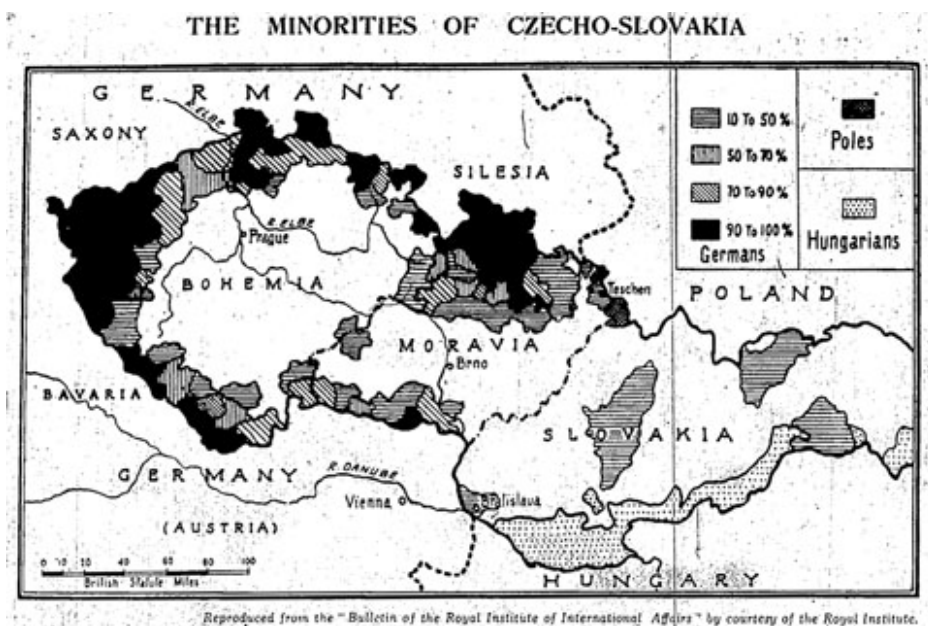


POST-BLOGGING

THE SUDETEN CRISIS

The British Press, August-October 1938

BRETT HOLMAN



Contents

Preface	1
1 Post-blogging the Sudeten crisis	2
2 Monday, 29 August 1938	3
3 Tuesday, 30 August 1938	6
4 Wednesday, 31 August 1938	9
5 Thursday, 1 September 1938	12
6 Friday, 2 September 1938	15
7 Saturday, 3 September 1938	18
8 Monday, 5 September 1938	21
9 Tuesday, 6 September 1938	24
10 Wednesday, 7 September 1938	26
11 Thursday, 8 September 1938	30
12 Friday, 9 September 1938	33
13 Saturday, 10 September 1938	36
14 Monday, 12 September 1938	40
15 Tuesday, 13 September 1938	44
16 Wednesday, 14 September 1938	48

17 Thursday, 15 September 1938	52
18 Friday, 16 September 1938	56
19 Saturday, 17 September 1938	59
20 Monday, 19 September 1938	63
21 Tuesday, 20 September 1938	68
22 Wednesday, 21 September 1938	72
23 Thursday, 22 September 1938	75
24 Friday, 23 September 1938	80
25 Saturday, 24 September 1938	84
26 Monday, 26 September 1938	88
27 Tuesday, 27 September 1938	92
28 Wednesday, 28 September 1938	97
29 Thursday, 29 September 1938	102
30 Friday, 30 September 1938	108
31 Saturday, 1 October 1938	112
32 Monday, 3 October 1938	118
33 Tuesday, 4 October 1938	122
34 Wednesday, 5 October 1938	126
35 Thursday, 6 October 1938	129
36 Friday, 7 October 1938	133
37 Saturday, 8 October 1938	136
38 Post-blogging the Sudeten crisis: thoughts and conclusions	139
Index	142

Preface

This is a PDF version of a series of blog posts I wrote in 2008 about the 1938 Sudeten (or Munich) crisis. The originals can be found at <http://airminded.org/archives/sudeten-crisis/>. My intention was to present a day-by-day view of the crisis as it unfolded in the British press (meaning, for the most part, *The Times*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Manchester Guardian*), and so minimise the effects of hindsight to some degree. To make the posts more accessible for academic and educational use, I've assembled them here in one place. I haven't altered the text (except for some light editing and to fix typos) and so its blogging origins are still obvious. However, for reader's comments you'll have to go back to the primary sources.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

The key point is that this document is free for non-commercial use. If you find it useful or have any suggestions, I'd appreciate if you let me know.

Brett Holman

19 July 2010

web: airminded.org

email: bholman@airminded.org

twitter: [@Airminded](https://twitter.com/Airminded)

Chapter 1

Post-blogging the Sudeten crisis

Tomorrow I'm starting a bit of an experiment, an idea I had after doing a post on [Human Smoke](#) a few months back. We're coming up on the 70th anniversary of the Sudeten crisis, which, as [I noted recently](#), was a crisis long before Munich had anything to do with it. *Long* before. The [Munich Conference](#) was on 29 September 1938, but the Sudeten issue was already prominent in British newspapers a full month earlier, and didn't start to fade until early October.

So, what I thought I'd do is put up a post every day showing how the crisis was unfolding in the press on the same date 70 years ago. Hopefully this will convey something of the steady rise – and sharp decline – of tension: from concern, to anxiety, to fear, to intense relief. I'll start with 29 August 1938 and go through to 8 October (six days out of every seven, at least – I haven't looked at any Sunday papers), and will draw on *The Times*, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily Mail*, as well as a couple of weeklies, the *Spectator* and the *New Statesman*. (George Orwell started keeping [his diary](#) in early August 1938, so I'll be keeping an eye out for his thoughts on the crisis too.) I'm not exactly sure how I'll write the posts, but they won't be very dense, at least at first: maybe just the headlines, to show what a [not-particularly interested reader](#) might pick up just by flicking the pages. We'll see how it evolves.

This means that my more usual fare will be thin on the ground for the next 5 or 6 weeks, so apologies to those wanting more aeroplanes and bombs!

Chapter 2

Monday, 29 August 1938

BRITISH MOVES IN THE CZECH CRISIS

Ministers to Meet To-morrow

BERLIN AMBASSADOR CALLED TO LONDON

Lord Runciman Sees Henlein

The three most important developments in the Czech-German crisis are—

Mr. Neville Chamberlain has called a meeting of Ministers for to-morrow.

Sir Neville Henderson, the British Ambassador in Berlin, returned to London yesterday, and will meet the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, to-day.

Lord Runciman, the British mediator in Czecho-Slovakia, sent an urgent request to Herr Henlein, the leader of the Sudeten Germans, to call on him at the castle in Bohemia of Prince Clery, where he spent the week-end. Herr Henlein at once went to the castle, where Mr. Newton, British Minister in Prague, was also a guest. The interview lasted about two hours, and Lord Runciman afterwards returned to Prague.

Figure 2.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 29 August 1938, p. 9.

The Sudeten crisis (or Czech crisis, or Czech-German crisis as it is called here) wasn't front-page news in the *Manchester Guardian* on 29 August – it was on page 9. But that was actually where most newspapers put the most important news. Compared with those of today, British newspapers

of the 1930s and before seem to be inside out. The first few pages would have classified ads, then there might be sport, then domestic news. Then, in the middle spread, easy to find when you open the paper, would be the index, leading articles (editorials) and other commentary on the left-hand side, and the major news of the day on the right. (This particular issue had 16 pages, so the leaders were on page 8 and the news on page 9.) Then, on following pages, there might be foreign news, business news, and letters to the editor on the last page. So the Sudeten crisis wasn't front-page news, it was middle-page news!

So, here we see that there is already fairly intense diplomatic activity going on. [Neville Chamberlain](#), the Conservative prime minister (though leading a coalition National Government) is to meet with his ministers (those who were 'available': it was the end of summer and Parliament was in recess, so not everyone was around. Chamberlain himself had just returned from Hampshire). The ambassador to Germany, Sir [Neville Henderson](#) (a pro-German – always what you want in an ambassador to Germany), has been recalled for discussions. And [Konrad Henlein](#) met with [Lord Runciman](#) on the weekend. Runciman was a former Liberal MP and minister who had been sent by Chamberlain (albeit in an unofficial capacity) to mediate between the [Sudeten](#) minority and the Czechoslovakian government after an earlier crisis. He was known to favour the Sudetens. Henlein was always described as the leader of the Sudeten Germans, but he was actually leader of the Sudeten German Party, which was not the same thing since the Sudetens did not have autonomy. Indeed, autonomy is ostensibly what Henlein was seeking on behalf of the Sudetens.

Related stories on this page (the above headlines take up about a quarter of the width) are:

Sir J. Simon's Warning

Sir [John Simon](#) was the Chancellor of the Exchequer (treasurer), and a former Foreign Secretary. On the weekend he had given a speech in Lanark, where he repeated a statement made by Chamberlain earlier in the year to the effect that if a war started over the Sudeten issue, nobody could predict which countries might become involved. Which sounds bland today, but seems to have been correctly interpreted as a threat by the German press. On the other hand, the French would have liked something a bit more definite.

AMBASSADOR'S HURRIED JOURNEY

Situation Regarded as "Particularly Grave"

More on Henderson. His deputy was away on holiday, so he had to leave the embassy in the hands of a relatively junior diplomat – a sure sign of urgency.

SIR JOHN SIMON’S “GOOD INTENTIONS”

Italian press reaction to Simon’s speech – OK, it was seen as fairly bland there too.

LORD RUNCIMAN ACTIVE

Czechs’ New Terms

GERMANY’S SEARCH FOR “INCIDENTS”

The Latest “Atrocity”

From the central European correspondent. Not actually much about Runciman, more about a minor street skirmish between Sudetens and Czechs in [Leitmeritz](#), but little damage was done. The Czechoslovakian government is reported to be considering a plan to add 23 (somewhat more) autonomous departments to the country’s administrative structure, some of which would be German in character.

