovakia. The correspondent wrote: “To the bitterness of this humiliation and defeat at the hands of friends and allies is added resentment at the manner with which it was carried out by a coalition of the four Powers who, it is felt here, have now imposed Hitler’s will on Czechoslovakia”.⁹⁷

Arthur Berriedale Keith, a professor at Edinburgh University, shares his criticism of the agreement with the readers of *The Scotsman*. Keith saw the

⁹⁵ “First Lord of the Admiralty resign”, *Gloucestershire Echo*, 01-10-1938, p. 1

⁹⁶ “Peace – and after”, *The Scotsman*, 01-10-1938, p. 12

⁹⁷ “Bitterness and despair in Prague”, *The Scotsman*, 01-10-1938, p. 14

agreement as the final step to grant Germany hegemony in Europe, and saw Chamberlain's actions as a submission to Hitler.⁹⁸

Western Daily Press and Bristol Mirror wrote of "three great scenes without precedence in the history of statesmanship" when describing the homecoming of Chamberlain. Despite the pouring rain, ten thousand people were reported to have greeted the Prime Minister when he returned from Munich, to declare "peace for our time". The cheers seemed endless, when the people of Britain welcomed the man who not only settled the Sudeten dispute, but brought with him a document that would guarantee peace between Great Britain and Germany for years to come.⁹⁹

While Britain, and almost the rest of the world, celebrated the news, the people of Czechoslovakia was in a state of mourning. A Reuter telegram reported that people tried to hold demonstrations in the streets of Prague, and the radio silence, which was initiated as a sign of national mourning, was only disturbed by the occasional news report.¹⁰⁰

In *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, the views of a few citizens, regarding the Munich agreement and the newly signed peace pact between Great Britain and Germany, were shared. The bishop of Exeter called it the triumph of reason, and that the 30th of September 1938 was "a greater day even than November 11". Several prominent people, among them aldermen and mayors, also shared their gratitude and optimism, praising their Prime Minister and the peace he had secured.¹⁰¹ There was no doubt that this was a day for celebration.

The day after the agreement was signed, the consensus regarding the achievements of Chamberlain was challenged. No doubt, the newspapers still put

⁹⁸ Keith, "After the crisis", *The Scotsman*, 01-10-1938, p. 15

⁹⁹ " 'It is peace of our time', cries Prime Minister", *Western Daily Mail and Bristol Mirror*, 01-10-1938, p. 7

¹⁰⁰ "Poland now talks 'grave developments' ", *Western Daily Mail and Bristol Mirror*, 01-10-1938, p. 7

¹⁰¹ "Peace of the world can be assured", *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 01-10-1938, p. 6

their emphasis on the peace which was now, at least to many, “guaranteed”, but dissenting opinions, especially from politicians, got its fair share of publicity. It would seem that several newspapers now wanted to change the view on Czechoslovakia as “a faraway country”, and offer perspectives that was so close to home. However, if one took part of such perspectives or not was highly dependent on location, as some newspapers (such as *Western Daily Mail and Daily Gazette*) still focused heavily on Chamberlain’s achievement and global acclaim.

3.5 Days of justification – and criticism (October 3rd – October 7th)

On Monday, October 3rd, there was a change of pace with regards to the criticism ventilated through several newspapers. In *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Eleonore Rathbone, independent M.P. and critic of the politics of appeasement, wrote that “only time can show fully what kind and duration of peace has been bought and what price will be paid for it by the Czechs, ourselves, and the world”. With regards to the resulting refugee crisis, she continued:

“At a time when Mr. Chamberlain’s influence stands so high, much may depend on what he is prepared to do for these victims of his policy, whether by exerting his own influence or through the instructions he gives to those who are to take part on our behalf in the execution of his plan. And his actions may depend on how far public opinion at home is aroused on behalf of these victims – these scapegoats by whose sacrifice some hope to have obtained immunity from the tragedy of war”.¹⁰²

James H. Mosey, Chairman of Gilling A.R.P. Committee, called the agreement unjust, saying that “no agreement can be just that is forced at the point