TRYING TO MAKE THE CZECHS APPEAR AS AGGRESSORS

Explanation of Hitler’s Tactics

OPPOSITION OF GERMAN PEOPLE TO AGGRESSIVE WAR

The diplomatic correspondent explains why Germany is trying so hard to make the Czechs appear to be the aggressors: because the German people don’t want war. (Which was true.)

There is also related news on page 12 (the text of Simon’s speech, and Henlein’s demands) and page 13 (more on German and French press reactions, and German support for the Sudetens).

It’s not really clear from this issue of the *Manchester Guardian* just why this is a crisis, or at least why it is one that involves Britain in any way. Or why Simon felt the need to mention the W word. And Germany itself doesn’t appear to be doing much that is threatening right now. A casual (or non-) follower of foreign affairs at the time might have been confused too. Perhaps the next day’s news will make things clearer?

Chapter 3

Tuesday, 30 August 1938

**THE SUDETEN
PROBLEM**

**A FRESH MOVE IN
PRAGUE**

**BENESH-HENLEIN
MEETING**

LONDON ACTIVITY

**MINISTERS CONFER
TO-DAY**

Figure 3.1: *The Times*, 30 August 1938, p. 10.

There is some hopeful news today, resulting from the flurry of activity of *yesterday*. From *The Times*, p. 10:

It became known in London late last night that, as the result of Lord Runciman's intervention, Dr. Benesh, the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, will receive to-day Herr Henlein, the leader of the Sudeten Germans. It is likely that other Sudeten representatives will accompany Herr Henlein. The importance of the meeting is clear, and it may well decide whether or not the negotiations between the Czechoslovak Government and Herr Henlein's party are to be resumed and on what basis.

So here we meet Dr. [Edvard Beneš](#), President of Czechoslovakia since 1935, a very well-known and sympathetic character in the West: he had represented his country at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, and been its foreign minister for most of the period since then. How fruitful this meeting will be depends on the good faith of Beneš and Henlein as much as their respective positions. But the French press is reported to be ‘more optimistic as to the prospect of an undisturbed autumn in consequence of this [British] activity’. The newspaper’s special correspondent in Prague says that there are no jingoistic feelings among the Sudetens themselves, who know they would bear the brunt of any war. Prague itself is very calm.

But there is still cause for uneasiness. The Berlin correspondent reports hostile feelings towards Britain: ‘Germans profess to be unable to understand why the British, who have long admitted the right to self-determination, should deny that right to the Sudeten Germans’. Hitler has toured his country’s fortifications on the French border, which are being ‘pushed forward at great speed’ by more than 400,000 labour conscripts. The Prague correspondent reports on his conversation with a fatalistic barber:

“Yes,” he said, “the situation is bad. Mind you, not only in Czechoslovakia – [Spain](#), [China](#), everywhere. But we are ready. A man can only die once, sooner or later.” I said I hoped it would be later. “Well,” he said, “we’ll see.”

The *Manchester Guardian*’s London correspondent, p. 8, notes that Londoners, too, are becoming absorbed by the crisis, after initially having been ill-served by the ‘ostrich press’:

But this week one observes quite a different note in people’s voices when they discuss the threat to peace, and all conversations, personal or business, now turn in the end to that.

One question that is often asked is, why would Hitler bring this crisis to the brink of war if that would mean having to fight three ‘Great Powers’? (Presumably meaning Britain, France, and the Soviet Union.) And will the German people unite behind him if it does come to war?

The general reply given was that the German people, having hardly any access to objective news because of its Government press and wireless, can only know what they are allowed to hear, and in any case, if they do not like the dictator’s actions, how can they protest or even express doubts in the hearing of an informer?

There's clearly an acute awareness here of the unfree nature of Nazi society, which is implicitly and unfavourably contrasted with Britain. Which is a little ironic given that when it came to foreign affairs, the British press was itself, in general, slavishly supportive of Chamberlain's appeasement policy: even those newspapers which otherwise opposed him politically, such as the Labour *Daily Herald* and the Liberal *Manchester Guardian* itself. (See Richard Cockett, *Twilight of Truth: Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989.) But this understanding doubtless motivated the hope of an (unfortunately unnamed) American journalist that if war did come, that 'the first thing the other Powers would do would be to drop pamphlets all over Germany, telling the Germans why it was happening and what the issue was' – exactly what was done just over [a year later](#), although without any appreciable result as far as encouraging war resistance goes.

Chapter 4

Wednesday, 31 August 1938

**BRITAIN AND
THE CZECHS**

**THE MEETING OF
MINISTERS**

FULL AGREEMENT

**U.S. AMBASSADOR
AT NO. 10**

A special meeting of Ministers was held in London yesterday in connexion with the Czechoslovak-German crisis. It was officially stated that Ministers were in entire agreement with the action already taken and the policy to be pursued in the future.

Mr. Chamberlain and Sir John Simon have left London, but Lord Halifax is remaining.

Sir Neville Henderson, British Ambassador to Germany, is returning to Berlin this afternoon fully informed of the British Government's views.

President Benesh had a conversation in Prague yesterday with Herr Kundt and Herr Sebekowsky, two of the Sudeten leaders.

Figure 4.1: *The Times*, 31 August 1938, p. 10.

Not a lot of news today – at least, not a lot of new news. As the above headlines from *The Times*, p. 10, show, the meetings which were announced on **Monday** and which took place on **Tuesday** have, er, taken place, but no public statements have been made about what transpired in them, other than

that everyone concerned is agreed that Britain's policy should be remain unchanged. There's support too, from the Prime Minister of Australia, [Joseph Lyons](#). The Canadian Minister of National Defence, [Ian Mackenzie](#) rather embarrassingly gushes that the British 'are sleepless sentinels on the frontiers of freedom [...] There is nothing more magnificent in history'.

The Sudeten crisis isn't the only thing going on in the world, of course, but it's very big. As the eye runs across the top of this page, five out of seven of the major headlines (other than than the ones shown above) relate to the crisis in some way:

**NAZI CRITICISM OF BRITAIN
WRONG TACTICS FOR PEACE
CZECH CONCESSIONS DENIED**

'Official circles' (meaning Nazis? Diplomats? Both?) are still smarting over Sir John Simon's weekend speech, and the suggestions in the British press that violent incidents between Sudetens and Czechs are being exaggerated are resented. The British government would do well to let the Czechs know that it will not support them unconditionally; the latter seem to have the idea that all they need to do is put off the Sudetens with promises until Britain has finished its rearmament programme and then they will be able to ignore them.

**TURNING POINT IN PRAGUE
THE NEW PLAN
DR. BENESH MEETS THE SUDETENS**

Yet more meetings without any real news. Dr. [Milan Hodza](#), the Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia (where everyone seems to be a doctor!), will make 'a full statement on the nationalities problem' tomorrow.

**CLOSING IN ON HANKOW
JAPANESE MOVE FORWARD
HEAVY AIR RAID**

[Hankow](#) looks to be in trouble. The air-minded reader will have noticed the reference to an air raid:

According to Chinese reports 1,000 people were killed or wounded when 50 Japanese aeroplanes dropped 200 bombs on the small town of Kingshan, 80 miles north-west of Hankow, starting many fires, which are still raging.

Bombing is all the rage at the moment. A couple of small articles on the previous page (p. 9) reported that Republican-held [Alicante](#) and [Valencia](#) were bombed yesterday, as was Nationalist-held [Ceuta](#), though there were only a handful of casualties between them. The *Manchester Guardian* notes (p. 8) that publication of a report into an earlier bombing of Alicante and Barcelona is imminent. while a photo on the back page (p. 16) of the *Daily Mail* shows a group of Chinese girls and a Salvation Army worker undertaking rescue work in the ruins of a bombed-out building in [Canton](#).

STOCK MARKETS RECOVERY U.S. DOLLAR ABOVE OLD PARITY

The stock markets referred to here are the City's, i.e. London. The reason for the recovery is the relatively hopeful news about the international situation (not sure what that news was, but I suppose that jaw-jaw is better than war-war), though it came too late to prevent sterling from taking a beating.

SOVIET NAVAL PURGE SHOT ADMIRALS EVERY FLEET LOSES ITS COMMANDER

This happened a few months ago, but it has taken a while for the Naval Ministry to admit that they'd carelessly lost all of their high-ranking officers in a purge. The reason given is that the 'traitors and wreckers' had advocated a purely defensive navy, when it is self-evident that the Red Fleet should have an offensive capability.

The crisis is the subject of leading articles in *The Times*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Manchester Guardian* today. The first two say that the Czech government must make concessions to the Sudeten minority. The *Guardian* concentrates on Germany (p. 8):

there are two things we would like to have both the German Government and the German people know: that in the opinion of this country there is no shadow of a reason why peaceful negotiations should be abandoned for force and that the use of force would in all probability not be "local" (Spain and the Far East are no analogy) but would almost certainly lead to the unspeakable calamity of a wider war from which we should find ourselves unable to stand aloof.

Hopefully somebody in Berlin is paying attention.

Chapter 5

Thursday, 1 September 1938



**SUDETEN GERMANS CONSIDERING
REPLY TO CZECHS**

Party Executive to Meet To-day

**LEADERS IMPRESSED BY NEW
PLAN'S POSSIBILITIES**

Restrained Optimism in Prague

Figure 5.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 1 September 1938, p. 9.

Things seem to be looking up, judging from today's headlines in the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 9). The plan proposed by the Czechs **yesterday** is said to have 'impressed' the Sudetens. The plan itself is still a mystery to the public, but *The Times* has a few details (p. 12):

In many ways – in particular in its proposal for self-administrative cantons – it closely resembles the old Minorities Law of 1920, never brought fully into effect. However, a greater number of cantons (*départements* is probably an apter word) is now proposed. In 1920 there were to have been 52,

of which only two would have been more than four-fifths German. Now the *départements* are to be smaller, in order that the line between Czech and German districts may be drawn more accurately and the German control may be wider.

No one dares hope too much yet of the German reply, but here is a sound basis of discussion could they accept it. Clearly the cantons would need much new administration, and German prefects and officials would naturally be chosen for the German districts. The Army and gendarmerie would remain under the Central Government, but education, social services, and a substantial measure of finance would be under the cantonal administration.

Will that be enough? On the same page, there's a summary of Henlein's demands, as outlined in his Carlsbad speech of 24 April:

The restoration of complete equality between Czechs and Germans in the State.

The recognition of the Sudeten Germans as a legal personality.

The determination and recognition of the German region within the State.

Full self-government for the German region.

Legal protection for Sudeten Germans who live beyond this region.

The removal of injustices inflicted on the Sudeten Germans since 1918, and the reparation for the injury caused thereby.

Recognition and carrying through the principle that German districts should have German officials.

Full liberty to profess German nationality and the German political philosophy.

Speaking of the 'German political philosophy', as the central Europe correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* emphasises (p. 9) 'the final decision does not rest with the Sudetens themselves but with Herr Hitler'. And he is reported (p. 9) to be planning a major speech on foreign policy during the upcoming Nuremberg rally, on 12 September. That's a whole 11 days away, which seems a long time to wait for a (possible) resolution to a world crisis. But this was before internet time.

The *Daily Mail* has a leading article (p. 10) calling for maximum freedom for minorities in Czechoslovakia in order to satisfy German desires, along with an international guarantee of the country's borders. On the other hand, Czechoslovakia 'is an artificial State – the jig-saw construction of the Peace Treaties' and will always be an irritant to Europe.

That Europe should be brought to the brink of war on account of the present untenable situation of Czecho-Slovakia is madness. A conflict in such a cause is only conceivable if the nations hold the despairing belief that war is inevitable, and that it might just as well be fought on this issue as on any other.

So the *Daily Mail* is taking a brave stand against war, at least as far as Czechoslovakia is concerned.

Chapter 6

Friday, 2 September 1938

HENLEIN SEES HITLER

CZECH PROPOSAL DISCUSSED

LORD RUNCIMAN'S PART

A CRUCIAL DAY

Herr Henlein, the Sudeten German leader, yesterday visited Herr Hitler at Berchtesgaden. The visit is understood to have had Lord Runciman's encouragement.

When Herr Henlein reached Berchtesgaden Herr Hitler was in conference with Field-Marshal Göring, Dr. Goebbels, and Herr Hess.

Herr von Ribbentrop is expected to visit Berchtesgaden to-day.

Figure 6.1: *The Times*, 2 September 1938, p. 12.

As these headlines from *The Times* (p. 12) report, it's 'a crucial day', because Henlein is meeting with Hitler at [Berchtesgaden](#) to discuss the Czechoslovakian autonomy proposals; and everyone assumes that Hitler will have final say over whether the Sudetens will accept or reject them,

as noted in the *Manchester Guardian* yesterday. Otherwise, there's not much to report. As *The Times* says of the Runciman mission's activities yesterday, 'It was a time to wait and a time to keep silence – until the German answer should be known.'

This being a Friday, there's a new issue of the weekly *Spectator* out. (Actually, I'm not sure that it was actually on the streets on Friday, but that's what's written on the masthead.) Its first leading article is devoted (p. 356) to the Sudeten crisis, and the first paragraph is not very reassuring:

THE FATE OF EUROPE

THERE can be no sane person in these islands who does not realise that within a space to be measured rather by weeks than by months – perhaps rather by days than by weeks – Great Britain may find herself at war. Alarming though that statement is it is not alarmist. It is implicit in every syllable of the references to the present international situation in Sir John Simon's speech on Saturday. That speech reaffirmed, on the basis of deep deliberation between the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the Prime Minister had said, after deep deliberation by the Cabinet, five months before, and the Cabinet added its confirmation this week. If Germany resorts to force against Czechoslovakia, if France and Russia honour their obligations and go to Czechoslovakia's aid, if in consequence France and Germany are at war, the arguments in favour of our joining France in arms may well seem irresistible. Nothing less than the fate of Europe is at stake.

But the dailies today seem more interested in the report of the British commission investigating the bombing of Alicante and Barcelona and elsewhere in Spain, which was foreshadowed on *Wednesday*. The conclusion was, as a leader in the *Manchester Guardian* put it (p. 8): 'in general the rebel [Nationalist] Air Force is entirely indifferent to the fate of the civilian population, and in certain circumstances the civilian population is actually the object of the attack'. The report into these outrages are not linked by these papers to the Sudeten crisis in any way; it's just stuff that was happening at the same time, and I mention it because (a) readers may have linked the two in their own minds, particularly since there's also talk of war between Germany and Britain is and (b) it's the sort of thing that interests me anyway. But sometimes similar bits of news were associated with the crisis, such as the following brief article, which was appended (p. 12) to

a column from *The Times*'s Berlin correspondent on the Berchtesgaden meeting and press attitudes to Czechoslovakia in Germany:

BERLIN A.R.P.

To-night and to-morrow night the authorities are testing the anti-aircraft defences of the Reich capital. Guns were mounted this morning on the roofs of public buildings, including the Reichstag, and manned by their crews. It is supposed that mock air raids will be staged during the night, but there is no black-out nor have residents been instructed to get into the cellars when the sirens sound.

There's not even a horizontal divider between the two stories, so they are probably actually one article.

Chapter 7

Saturday, 3 September 1938

HITLER AND HENLEIN

—
“IDENTITY OF
VIEWS”

—
LOOKING TO LORD
RUNCIMAN

GAP NARROWED

Herr Henlein met Herr Hitler at Berchtesgaden yesterday, when the negotiations between the Czechoslovak Government and the Sudeten Germans were reviewed.

In Prague Dr. Benesh, the President, had a long meeting with Sudeten German leaders.

Our Special Correspondent in Prague says the feeling is a little more hopeful. The gap between the two points of view, Government and German, has been narrowed.

Figure 7.1: *The Times*, 3 September 1938, p. 10.

More good news, or at least that's how it is presented. The dailies today all have pretty similar headlines to those from *The Times*, above (p. 10), but their stories differ in detail. Henlein has met with Hitler and it would seem that they agreed that the Sudetens should negotiate with the Czechs on

the basis of Henlein's [previously-announced](#) demands, but without either accepting or rejecting the Czech autonomy plan. The *Manchester Guardian* thinks (p. 11) that Henlein is to present specific counter-proposals, and the *Daily Mail* says (p. 9) that Henlein has already done so in a meeting with Beneš. No details are given of these counter-proposals, but all three seem to agree that Henlein and Hitler are genuinely interested in reaching a compromise with Beneš. Such faith seems touchingly naive today, with the benefit of hindsight. Here's another example, from *The Times*:

National-Socialist circles here think that he [Hitler] would propose a "reasonable" solution and there would be no hasty unilateral measures. The Reich, while determined to force a settlement, is, they say, desirous of doing so by methods which will not compromise future relations with England and France. In fact she wants a settlement which can be the starting point of real European collaboration.

The danger, it is pointed out, that a situation may develop in Czechoslovakia which may compel Herr Hitler to act regardless of what is thought in London and Paris. The German newspapers' reports of alleged ill-treatment of Sudeten Germans must already have made a painful impression on his mind and inclined him to lend a willing ear to those more adventurous Nazi circles who, in the belief that France cannot and England will not do anything, hold that Germany need not be deterred by fear of war from settling the Czechoslovak question by direct and independent action.

The view here is of Hitler as somebody who does not want war, but who cares about the German people, including the Sudetens, and may be forced by the pressure of events to act, reluctantly, to protect them by the use of force. It's hard to square this with what we now know of Hitler as a deeply cynical and manipulative warmonger, but it must be remembered that so many of the events which define Nazi Germany for us today still lay ahead ([Kristallnacht](#), for example, was still two months away). He's not yet the Hitler we know, as far as the outside world is concerned.

More talk of military preparations today. The *Manchester Guardian* claims (p. 11) that Germany has carried out 'something more than a normal mobilisation', while the *Daily Mail* reports (p. 9) that Czech army and police units have been moving into the Carlsbad region of the Sudetenland, including 'heavy tanks' and 'heavy long-range artillery'. Yet, according to [Kingsley Martin](#), writing (p. 338) as 'Critic' in the *New Statesman* (a

Saturday publication), ‘The general public has only just begun to wake up to the danger’. This seems odd given that the papers have been going on about the crisis all week; and the *Manchester Guardian* reported on **Tuesday** that Londoners were talking about it even then. Maybe Martin moved in different circles (the people he quotes are ‘country people’ and date from the previous weekend). Or maybe people are getting bored of a week of ‘crisis’ without anything much actually happening?

Chapter 8

Monday, 5 September 1938

**UNCERTAINTY
IN PRAGUE**
—
MANY MEETINGS
—
**THE BERCHTESGADEN
DECISIONS**
—
**BRITISH MISSION
INFORMED**
—
**THE SHADOW OF
NUREMBERG**

Figure 8.1: *The Times*, 5 September 1938, p. 12.