¹⁰² ”Correspondence – Readers’ views on the Munich Agreement”, *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 03-10-1938, p. 6

of a bayonet” and that “the Czechoslovak people are paying the price for our respite...”. He urged other (A.R.P.) committees to send proposals to M.P’s, the Prime Minister and the opposition, to “insist that an immediate world conference [...] examine all maladjustments, economic, racial, social and political which interfere with the right-living of the peoples of the world”, as he did not wish the Czechoslovakian people to be the only ones to make sacrifices for peace.¹⁰³

Hugh R. Lupton from Leeds sent a copy of a letter, meant for M.P. Osbert Peake, to the newspaper, which got published. The letter contained a proposal to reconstruct the Government, and some of the criticism went as follows:

“I am writing to inform you that I disagree with the action lately taken by the Prime Minister and shall, if you continue to support his policy, be unable again to record my vote in your favour”. He continues:

“... Although our failure to support the cause of Czechoslovakia has filled me with such shame in respect of my country as I never thought to experience, the main cause of my dissent is the *short-sightedness* of the action taken. It must be obvious to the whole world that the Sudeten grievances were deliberately formatted by Hitler as a means to achieve his ends”.¹⁰⁴

A text signed with the name C. E. G. Spencer also questioned the actions taken by Chamberlain: “Try as we may to conceal it, the fact remains that that war has been averted by surrender to threats of force, and the peace gained has been won by substituting one injustice for another”. Philip R. Le Mesurier sent the newspaper a copy of a telegram he had sent to the Prime Minister. The telegram was short and concise: “Deplore utterly your latest surrender to German dictation”.

Charles Davy from Kent wrote: “We must not try to justify our part in demanding these sacrifices; this must be left for history to decide”, while also

¹⁰³ “Correspondence – Readers’ views on the Munich Agreement”, *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 03-10-1938, p. 6

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

sharing his admiration for the Czechs, who had “given the world superb example of courage and social discipline.”¹⁰⁵

The Dundee Evening Telegraph wrote an article about Duff Cooper, who had previously resigned in response to the Munich Agreement. Cooper had now given up on his political career, but stated that “I have maintained something which is to me of great value. I can still walk about the world with my head erect.”¹⁰⁶ Excerpts of Cooper’s speech in the House of Commons was also published in *Hull Daily Mail* and *The Sunderland Echo and Shipping Gazette*.¹⁰⁷

Meanwhile, *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette* went another way, focusing on the positive. The Bishop of Plymouth thanked God, and Chamberlain, for the peace, and the Plymouth Conservative Club had sent a telegram to their Prime Minister, informing him of their “heartfelt gratitude to you as peacemaker.”¹⁰⁸

The most negative words shared by the paper was those written by Isaac Foot, who felt that the agreement had resulted in “relief and shame”, seeing the actions taken as a necessary evil.¹⁰⁹ In *The Aberdeen Press and Journal* “King’s message of thanks to the nation” adorned the top of page 7, with several positive stories on the recent developments. The King himself praised Chamberlain, stating that “after the magnificent efforts of the Prime Minister in the cause of peace, it is my fervent hope that a new era of friendship and prosperity may be dawning among the peoples of the world.”¹¹⁰

The words of General Jan Smuts were also shared, and Smuts had stated that “Mr Chamberlain appeared at the last moment to save the world from war”.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ “Correspondence – Readers’ views on the Munich Agreement”, *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 03-10-1938, p. 6

¹⁰⁶ “Mr Duff Cooper’s statement”, *The Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 03-10-1938, p. 4

¹⁰⁷ See: “Mr Duff Cooper’s speech”, *The Hull Daily Mail*, 03-10-1938, p. 1 and 10 and “We should have been fighting...”, *The Sunderland Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 03-10-1938, p. 1

¹⁰⁸ “Plymouth gives thanks” and “Sutton Division Conservatives”, *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 03-10-1938, p. 5

¹⁰⁹ “Relief mixed with shame”, *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 03-10-1938, p. 5

¹¹⁰ “Calm resolve during these critical days”, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 03-10-1938, p. 7

¹¹¹ “Britain leads again”, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 03-10-1938, p. 7

The Gloucester Citizen had a somewhat different approach, giving much focus to Germany's entrance into the Sudetenland, where Hitler was greeted with cheers and flowers.¹¹² Like several other newspapers on October 3rd, they also reported Duff Cooper's resignation.¹¹³ The editor of the paper also received multiple letters that were published regarding the matter. Signed C. F. England, the author shared his "immeasurable admiration and gratitude [...] towards the supreme and self-sacrificing effort of the Prime Minister".¹¹⁴

Like some of the aforementioned newspapers, *The Scotsman* also shared some views of the readers. Many wrote to *The Scotsman*, praising both the Prime Minister and the Czechs. Writing under the signature "One of complete insignificance", one author called the Munich agreement "infamous", seeing it as a moment where Britain had chosen to "accelerate our humiliating retreat before the dictators", ending the piece with "The sun of Great Britain is not setting gloriously, but in a dark and cloudy sky". William M. C. Stewart, just like others before him, called the agreement a betrayal of Czechoslovakia, but also took comfort in the voices of those critical to the agreement.¹¹⁵

At this time, it was clear that the agenda had been changed to represent a more nuanced discourse about the Munich agreement. Now, more than ever before, several newspapers made way for extensive criticism of the agreement. It represented a clear change, and the after celebrations had toned down, a more critical debate opened up. Papers still had room for praise, but it was still negative publicity that characterized the publications of October 3rd.

On October 4th, *The Hull Daily Mail* published two texts containing answers to some of the criticism. One article conveyed the opinions of Sir Lambert Ward, who saw it fit to look back to the treaties of 1919, asking if the very creation of the Czechoslovakian republic was a wise choice at all. Ward had stated that "I do

¹¹² "Hitler enters Sudetenland in triumph", *The Gloucester Citizen*, 03-10-1938, p. 1

¹¹³ "Mr. Duff Cooper on his resignation", *The Gloucester Citizen*, 03-10-1938, p. 1

¹¹⁴ "Other people's views: The peace – and after", *The Gloucester Citizen*, 03-10-1938, p. 4

¹¹⁵ "Points of View – After Munich", *The Scotsman*, 03-10-1938, p. 13

not think the Peace Treaty made the best of the somewhat inflammable material at its disposal, especially about the setting up of the State of Czechoslovakia.”¹¹⁶ Another, shorter, article also contained similar criticism, where the legitimacy of Czechoslovakia was questioned, while Chamberlain was commended for his achievement, as it at least secured the existence of the Czechoslovakian state. The author wrote that:

“The critics would have us remain at the status quo in Czechoslovakia despite the fact that for 19 years certain terms of the Versailles peace, including the creation of Czechoslovakia with impossibly large minorities on military considerations only, have been the cause of European unrest and danger.”¹¹⁷

Several other papers, including *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post* and *Sheffield Daily Independent*, had big headlines, followed with extensive texts containing criticism of the agreement, among them statements from Duff Cooper.¹¹⁸

The Aberdeen Press and Journal reported on the debate in the House of Commons, where Chamberlain faced criticism from other members of Parliament. Chamberlain had not responded directly to this criticism, but rather talked about “the facts”, while having overwhelming support in the House.¹¹⁹ They also shared a short text written letter from a Czech member of the *International Council of Women*, in which it was stated that “we have been betrayed by our friends to whom we have been faithful. You have betrayed us because you have been afraid of force”. The letter ended with the words “I am proud of being a Czech. I am ashamed of being a European.”¹²⁰

The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, as well as *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, also reported on the political debate within the House of

¹¹⁶ “Crisis settlement only one possible says Lt.-Col. Sir L. Ward”, *The Hull Daily Mail*, 04-10-1938, p. 4

¹¹⁷ “We must be one guard”, *The Hull Daily Mail*, 04-10-1938, p. 4

¹¹⁸ “Criticism of the Munich Agreement”, *Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 04-10-1938, p. 8 and “Opposition attack on Munich Agreement”, *Sheffield Daily Independent*, 04-10-1938, p. 6