So, we're into the second week of the crisis (or rather, the second week for which I have newspaper sources), and as these headlines from *The Times* indicate (p. 12), the public still doesn't have much idea as to what's going on. Just that there have been lots of meetings over the weekend. The leading article gives a good summary (p. 13):

NEGOTIATIONS CONTINUE

Discussion of the Czech-German problem in Bohemia has been actively continued during the week-end. LORD RUNCIMAN had a meeting with PRESIDENT BENESH on Saturday, and

yesterday MR. ASHTON-GWATKIN conferred with HERR HENLEIN at his home near the German frontier. DR. KUNDT and HERR SEBEKOWSKY, the two other Sudeten leaders, had a four-hour talk with PRESIDENT BENESH on Friday and DR. KUNDT saw DR. HODZA, the Prime Minister, on Saturday.

But, after all that, no news, just more speculation. The leading article in the *Manchester Guardian* cautions (p. 8) against an optimistic reading of [Friday's](#) meeting between Hitler and Henlein, upon the (still unknown) outcome of which so much depends:

There was complete “unanimity.” It is natural, so much do we all loathe the idea of war, to interpret a conventional, ambiguous phrase in three soothing propositions: that Henlein is a “moderate” attached to peace, that Hitler agreed with him, and that therefore “moderation” is to be the word. It would be equally just (and more probable) to say that Hitler is an extremist believing in force, that Henlein agreed with him (he had better), and that therefore the outlook is bad.

I suggested in the [previous post](#) that we shouldn't be too hard on those observers who still gave Hitler (and Henlein) the benefit of the doubt, but we see here that there were certainly those who had a lot of doubt. The *Manchester Guardian* was a liberal paper, not as [radical](#) as it had been thirty years earlier, perhaps, but still generally opposed to the use of force (or threats of force) in international affairs.

The other interesting thing today is the opening of the [Trades Union Congress](#) at [Blackpool](#). The *Manchester Guardian* suggests (p. 12) that later in the week, Czechoslovakia will become a major issue, and that the TUC is likely to call for a recall of Parliament, so that Chamberlain can explain what diplomatic steps Britain is taking to resolve the crisis. A taste of unionist anger comes from John Marchbank, General Secretary of the [National Union of Railwaymen](#), addressing a TUC demonstration:

The step that should be taken is that Britain, France, Russia and America should make it clear to Hitler that any attempt to coerce the Czecho-Slovakian Government or to weaken in any way its democratic position will be resisted, and that the four countries should stand by her in her rights for democratic government. We have never acknowledged and never will admit the right of any single man, be he crowned the head of a State

or a leader or a dictator ruling by force or by terror, to make war the instrument of his policy. Against such dictatorships we preach the divine right of revolution. Neither do we afford to any Government the authority to pursue policies which must culminate in war.

However, Marchbank did accept the need to rearm for self-defence and to restrain aggression. The attitude of trade unions was important, for in theory they had the ability to cripple the economy just as surely as a knock-out blow ... even if that didn't work so well [in practice](#).

Chapter 9

Tuesday, 6 September 1938



Figure 9.1: *Daily Mail*, 6 September 1938, p. 9.

Apologies for the fairly ordinary quality of the above (it's a scan of a photocopy of a microfilm of the original ...) but it illustrates a problem with relying on headlines for information, as I'm sure some people did back then as they do today. It's from the *Daily Mail*, p. 9, and you can immediately see the difference in style to the other papers I've been using: the headlines are bigger, bolder, more 'modern'. They are also a bit alarming. Final concessions ... decision at midnight ... France recalls reservists! But while the concessions are 'believed to represent the final limit of concessions the Czechs intend to make, regardless of any pressure which may be put upon them from any quarter', they are also described by Ralph Izzard (the *Daily Mail* was also up-to-date in giving its reporters their own byline, instead of, e.g., 'our correspondent') as 'very generous [...] almost complete acceptance, as a basis for negotiation, of Herr Henlein's eight Carlsbad demands'. The decision at midnight is just when the Czech leaders ended their meeting, not a deadline for acceptance of an ultimatum.

So that seems positive enough, although it would seem that events are moving towards a conclusion, whatever that will be.

I seem to have misplaced my hardcopy, so I don't have the text for the French reservists to hand, but an article in the *The Times* says (p. 12) that, as a precaution, the French Council of Ministers has recalled some reservists (*not* whole classes: it's not a full mobilisation) in order to bring the Maginot Line up to strength, especially its technical units. Also, all leave has been cancelled. This is a reaction to the German maneuvers on the other side of the border, as well as to the general international situation, though as to that, the official French communique, 'the general situation seems to be moving towards an appreciable *détente*'.

The *Manchester Guardian's* diplomatic correspondent reports (p. 9) from London that:

The crisis, according to the view taken here, would seem to be approaching its most critical stage. There is reason to believe that Hitler has not yet decided between peace and war. The military precautions taken by France are regarded with full approval.

The attitude of Italy is unknown. The recent imposition of anti-Semitic measures may be designed to impress Arab opinion, but it could also be that they designed to impress German opinion. Mussolini is reported to be looking upon Tunis (a French city) as 'a sort of African "Sudetenland"', since there are many Italians living there. So Britain is taking 'certain precautions in the Mediterranean'.

Chapter 10

Wednesday, 7 September 1938

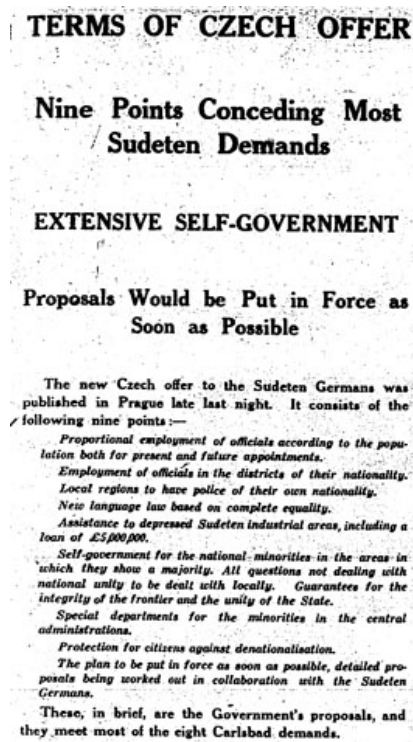


Figure 10.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 7 September 1938, p. 9.

At last, after all the endless reports of meetings to seemingly no end: actual details! As the above – from the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 9) – shows, the Czech autonomy proposals (first reported **yesterday**) were pretty generous. The Sudetens (and presumably other minorities) would get self-

government, language equality, their own civil servants and police. I'm not sure what the 'Protection for citizens against denationalization' means – more likely something about the right to a passport than maintaining state ownership of industry!

The proposals also include 'Guarantees for the integrity of the frontier and the unity of the State', which seems reasonable enough. But a (later to become infamous) [leading article](#) in *The Times* suggests an alternative (p. 13):

In that case it might be worth while for the Czechoslovak Government to consider whether they should exclude altogether the project, which has found favour in some quarters, of making Czechoslovakia a more homogeneous State by the secession of that fringe of alien populations who are contiguous to the nation with which they are united by race. In any case the wishes of the population concerned would seem to be a decisively important element in any solution that can hope to be regarded as permanent, and the advantages to Czechoslovakia of becoming a homogeneous State might conceivably outweigh the obvious disadvantages of losing the Sudeten German districts of the borderland.

There it is: the first time (at least in my sources) that the idea of the annexation of the Sudetenland by Germany – the solution eventually adopted at Munich – was raised in the British press. *The Times* was often thought, somewhat unfairly, to be especially close to the British government, so a suggestion like this will make people sit up and take notice.

One sign that the nation is starting to become preoccupied with the crisis is the way in which it is starting to appear more frequently in the letter columns. There are no less than four letters about the crisis in today's *Manchester Guardian* (p. 18). One urges Britain and France to stand firm and support Czechoslovakia, another disdains the idea that Europe should be plunged into war just so France can honour its treaties. A third draws on personal contacts with Germans to argue that they would be unwilling to fight for the Sudetenland, and the last claims that Hitler has no interest in the welfare of the Sudeten Germans, but rather wants to destroy Czechoslovakia's unity, as it stands between him and the Balkans. Overall, the mood is against appeasement, but it's impossible to generalise from these examples to any conclusions about public opinion as a whole, because they are not random selections: only particularly interested people would have taken the trouble to write, and then an editor would have chosen which ones were published. (*The Times* tried to print a representative

sample, but even then that's only of the letters it received, of course.) But it all goes into the mix. Here's another data point, overheard today by [George Orwell](#) from an English resident at Gibraltar (where Orwell's ship docked on its way to Morocco):

It's coming right enough. Hitler's going to have Czecho-Slovakia all right. If he doesn't get it now he'll go on and on till he does. Better let him have it at once. We shall be ready by 1941.

So here appeasement is seen as buying time for British rearmament.

Finally, a couple of backgrounders, which are probably as useful to us today as they were to readers back then! First, a map of the minorities of Czechoslovakia from the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 13). The black bits are 90-100% Sudeten German.



Figure 10.2: *Manchester Guardian*, 7 September 1938, p. 13.

And secondly, from the *Daily Mail* (p. 8), a timeline of the evolution of the crisis, from the [Anschluss](#) in March up until yesterday:

ABC of CZECHO-SLOVAKIA

HOW did the present crisis in Czecho-Slovakia start?

Everyone knows that Czecho-Slovakia was established as an independent State in October 1918, incorporating six different races comprising: 7,000,000 Czechs, 2,500,000 Slovaks, 3,500,000 Germans, 750,000 Hungarians, 500,000 Ruthenians, and 100,000 Poles.

But what about Now?
Here is an A B C of events starting with the day last Spring when Hitler occupied Austria.

March 11.—German troops march into Austria.

March 12.—Hitler crosses frontier; arrives Linz, Upper Austria.

March 13.—Sudeten Germans, who for years had been pressing for national concessions immediately, under their leader, Konrad Henlein, become more menacing in their demands from Czech Government.

March 15.—Henlein claims new elections.
March 28.—Dr. Milan Hodza, Czech Premier, offers new Charter of Rights for the minorities in the country.

April 1.—Sudeten Germans react unfavourably to this offer.

April 24.—Henlein in a speech at Carlsbad openly rejects Hodza's offer, makes famous eight demands from Czechs, including full equality of status for Germans, self-government, reparation for all damage suffered by Sudetens since 1918.

April 27.—Czech Government decides Henlein's demands cannot be accepted as basis for negotiation, but expresses willingness to discuss minorities question.

Visits to London

April 28.—M. Daladier, French Premier, and M. Bonnet, French Foreign Minister, meet Mr. Chamberlain in London, discuss Czech situation.

April 30.—Dr. Benes, Czech President, advised unofficially to go to the limit of reasonable concessions to Sudetens.

May 1.—Benes sends Hitler good wishes on Germany's day of national celebration.

May 4.—Hitler thanks Czechs.

May 6.—British and French Ministers in Prague call on M. Krofta, Czech Foreign Minister, assure him of their friendly interest.

May 12 (night).—Henlein arrives in London by air.

May 13.—Henlein has informal talks with Mr. Winston Churchill and other M.P.s.

May 15.—Clashes between Czechs and Sudetens become worse.

May 18.—German troops reported massing on Czech frontier.

May 20.—Germany denies unusual troop movements.

May 21.—Czechs call up Army reserves. France and Russia reaffirm their treaty obligations to Czecho-Slovakia.

May 22.—Municipal elections in Czecho-Slovakia pass off quietly.

May 23.—Mr. Chamberlain stated in Commons that British Government had "represented to the German Government the importance of reaching a settlement if European peace is to be preserved."

June 7.—Sudetens increase their demands and present memorandum of 14 points to Czech Government.

June 30.—Czech Government drafts Nationalities Statute giving Germans and other minorities equality in management of the State. Sudetens unsatisfied.

July 26.—Mr. Chamberlain announces in Commons that Lord Runciman had agreed to go to Czecho-Slovakia as unofficial mediator.

August 3.—Lord Runciman arrives in Prague.

Britain's Policy

August 15.—German Army manoeuvres begin. Some manoeuvres held near Czech frontier.

August 17.—Sudetens talk of "Unbridgeable gulf" between their demands and Czech offers.

August 24.—Mr. Ashton-Gwatkin, one of Lord Runciman's staff, flies to London to see Lord Halifax.

August 25.—Czechs make new concessions.

August 27.—Sir John Simon at Lanark reaffirms Britain's policy defined by Mr. Chamberlain on March 24 that Britain could give no guarantee to go to aid of France or Czecho-Slovakia if the latter were attacked, but stating it was "impossible to assume limit to disturbance that conflict might involve."

August 28.—Sir Neville Henderson, British Ambassador in Berlin, called back to London.

August 29.—Meeting of British Cabinet Ministers at 10, Downing-street. Lord Runciman sees Dr. Benes.

August 30.—Sudeten Germans demand Home Rule similar to that in Elbe.

August 31.—Sir Neville Henderson returns to Berlin.

September 2.—Henlein confers with Hitler, Göring, Goebbels, Ribbentrop, at Hitler's Alpine home. Benes seeks Lord Runciman's advice. Announced by Sudetens that Hitler and Henlein in complete agreement on situation.

September 4.—Sudeten spokesman demand that all Czechs who have entered their territory since the war should be removed. Point out that Henlein's eight demands to be no longer regarded as final.

September 4.—Czech Government makes new offer to Sudeten Germans, stated to represent "final limit of concessions."

Figure 10.3: *Daily Mail*, 7 September 1938, p. 8.

Chapter 11

Thursday, 8 September 1938



Figure 11.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 8 September 1938, p. 8.

These headlines from the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 9) could be summarised: Yeah, but no, but yeah ... The Sudeten leadership agreed to accept the Czech autonomy proposals (as revealed **yesterday**) as the basis for negotiations. Which sounds very promising! But at that point, news was received of an incident at **Mährisch-Ostrau**, where two Sudeten deputies (i.e. MPs in the Czech parliament) were insulted by a Czech mounted policeman during an attempt to break up a demonstration regarding Sudetens who had been arrested for possession of illegal firearms. One of the deputies claimed to have been kicked and struck by a horse-whip. The Czechs claim this was an accident, as the policeman attempted

to restrain his horse. Whatever the real truth, the Sudeten leaders used this incident as a reason to break off the negotiations before they had even begun, as their communique explains:

The incident at Mährisch-Ostrau demonstrates that the Government does not control the situation sufficiently to begin the discussions in detail in the present circumstances with any success or with a possibility of bringing them to a peaceful conclusion.

Perhaps I'm cynical, but this seems like an attempt by the Sudetens to have their cake and eat it too. Even *The Times*, in its leading article today, calls this move 'childish' and a 'pretext' (p. 13).

Speaking of leading articles in *The Times*, there are some first reactions in its letter columns (p. 13) to its proposal **yesterday** for the German annexation of the Sudetenland. The first is from **Vyvyan Adams**, a Conservative MP.¹ Adams strongly disagrees with this idea, partly because of the likely discrimination by the Nazis against the Czech minorities in the newly annexed areas (there's just no easy way around the minorities problem) but also for strategic reasons:

The fortresses in the Sudetenland are a vital element, perhaps the most vital, in the defence of Czechoslovakia. Our ally France cannot be indifferent to the strategic considerations; no more can we. It is Nazi Germany which, more than any other single factor, has compelled us to rearm. A strong Czechoslovakia should be regarded as part of our own Air Raid Precautions.

Now, I don't quite get the ARP reference here. Obviously he's not being literal, but is saying that a strong Czechoslovakia helps Britain strategically. But why ARP? Is he saying that Czechoslovakia would absorb a knock-out blow instead of Britain? Or that Czechoslovakia's existence makes war (and hence air raids on Britain) less likely?

The other letter is from Douglas Steuart. I don't know who he was, but he wrote from the Junior **Carlton Club**, which means he was almost certainly a Tory as well. He's wholly in favour of the annexation proposal:

Not only have you pointed out the unnatural and surely intolerable injustice of the Sudeten Germans being placed in a position obliging them, in the event of war, to fight on the side of

¹What do you call somebody who likes the way words *look*? I love the alternating vs and ys in Vyvyan; I think he should have pulled an e. e. cummings and called himself vyvyan adams, that would have been more pleasing to the eye.

Frenchmen and Russians against their racial co-nationals [sic], but you have specified clearly and concisely the only feasible proposal the adoption of which would effectively remove such a contingency and operate to the lasting advantages of all the parties concerned.

I'm sure he won't be the last supporter, either.

A couple of other notes.

The *Manchester Guardian* reports (p. 9) that German aircraft have been penetrating Czech airspace, flying over [Krumau](#) in an effort to find out troop numbers in the area.

And today, the *Daily Mail* begins (p. 4) its serialisation of P. G. Wodehouse's *The Code of the Woosters* ...

Chapter 12

Friday, 9 September 1938

SUDETENS REFUSE
Why They Cannot Negotiate
at Present
“PRAGUE NOT IN CONTROL”
Premier Promises to Deal With
Ill-Treatment of Germans

Figure 12.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 9 September 1938, p. 11.

The headlines from the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 11) indicate that the situation is the same as yesterday, or a bit worse. The Sudeten leadership is still refusing to negotiate with the Czechoslovakian government, ostensibly because of the latter's inability to maintain order in the country. This is despite a meeting between the Sudetens and the Czech Premier, Hodza, who promised that those responsible for the incident at Mährisch-Ostrau (reported **yesterday**) would be punished severely, and an official Czech investigation confirming that Sudetens have indeed been mistreated in the area. According to the *Guardian's* diplomatic correspondent (p. 11), incidents like this could be used by the Sudeten German party to declare that

the breakdown of law and order has forced them to assume control of the Sudetenland, which in turn could be a prelude to secession and union with Germany.

The view from London is grim (p. 11):

The fear is growing here [presumably in the Foreign Office] that Hitler does not desire a genuine settlement, and if there is a settlement of any sort it will only have the purpose of tiding over the period that will lead to the long-anticipated and long-prepared attack on Czecho-Slovakia.

Chamberlain is back from Scotland, and Halifax has put off his trip to Geneva (presumably something to do with the League of Nations), which was planned for tomorrow. There will be a Cabinet meeting on Monday to discuss the crisis. On the other hand, there is evidence of resistance to war inside Germany, as information given to the Geneva correspondent (p. 11) from a German source suggests that General [Ludwig Beck](#), the Chief of the Staff of the German Army, has resigned because of his belief that ‘an attack on Czecho-Slovakia would involved Germany in a war with England, France, and Russia, and perhaps other countries’. (True: Beck did resign for just this reason.) Also, ‘There is reason to believe that General Beck’s opinion is shared by other German military leaders’. Maybe Hitler can be restrained by his own army’s unwillingness for war?

The chances of that happening would depend upon strong signals from Britain, France and the Soviet Union that they are willing to fight Germany, if necessary. This is exactly what the Labour Party is demanding, as expressed in a statement made on its behalf at (and endorsed by) the Trades Union Congress by [George Hicks](#), MP (p. 14):

the British Government must leave no doubt in the mind of the German Government that it will unite with the French and Soviet Governments to resist any attack on Czecho-Slovakia [...] Whatever the risk, Britain must make its stand against aggression.

And in this respect, *The Times*’s leader on [Wednesday](#) was unhelpful, at least according to a letter appearing in the *Manchester Guardian* today (p. 20). In it, William Goodchild of Glasgow (possibly [Sir William Goodchild](#), a Scottish civil servant, though perhaps he’s a bit outspoken if so) attacks most vociferously the suggestion that the Sudetenland be given to Germany:

In other words, the “Times” suggests that international law and order should be thrown to the winds, and that Europe should submissively accept the brutal violence of totalitarian States which rely solely on force and the threat of force.