¹¹⁹ “Premier explains Munich peace policy”, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 04-10-1938, p. 7

¹²⁰ “You have betrayed us”, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 04-10-1938, p. 9

Commons, reporting on the praise of Chamberlain and the criticism from Duff Cooper alike.¹²¹

The Scotsman also reported on the debate, through their private correspondent. In his report, he wrote about the wide support Chamberlain had in the House of Commons, while also reporting “unmannerly interruptions” from the Socialists, further stating that Chamberlain was not deserving the accusations put forth by his critics.¹²² The paper also made way for some of their readers to put forth their opinion. Some praised the Prime Minister, while others criticized the agreement. Some also saw it fit to sympathize with the Czechs, and help them in their hour of desperate need.

A text signed by Hector Macpherson declared it “unfortunate that so many of your [*The Scotsman*] correspondents have rushed into print so hastily to criticise the Prime Minister and to denounce the Munich Agreement”. He suggested that the writers should ask themselves what would have been a reasonable alternative. At the same time, he also acknowledged that the current state in Europe was problematic, due to British and French passiveness during the mid-30’s, when Hitler violated the treaty of Versailles and reintroduced conscription. Even so, what was done was done, and the Munich agreement was a necessity, and Chamberlain should be commended for his work.¹²³

On October 5th, *The Dundee Courier and Advertiser* published an article, with the agreement, and the subsequent debate, in focus. The author argued that the

¹²¹ “Commons debate on the Czech crisis”, *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 04-10-1938, p. 8 and “Great Britain Grants £10,000,000 Loan to Czechoslovakian Government”, *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 04-10-1938, p. 3

¹²² “London News”, *The Scotsman*, 04-10-1938, p. 10

agreement was not only a step forward, but went so far as to say “that of all the beneficiaries of the settlement the Czechoslovak people have been the chief” and that the monetary support the British would now give to the country was an act of sympathy for a people that “had yielded to natural impulses and rejected the Munich proposals”.¹²⁴

The Gloucester Echo printed a letter to the editor, where the author commented on the German claims on the Sudetenland. It was argued that “Hitler’s policy to bring about a homogenous Germany is understandable and legitimate”, and that the problem was within Czechoslovakia, a land that was “carved out of the old ramshackle Austrian Empire” and where “the two races were on bad terms”. In another letter, Chamberlain was praised and the author wrote that “surely, the nation will express its approval of the extraordinary energy and diplomacy of its Prime Minister by suitable reward for his success in averting an unprecedented national disaster”.

In another letter, however, the government was called a pacifist party “which gives in at the moment a bully shakes his fist in its face, and that the agreement did not result in peace with honour, but rather “a truce with dishonour”.¹²⁵

The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer also shared some of the readers’ views on the agreement. One reader, professing himself as “an ordinary man in the street, with first-hand experience of the horrors of the last war”, protested against the criticism against Chamberlain. Once again, the very creation of Czechoslovakia was questioned, and the heterogenous population, among them many (Sudeten) Germans, was seen as a cause of conflict. The author finished his text by claiming that Chamberlain was “entitled to the generous and unreserved support of all men of good will”.

Another reader called it “a time of national humiliation” and “a shameful business” that the Prime Minister had bent to the will of Germany. Others shared

¹²³ “Points of view: Munich Agreement and the alternative”, *The Scotsman*, 04-10-1938, p. 13

¹²⁴ “Czechoslovakia and the settlement”, *The Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 05-10-1938, p. 6

¹²⁵ “Letters to the editor”, *The Gloucester Echo*, 05-10-1938, p. 4

their gratitude towards Czechoslovakia, wanting to see people come together to help in what way they could.¹²⁶

In *The Hull Daily Mail*, Diana Spearman, a candidate for the Conservatives, praised Chamberlain's achievement, and that one was to be deeply thankful for "the disappearance of the nightmare of war". She put forth a utilitarian argument, stating that even though Czechoslovakia had made a great sacrifice, peace in Europe was to be the prime objective. She also argued that the disadvantages of Czechoslovakia had been "wildly exaggerated in some quarters". Was it not for the settlement, Czechoslovakia would, she argued, be the first (and worst) sufferer in the event of war.¹²⁷

At this point, there had been a drastic change regarding the content of published material. Critics no longer seemed to be dissenters, and in some papers, the negative views on the agreement outweighed the positive. While unity was the dominating characteristic when the news of the agreement first reached the newspapers, publications now shaped a reality where politicians and citizens alike seemed divided over the question. Of course, within Parliament, the support for Chamberlain seemed to still dominate the debate, but there was no doubt that the agreement had created conflict, which was also manifested through the newspapers.