And the danger is that since *The Times* is known to be close to the government that the suggestion could be taken as taken as official kite-flying. Goodchild refers to an official denial of this which was made last night (which I haven’t come across). But then, if one turns to *The Times* (p. 7), one finds a statement from a Conservative MP and pro-appeaser, Sir [Arnold Wilson](#), speaking at a League of Nations Union meeting, that he ‘welcomed the cautious suggestion’ made by *The Times*. Mind you, aside from [yesterday’s](#) examples, the letters column of *The Times* itself (p. 13) hasn’t exactly lit up with discussion of the secession idea: today’s topics of discussion include Rubens, Horace, Fox, and a debate about whether a particular line came from Voltaire, Tallyrand or Fouché. What a bunch of geeks!

Finally, a headline from *The Times* (p. 9):

THE HERRING IN WARTIME

Now there’s [a book that needs to be written!](#)

Chapter 13

Saturday, 10 September 1938

**BRITAIN AND
THE CZECHS**

**AMBASSADOR SEES
RIBBENTROP**

**CONFERENCES IN
LONDON**

**MR. ATTLEE ASKED
TO NO. 10**

**PRAGUE TALKS TO
BE RESUMED**

The negotiations between the Czechoslovak Government and the Sudeten Germans are expected to be resumed to-day. Our Special Correspondent in Prague describes the situation as a little easier.

The Prime Minister continued his consultations in London yesterday. To-day Mr. Attlee, Leader of the Opposition, is meeting him.

The British Ambassador discussed the situation with the German Foreign Minister at Nuremberg yesterday.

Herr Hitler, in a speech at Nuremberg last night, made his first direct reference to the international situation. He said that Germany was "determined to capitulate to none," and that those who counted on her weakness would find themselves mistaken.

Figure 13.1: *The Times*, 10 September 1938, p. 10.

Good news, bad news in these headlines from *The Times* (p. 10) ... On the positive side, the Sudeten leaders have agreed to resume negotiations with the Czechoslovakian government. This may be related to a report into the [Mährisch-Ostrau incident](#) by a British observer, Major [Sutton-Pratt](#), who

concluded that it had been blown out of all proportions: clearly not a very good reason to break off talks. The situation in Prague is described as ‘a little easier’.

But the German press is now fuming over ‘the alleged cruelties perpetrated in the dungeons of Prague against the Sudeten Germans, which makes extremely unpleasant reading’, in a spirit expressed ‘with a unanimity which has ceased to be surprising’. And Hitler, in an address at Nuremberg to his Gauleiters (supposedly 180,000 of them) is talking tough:

In these long years you have been tried out and hardened, and have experienced for yourselves what strength there is in a community indissolubly bound together and determined to capitulate to none. You make it easy for me to be your Leader to-day. All those who count on the weakness of Germany to-day will find themselves just as mistaken.

And he’s due to make another speech at Nuremberg on Monday, specifically on foreign policy. There’s understandable nervousness about what he’s going to say.

The *Daily Mail* seems to have scooped *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* today with some late-breaking news.¹ Wilson Broadbent, the diplomatic correspondent, reports (p. 9) that:

THE British Government decided just before midnight last night to inform the German Government in precise and formal terms that Britain will not stand aside if Czecho-Slovakia is the subject of military aggression.

Chamberlain took this decision after long talks with Halifax, Simon, Sir [Robert Vansittart](#) (Chief Diplomatic Adviser) and Sir [Alexander Cadogan](#) (Permanent Under-Secretary, Foreign Office). The British Ambassador to Germany, Henderson, will deliver the note to Hitler in person. So,

¹I wondered if maybe this was from a late edition, but it doesn’t appear so. Some newspapers had a morning and an afternoon edition, the *Guardian* did, I believe. But historians don’t routinely make a distinction when citing them, or at least I’ve never seen them do so. Conceivably, this could be a problem – after all, the two editions are going to be different, and have some different articles in them, or else there’d be no point in having multiple editions. But when you go through the *Guardian* microfilm, there’s only one edition of the paper for each day. So what happens if you want to check the other edition? Hopefully somebody somewhere has these, but who knows where. And there’s no doubt a temptation for libraries to ditch such bulky, mouldy items as newspapers once they are available on microfilm or online ... but they may not be replacing like with like.

depending on where one fell on the pro-appeasement/anti-appeasement spectrum, this could be seen as bad news or good news. It's exactly what Labour and the Trades Union Congress **called for** this week, so they'll be happy.

Unlike yesterday, *The Times* has a number of letters (p. 11) about its **secession leader**. **John Fischer Williams**, a prominent international lawyer, can't understand why the Czech government is reportedly not very keen on 'so wise a suggestion'. H. Wansey Bayley, a Harley Street doctor, thinks that if we want peace then we should openly stand beside Czechoslovakia, France, Russia and Romania. And Hilda Ormsby, Reader in Geography at the London School of Economics, makes some criticisms on population, strategic and cultural grounds: for example, that the loss of the mountains on the border would make Czechoslovakia indefensible, or that the Sudetens of northern Bohemia would be joined to neighbouring Saxony, when they are actually descended from Bavarians or Austrians.

Finally, here's an ad from the *Daily Mail* (p. 14), offering new bungalows for sale at **Hassocks** in Sussex:

A MIDST **R**URAL **P**LEASANTNESS

A REFUGE . . . from the smoke and grime of Town:
A SAFEGUARD of your and the family's health - amidst the clean, country air of healthy Hassocks!

Yet - so near to Town as far as time goes! Get your details about these attractive bungalows, offered at prices in suit everybody. Complete with large lounge, three large bedrooms, tiled bathroom, kitchen with latest labour-saving appliances, Sentry boiler, electric cooker, lights and fires - and with no road or legal charges, they are acknowledged as easily amongst the best value in Sussex. Now, while you think of it, send for the Informative Illustrated booklet!

LIVE AT

Healthy HASSOCKS
NEAR BRIGHTON

PRICE
£750
Freehold

Hassocks Homes Ltd
KEYMER AVENUE, HASSOCKS. 'PHONE: 340.

★ We make a speciality of houses built to order. State your requirements and ask for plans and quotations.

Figure 13.2: *Daily Mail*, 10 September 1938, p. 10.

The first thing that some readers will notice is the price – 750 for 3 bed-

rooms, including land! That's the equivalent of about 34,000 in 2007 terms, according to [this](#). Sounds like a bargain, especially since the kitchen comes with the 'latest labour-saving cabinets'!

But have a look at the odd phrase up the top:

AMIDST RURAL PLEASANTNESS

A - R - P ... ARP ... hmmm, I don't think it's just a coincidence that those initials were widely understood to refer to air raid precautions. The opening spiel confirms this, I think:

A REFUGE ... from the smoke and grime of Town.

A SAFEGUARD of your and the family's health – amidst the clean, country air of healthy Hassocks!

It seems pretty clear to me that this is a sly, yet quite transparent, attempt to use the fear of bombing to sell country holiday homes to the middle class as places to which you can evacuate your family when the knock-out blow threatens. What I wonder, though, is whether the fact that it is being published now is significant? Was Hassocks Homes Ltd. attempting to cash in on the crisis? Because otherwise, ads of this type are rare, in my experience.

A leader in the *New Statesman* today says (p. 366) that if war comes, it would stop Germany, but 'It would probably also end European civilisation'.

Chapter 14

Monday, 12 September 1938



Figure 14.1: *Daily Mail*, 12 September 1938, p. 7.

I'm cheating slightly today; the above headlines – from the *Daily Mail* (p. 7) – aren't, strictly speaking, about Czechoslovakia, but refer to speeches made by Nazi leaders at the Nuremberg rally on the weekend. But of course they were always going to be interpreted in the light of the continuing Sudeten crisis.

[Hermann Goering](#) was of course the head of the Luftwaffe as well as, at this time, probably second only to Hitler himself in terms of the Nazi hierarchy. Among other things, he called the Czech government 'ridiculous dwarfs' who were backed by 'Moscow – the eternal, Jewish Bolshevist demons of destruction'. And he reassuringly noted that:

Germany's air fleet is the strongest in the world. Never before in history has Germany been so strong and united as now.

Hitler didn't refer directly to Czechoslovakia, but referred to the Anschluss of Austria in March, and added:

But this is only the beginning of our task. There are many great tasks before us which must still be solved.

Conflating these bits – which the *Daily Mail* has done by referencing them together in the headline – makes them sound like a threat.¹ Which, let's face it, they almost certainly were, but let's not forget the power of selective editing to fabricate apparent meaning.

Remember the *Daily Mail*'s scoop on **Saturday**, about the British ambassador delivering Hitler a warning that Britain would not stand aside if Czechoslovakia were attacked? Well, Henderson did not actually get to meet Hitler after all, but instead talked to other senior Nazis. From the number of times that the reader of the various papers is assured that 'there was every reason to feel confident that the British point of view had been conveyed fully to the proper quarter [Hitler]', as the *Manchester Guardian*, for one, puts it (p. 11), I get the feeling that, actually, nobody is very confident of this at all. The author of today's leading article (p. 10) agrees: 'No one can "feel assured" so long as we do not know that Hitler has been personally informed'. All eyes will be on Hitler tonight, when he may (or may not) talk about the crisis. Speculation is that he may demand a plebiscite for the Sudetens, on the question of whether they should stay in Czechoslovakia or go to Germany (p. 11).