On October 6th, *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* wrote two whole pages on the aftermath of the agreement. Winston Churchill was quoted on

¹²⁶ "Correspondence: Readers' views on the Munich Agreement", *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 05-10-1938, p. 7

¹²⁷ Spearman, "European War Threat Would Not Have Settled the Causes of War", *The Hull Daily Mail*, 05-10-1938, p. 4

several occasions, and he had called the settlement a “total, unmitigated defeat”. He had also shared his worries about the future, warning about the growing German army, asking “if the Nazi Dictator should choose to look Westward, as he may, then bitterly will France and England regret the loss of that vast army of ancient Bohemia...”.¹²⁸ Churchill’s notions were met with considerable resistance from other politicians, where Sir Henry Page Croft stated that Britain had not lost any prestige, but rather that it was viewed as “the saviour of the world” by some nations, and Thomas Magnay seconded the opinions of those pointing out the problems regarding the creation of the Czechoslovakian state.¹²⁹

October 7th, just about a week after the agreement was signed, *The Western Gazette* shared the views of a few larger, national newspapers. From *The Times*, praised the leadership of Chamberlain, saying that he had made way for a future where threats of war had been removed. The nation was to show gratitude to their Prime Minister. *The Daily Herald* had commented on Chamberlain’s role in the negotiations, writing that “for the first time he [Hitler] has had to realise that there are more forces in the world more powerful than the absolute will of a dictator”.¹³⁰

In *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, in a text signed E. H. Baxter, criticism was directed to democracy itself. Like others before, the creation of Czechoslovakia was brought into question, as it was seen as a result of when “President Wilson and Mr. Lloyd George arranged the map of Europe to their satisfaction.”¹³¹

The writer blamed the League of Nations, the No More War Movement, the Socialists and the Liberals for putting Great Britain in a situation where they “had no friends, no influence, and no certainty that we could even defend ourselves”.

¹²⁸ “Danger to Britain and France”, *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 06-10-1938, p. 8

¹²⁹ “Sir H. Page Croft’s Reply to Mr. Churchill”, *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 06-10-1938, p. 9

¹³⁰ “Opinions of the press”, *The Western Gazette*, 07-10-1938, p. 16

The heterogeneity of Czechoslovakia was also pointed out as an issue, since “democracy is not very kind to minorities.”¹³²

The Essex Chronicle published a few letters to the editor, dealing with the Munich agreement. One writer the Prime minister for his courage in securing peace, while another expressed his gratitude and payed “tribute to his wisdom and great statesmanship” calling Chamberlain “our [Britain’s] Abraham Lincoln”. Another writer criticized the agreement, writing that “Mr. Chamberlain seemed determined to save the face and prestige of Hitler” and that “the only sure way for the preservation of world peace is for the people of Britain to make a joint declaration to stand alongside the people of France, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia against Hitler’s threats...”¹³³

The Scotsman published a text, containing a report from their Parliamentary correspondent, summarizing Chamberlain’s defence of the critique that was now directed at him from, among others, Winston Churchill. The author called Chamberlain’s speech “To-day’s outstanding event”, also showing that the support of Chamberlain’s policy still had extensive support in Parliament.¹³⁴ *Western Morning News and Daily Gazette* also hinted at the wide support of Chamberlain, writing that “Mr. Churchill seemed quite surprised at the warmth of the cheering when the Prime Minister rebuked him today”.¹³⁵

The Northern Whig and Daily Gazette also shared with its readers a few letters to the editor. One of these letters questioned the underlying argument regarding the German claims on the Sudetenland.