More and more column inches are being given over to news about the crisis. In the *Manchester Guardian*, there's **Viscount Samuel**, a former Liberal leader, supporting the government's position (p. 6), some photos ('A week-end of crisis. Scenes in London'), the leader referred to above and some notes on public reactions in London (p. 10), various bits of news from Czechoslovakia (most of p. 11), the Nuremberg speeches and reactions in France, the United States and Italy (most of p. 14), more on Nuremberg and the **Czech autonomy proposals** (p. 15), and four letters to the editor (p. 18). It's becoming hard to escape the crisis.

One of those letters has a very surprising author: **Jawaharlal Nehru**, the first prime minister of independent India. At this time he was president of the Indian National Congress, and on a visit to Europe which lasted several months, which included a trip to Czechoslovakia. Here he strongly attacks the British policy of appeasement from Manchuria to Spain, and believes that it is dragging the world into war:

All our sympathies are with Czecho-Slovakia. If war comes, the British people, in spite of their pro-Fascist Government,

¹The *Mail* subeditor's habit of saying 'So-and-so's "Thing that they said"' or 'So-and-so & "Other thing that they said"' in their headlines really gets on my pip. I couldn't even say why, it's just annoying.

will inevitably be dragged into it. But, even then, how will this Government, with its patent sympathies for the Fascist and Nazi States, advance the cause of democracy and freedom? So long as this Government endures, Fascism will always be at the doorstep.

Nehru's ultimate conclusion seems somewhat self-serving, however (or at least serving the interests of the Indian people), arguing that an unfree India would have no part in such a war:

If Britain is on the side of democracy, then its first task is to eliminate empire from India. That is the sequence of events in Indian eyes, and to that sequence the people of India will adhere.

Actually, the Indian Army in the Second World War became the biggest volunteer army in history, which I don't call adhering to that sequence. But Nehru got his free India within a decade, so I suppose he wasn't complaining too much.

Here's one of those photos of the 'week-end of crisis':



People waiting in Downing Street on Saturday.

Figure 14.2: *Manchester Guardian*, 12 September 1938, p. 9.

It shows the crowds waiting outside 10 Downing Street. Waiting for what? It's never been entirely clear to me why, but gathering outside the PM's res-

idence seemed to be something that Londoners did at moments of political tension. Maybe somebody has written something about this phenomenon. Anyway, the crowds are getting bigger. Earlier in the month, there were only a few loiterers; now *The Times* says (p. 12) that:

In the evening there were several thousand people wedged the whole way from Whitehall to No. 10; and when the Ministers came out the police had to clear a way. There was a special cheer for Lord Halifax.

The *Guardian*'s London correspondent notes (p. 10) that:

They have seemed like a reflection of London's restlessness, constantly drawn back to the place where the decisions are being made.

These days I suppose they would stay at home and constantly refresh [BBC News](#) instead.

Chapter 15

Tuesday, 13 September 1938

HITLER'S ANGRY SPEECH

**"Self-Determination" the Right
of the Sudetens**

GERMAN AID, IF NEED BE

**Western Fortifications "Ready Before
the Winter"**

Hitler's speech at Nuremberg last night made no definite announcement of German policy towards Czecho-Slovakia except that of determination to defend the Sudeten Germans against Czech "oppression" if that did not cease. Hitler's tone was angry, and there were bitter references to Czecho-Slovakia and to the democracies, Britain in particular.

The vital passages of the speech follow. It will be noted that Hitler did not in explicit terms demand a plebiscite, and that though he declared that the Sudeten Germans demanded the right of self-determination, he also said that it was "up to Prague to come to an agreement" with them:—

Herr Benes indulges in tactics; he speaks; he organises negotiations. This cannot go on. This is not a matter of phrases but of right.

The Germans demand the right of self-determination. Herr Benes shall not give them mere gifts but their rights.

I demand that the oppression of 3,500,000 in Czecho-Slovakia shall end or — (drowned in cheers) — the free right of self-determination shall take its place.

It is up to Prague to bring about an agreement with the Sudeten Germans.

If the democracies should be convinced that they must protect with all their means the oppressors of the Germans, then this will have grave consequences.

Figure 15.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 13 September 1938, p. 13.

So, Hitler's big speech – summarised in the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 11), above – turned out to contain no new demands or proposals, nothing at any rate that was not implicit in Henlein's Carlsbad speech. But it's not so much the content as the tone which is worrying: his rhetoric was angry,

violent and menacing. The demand he did make was:

I demand that the oppression of 3,500,000 [Sudetens] in Czecho-Slovakia shall end or the right of self-determination shall take its place.

He did not exclude negotiation; indeed, he said that it's up to Prague to make an agreement with the Sudetens. But he also said:

If the democracies should be convinced that they must protect with all their means the oppressors of the Germans, then this will have grave consequences.

Although it could be read a number of ways, this sounds like a clear warning that Germany is willing to risk war with Britain and France over the Sudetenland. But still there is nothing definite: as the diplomatic correspondent says, 'The question "war or peace" remains unanswered.' And that's the big question, isn't it?

So the crisis continues. In the letters columns, it's turning into a war. *The Times* has two columns of them (p. 8) on [that leader](#) from last week on the annexation question. There are those who are disgusted by *The Times*'s suggestion. From Nigel Law:

When I first read it I assumed that it had somehow strayed from the columns of the [Angriff](#), since it seemed so much at variance with the tenor of the rest of the article in question.

R. E. Godfray:

As an old reader of your esteemed newspaper and an admirer of the steady influence on public opinion which your leading articles have exercised in the past, may I be permitted to express my utter astonishment at your suggestion on September 7 [...]

T. C. S. Lodge:

The line you took was surely a direct incitement to the Nazis to go ahead as they like, come what may, and you have thereby contributed not a little to the doom of democracy [...]

Ouch. But *The Times* has its supporters too. [Archibald Ramsay](#):

Are we to send millions to their deaths in order that the Czechs may continue to deny to the Sudeten Germans that same degree of self-determination which we recently granted the Southern Irish?

Kenneth Macassey:

Once more *The Times* has accurately and most opportunely ventilated the opinion of a vast number of unbiased citizens of this country. The suggestion that a revision of boundaries ought not to be entirely excluded as a possible solution of the Czech-Sudeten dispute is very much to be welcomed.

There are a couple of interesting letters in the *Manchester Guardian* too (p. 20). One is from G. E. Lee, who criticises Britain's failure to uphold collective security in China, Abyssinia or Spain:

War is raging in the world to-day, and may shortly ravage our own towns and cities because we have been unwilling to face this basic obligation to the League, this fundamental of any peace system.

And again:

If to-morrow London and Birmingham and Manchester are faced with what the populations of other cities in other lands have been forced to bear it will be because we have stood supinely by when we might have crushed out the evil thing, and have contented ourselves with thanking the National Government that we had been kept out of war.

So the coming air war will be Britain's just desserts.

The other is from [H. M. Swanwick](#), a prominent pacifist, the former head of the [British chapter](#) of the [Women's International League for Peace and Freedom](#). Here she refuses to join 'the deafening chorus of attacks on Nazi Germany':

I loathe all tyranny, whether Bolshevik, Fascist, or Nazi, but I believe that press attacks on foreign countries have no influence for good and rather serve to inflame feeling in the opposite direction to that desired.

She believed that the autonomy plan offered by the Czech government merely 'proves up to the hilt how undemocratic' the country must have been.

As to my position, I am a pacifist and believe in always, under all temptation, trying to understand both sides, instead of shutting my eyes and ears and squaring up with one side against the other.

This looks pretty much like the definition of ‘well-meaning but hopelessly naive’. Which is very easy to say, seventy years later.

I’ve been trying not to anticipate future events in these posts, but I’m going to make two exceptions here and look ahead a little. In November 1939, Swanwick committed suicide. I’m not entirely sure why, though she was in poor health, but one must suspect that the coming of war had something to do with it, too. And in May 1940, Ramsay (author of one of the letters to *The Times* noted above) was interned under [Defence Regulation 18B](#) due to his involvement in the [Tyler Kent](#) affair (his pro-fascist and pro-German attitudes surely didn’t help, though his anti-Semitism probably didn’t hurt). He was an MP, the only one to be so interned, and was not released until September 1944. In very different ways both Swanwick and Ramsay suffered for their views.

Chapter 16

Wednesday, 14 September 1938

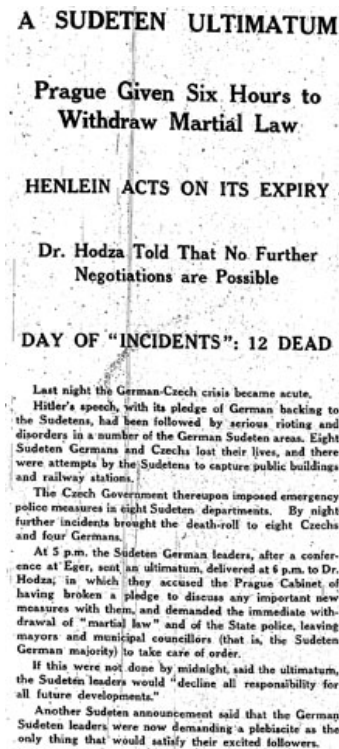


Figure 16.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 14 September 1938, p. 9.

Ultimatum ... martial law ... 12 dead. These are not good words to be reading in the headlines (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 9). Yesterday, Hitler's

Nuremberg speech was interpreted as being somewhat worrying, but basically OK: after all, it could have been worse. But in the Sudetenland itself, it led to rioting, and the deaths of at least 12 people. Therefore the Czech government imposed martial law. In response, Henlein, the leader of the Sudeten German Party, demanded that martial law be withdrawn by midnight. Of course the Czechs refused to bow to such a peremptory demand from one of its own citizens, and so Henlein broke off negotiations once more. The Runciman mission is on the move again, trying to get people to talk to each other again, but it's not looking good. As the leading article says (p. 8):

Events have moved with a terrible rapidity in Czecho-Slovakia since Herr Hitler's speech and have now reached a grave crisis.