The author argued that this claim was weak, as areas granted to the Germans through the Munich agreement never belonged to Germany, but Bohemia.¹³⁶

¹³¹ ”After Munich”, *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 07-10-1938, p. 7

¹³² ”After Munich”, *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 07-10-1938, p. 7

¹³³ ”Correspondence – Letters from our readers”, *The Essex Chronicle*, 07-10-1938, p. 7

¹³⁴ ”Premier replies to critics”, *The Scotsman*, 07-10-1938, p. 11

¹³⁵ ”Our London Letter”, *Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 07-10-1938, p. 6

¹³⁶ Bohemia had, before the creation of Czechoslovakia after the First World War, been an independent Kingdom since the 12th century.

Another letter agreed that Czechoslovakia was indeed the biggest loser of the agreement, but that the actions of Chamberlain was that “of a great realist”.¹³⁷

By this time, the division between those for and against the agreement and Chamberlain’s foreign policy, had become abundantly clear. The objective reality, that is, the support of Chamberlain in Parliament, was reported as it was, although some aspects of the debates were excluded in the reports. Letters sent to the editors of the different newspapers showed a reality where the people were deeply divided. The variation of opinions was greater, from unconditional praising of Chamberlain, to the criticism towards how Britain had betrayed Czechoslovakia and bowed to Hitler’s extortions.

¹³⁷ ”Letters to the editor”, *The Northern Whig and Daily Gazette*, 07-10-1938, p. 14

4 Conclusions

Looking at the general tendencies in the reporting during September and early October, there have been some, albeit not extensive, differences in the reporting in the different newspapers. Of course, the reports are skewed in a direction where the British perspective is dominant, especially when it comes to texts written by journalists and editors on respective newspaper. This is in no way a surprising result, and absence of such a bias would be extraordinary. A basic assumption within agenda setting theory is that the reality is, at least not fully, reported. Indeed, covering all there is to cover would be impossible, which opts media outlets to prioritize.

This process can be seen as a filtering system, which is used to filter reality, and shape it, before conveying it. In this way, the specific newspaper can control what will reach the public. Today, in a digital society, we are constantly bombarded with information from thousands and thousands of sources, and can often compose our own view of reality, based on several sources. However, in 1938, the situation was radically different. With fewer media outlets, the “power over reality” was far more concentrated.

Looking back at McCombs and Shaw, their study about how media attention affects voters can be compared to the reports written by editors and journalists, and how it affects the readers. In this way, the letters that were sometimes sent into different newspapers might also be shaped by the nature of the reporting of a specific newspaper.

Northern Whig and Belfast Post published several reports and articles where criticism of Chamberlain and his policy of appeasement was prominent. Several M.P’s critical of the agreement were quoted and the Czechoslovakian perspective was, in extension, brought to light.

The Scotsman stands out with their use of a Czechoslovakian perspective. Having their own correspondent in Prague, they offer a unique perspective on the crisis, especially during the most intense period around the end of September, when the agreement was signed.

In addition to this, several articles focusing on the imposition on Czechoslovakia were printed. This seemed to affect the readers, as many shared their criticism of the agreement. This focus, which was consistent through the crisis, and afterwards, was noticed by one of the readers, who sent a letter, criticising *The Scotsman* for publishing so much criticism towards Chamberlain.

Until the days following the signing, most newspapers were characterized by a plethora of emotions. The balance between hopes of peace and fear of war was often uncanny, as the intensity of conflict increased. The hope was based on a great belief in the diplomatic skills of Chamberlain, and the fear was based on the threatening rhetoric that had been used by Hitler. During this period, the “filtered reality” of the newspapers can be summarized by “hope for the best, prepare for the worst”. Reports and information conserving the digging of trenches and distribution of gas masks, while cheering Chamberlain’s efforts, is a clear indication of this.

Other than this, the main differences does not lie between the different newspapers, but rather between different publishing dates. The criticism towards the agreement was widely reported in almost all of the newspapers, and letters to editors often shared the criticism of different M.P’s (such as Churchill and the newly resigned Duff Cooper). The relative optimism prior to this change could perhaps be attributed to a form of “collective euphoria” among both citizens and the media, celebrating the peace brought home by their Prime Minister. It could also be a way for the media to calm down their readers, as to create tranquillity among the British people. As my analysis did not explore differences using an ideological perspective (that is, searching for differences between newspapers with different ideological standpoints), it is hard to speculate about if there is an ideological – more specifically, a patriotic or nationalistic – component which opted for the rallying behind the British Prime Minister. The fact that letters from readers often mirrored the pattern in the newspapers, the result fits in well with previous research within agenda setting.

This study have also brought forth a medial perspective on the appeasement politics of the 1930's. Despite Hitler's repeated aggressions, most notably culminating in the de-militarization of the Rhineland and the *Anschluss*, texts on the risks of future aggression was surprisingly absent. Exempted from this are those who early on reported with a Czechoslovakian perspective, such as *The Scotsman*.

The anti-Czech attitude Vít Smetana have written about is also present, albeit in a different manner. Since Smetana focused on the British parliament, where these anti-Czech attitudes were apparent, while I was focusing on media, I did not get the same results. Although many politicians were quoted in several newspapers, any anti-Czech attitudes was not put forth. Instead, such opinions are instead shared by readers. On several occasions, the very creation of Czechoslovakia was questioned, and if not that, then at least Germany had a right to the Sudetenland to "unite their race".

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6 Appendix

6.1 The Munich Agreement

Agreement concluded at Munich, September 29, 1938, between Germany, Great Britain, France and Italy

GERMANY, the United Kingdom, France and Italy, taking into consideration the agreement, which has been already reached in principle for the cession to Germany of the Sudeten German territory, have agreed on the following terms and conditions governing the said cession and the measures consequent thereon, and by this agreement they each hold themselves responsible for the steps necessary to secure its fulfilment:

- (1) The evacuation will begin on 1st October.
- (2) The United Kingdom, France and Italy agree that the evacuation of the territory shall be completed by the 10th October, without any existing installations having been destroyed, and that the Czechoslovak Government will be held responsible for carrying out the evacuation without damage to the said installations.
- (3) The conditions governing the evacuation will be laid down in detail by an international commission composed of representatives of Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Czechoslovakia.
- (4) The occupation by stages of the predominantly German territory by German troops will begin on 1st October. The four territories marked on the attached map will be occupied by German troops in the following order:

The territory marked No. I on the 1st and 2nd of October; the territory marked No. II on the 2nd and 3rd of October; the territory marked No. III on the 3rd, 4th and 5th of October; the territory marked No. IV on the 6th and 7th of October. The remaining territory of preponderantly German character will be ascertained by the aforesaid international commission forthwith and be occupied by German troops by the 10th of October.

(5) The international commission referred to in paragraph 3 will determine the territories in which a plebiscite is to be held. These territories will be occupied by international bodies until the plebiscite has been completed. The same commission will fix the conditions in which the plebiscite is to be held, taking as a basis the conditions of the Saar plebiscite. The commission will also fix a date, not later than the end of November, on which the plebiscite will be held.

(6) The final determination of the frontiers will be carried out by the international commission. The commission will also be entitled to recommend to the four Powers, Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy, in certain exceptional cases, minor modifications in the strictly ethnographical determination of the zones which are to be transferred without plebiscite.

(7) There will be a right of option into and out of the transferred territories, the option to be exercised within six months from the date of this agreement. A German-Czechoslovak commission shall determine the details of the option, consider ways of facilitating the transfer of population and settle questions of principle arising out of the said transfer.

(8) The Czechoslovak Government will within a period of four weeks from the date of this agreement release from their military and police forces any Sudeten Germans who may wish to be released, and the Czechoslovak Government will within the same period release Sudeten German prisoners who are serving terms of imprisonment for political offences.

Munich, September 29, 1938.

ADOLF HITLER,

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN,

EDOUARD DALADIER,

BENITO MUSSOLINI.

6.2 Sudetenland



Sudeten area marked with stripes