It ends by saying that the situation can still be saved, if Hitler and the Sudetens want to:

But is compromise desired? Is there a will to peace? The British Government, for its part, must remember that it will have to convince its own people, and other peoples, that up to the last minute of the last hour it did the utmost that it could, by appeal and by warning to Berlin, to avert catastrophe.

The 'incidents' are very serious. They include (p. 9):

[Falkenau](#). – Three gendarmes killed by shots fired by Sudetens. [Aussig](#). – Two Sudetens and one Czech killed. Three other people killed; nationality not stated. [Eger](#). – One Czech killed. [Eringseilen](#). – Czech postmaster died of injuries caused by Sudetens.

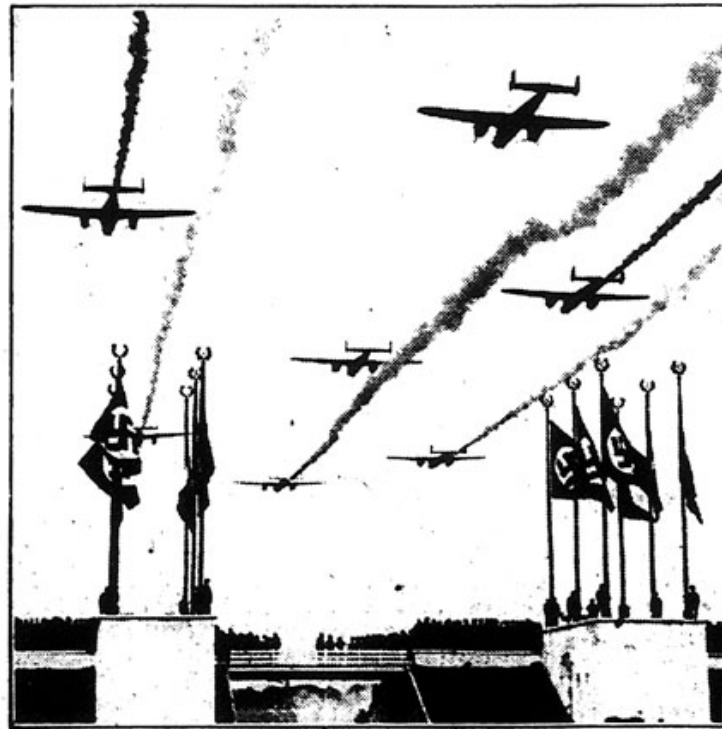
So, despite the howling of the German press and government that the Sudeten people are not safe, more Czechs than Germans have been killed. For their part, the Sudetens claim that Czech officials fired upon them without provocation.

All this news came after trading on City markets had finished, but Wall Street was not so lucky (p. 12). The ultimatum led to falls of up to 3% across the board:

More than a million shares were sold in the last hour, the tape-machine falling five minutes behind transactions.

In London, the 'inner Cabinet' met: Chamberlain, Halifax, Hoare and Simon (Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary, Chancellor of

the Exchequer). Perhaps more worrying is who they were meeting: Sir [Thomas Inskip](#), Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, [Duff Cooper](#), First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir [Kingsley Wood](#), Air Minister, [Hore-Belisha](#), War Minister. And [Lord Gort](#), Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Air Marshal Sir [Cyril Newall](#), Chief of Air Staff, and Admiral Sir [Roger Backhouse](#), First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff. This kind of suggests that war might not be far off ...



A demonstration of smoke-screen flying on the Zeppelin Field, Nuremberg, on Monday.

Figure 16.2: *Manchester Guardian*, 14 September 1938, p. 7.

This photo of a Luftwaffe flypast ([Do 17s?](#)) at Nuremberg on Monday (p. 7) isn't linked in any way to the Sudeten crisis.

Nor was this one of telephone operators in Sheffield wearing gas masks during an ARP drill, which was printed directly below the above. But at least some readers would have made a mental connection between these images and the worsening crisis in central Europe.



Sheffield telephone operators wearing gas masks during their A.R.P. training.

Figure 16.3: *Manchester Guardian*, 14 September 1938, p. 7.

Chapter 17

Thursday, 15 September 1938

DRAMATIC BRITISH MOVE FOR PEACE

—
MR. CHAMBERLAIN TO CONFER
WITH HERR HITLER

—
FLYING TO GERMANY TO-DAY

A CORDIAL WELCOME FROM THE FÜHRER

The following announcement was issued from 10, Downing Street last night :—

The Prime Minister has sent to the German Führer and Chancellor, through His Majesty's Ambassador in Berlin, the following message :—

" In view of increasingly critical situation, I propose to come over at once to see you with a view to trying to find peaceful solution. I propose to come across by air and am ready to start to-morrow. Please indicate earliest time at which you can see me and suggest place of meeting. Should be grateful for very early reply.

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN."

The Führer and Chancellor has replied to the above message to the effect that he will be very ready to meet the British Prime Minister on September 15 (to-morrow). The Prime Minister is accordingly leaving for Germany by air to-morrow morning.

10, Downing Street, S.W.1. 14th September, 1938.

Figure 17.1: *The Times*, 15 September 1938, p. 10.

Now events are moving with a startling rapidity: all the more startling because it is Britain's sober, solid, unexciting prime minister, the 69-year old Neville Chamberlain, who is pushing them along. He has stunned the press by announcing, as can be seen in today's headlines from *The*

Times above (p. 10), that he will fly to Germany to meet with Hitler in person, to see if they can't sort out the Sudeten crisis together, face to face. This is a very novel method of conducting diplomacy – though not quite as novel, perhaps, as is often made out: the victorious Allied leaders had become used to summit meetings after the war, beginning with the Paris Peace Conference itself. But there's no doubt that, coming at such a critical juncture, it is seen as a bold and highly imaginative attempt to cut through the darkening atmospheres of racial incidents and veiled threats, to prevent war by rational, and personal, discussion.

Today's leader in *The Times* is devoted to Chamberlain's flight (p. 11). It says that the news 'will bring a sense of relief and profound satisfaction to all but the very few to whom any sort of discourse with a dictator is anathema', and proof of Chamberlain's 'courage and common sense'.

Behind all the intricacies and discussions and multitudinous conjectures that have been whirling round the central problem of the Czech-German dispute has stood, dimly limned but unmistakably recognizable, the spectra of Armageddon – a large-scale, perhaps world-wide, war springing from a local racial difference in Central Europe. And the conviction is everywhere felt that war on this issue would be a folly and a crime, and that humanity would be heading for the madhouse if the nations of the most densely populated Continent of the world were really going to bomb one another to pieces on account of the troubles of some three and a half million folk in the pleasant land of Bohemia.

The *Manchester Guardian* is a bit less enthusiastic (p. 8), calling the flight a 'bold move', but otherwise seems unsure that it can do any good:

He [Chamberlain] will be able, perhaps, to find out precisely some of the things in Hitler's mind about which we are uncertain and to represent to him faithfully this country's intense desire to preserve the peace, indeed, but also to do what we believe to be right in Czecho-Slovakia. He will be aware that there are those in Germany who may regard his visit as a sign of weakness, but he will have it in his own hands to show that it is not so, that this country remains firm in its intentions, and that his motive is simply a supreme effort to find a way to peace that can honourably accept.

And with that, it moves to the Sudetenland and the idea of a plebiscite to determine which country the inhabitants want to be a part of. (I'm

not sure where this idea came from: the German press attributes it to the British and French press, but that was **only speculation**. See *Manchester Guardian*, p. 12.) The leader writer is worried about the defensibility of the Czech state, as well as for the safety of Jews and anti-Nazis, if the Sudetenland were to pass to Germany. The *Guardian* does not like the way other countries are apparently rushing to seal Czechoslovakia's fate:

A man may always offer his own throat to be cut, but it would be indelicate of friends to make the offer for him.

Which would seem to be a warning to Chamberlain, who, even as millions learn of his flight, is already winging his way to Munich to meet with Hitler at Berchtesgaden. By the way, Chamberlain will be flying from **Heston Aerodrome** (not Hendon, as is sometimes said) at 8.30am, in a **British Airways Lockheed Electra**, one of its latest types. According to *The Times* (p. 10), he's due to land at Munich at about 1pm, and may then be flown in Hitler's own aeroplane to Obersalzberg, and then to Berchtesgaden.

Reaction around the world seems positive. Some of the headlines from *The Times* (p. 10) include:

**RELIEF IN BERLIN
VISIT WELCOMED
"A WEIGHT OFF THE HEART"**

And:

**ASTONISHMENT IN PRAGUE
TENSION RELIEVED
FIGHT AT FRONTIER VILLAGE**

And:

**"THE RIGHT STEP"
MESSAGE FROM CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER**

And (p. 9):

**MR. CHAMBERLAIN'S MISSION
FRENCH GRATITUDE**

But the intense hope, of course, goes hand in hand with intense fear. The *Manchester Guardian* has an article on the Czech military (p. 13):

**THE CZECH ARMY
Well-Trained, Well-Armed Force Behind Mountain
Wall
2,000 FIGHTING AIRCRAFT**

The Times reports (p. 10) that Westminster Abbey will be open from 8am today to 8am on Sunday 'for a period of unbroken intercession in connexion with the present international crisis':

The west portion of the nave round the Unknown Warrior's Grave is being reserved for this purpose.

It seems safe to assume that the nation is collectively holding its breath for news from the historic meeting of Chamberlain and Hitler.

Chapter 18

Friday, 16 September 1938

SWIFT DEVELOPMENTS AT BERCHTESGADEN

PRIME MINISTER RETURNING
TO-DAY

CONSULTATION WITH THE CABINET

FURTHER TALKS IN GERMANY
NEXT WEEK

LORD RUNCIMAN COMING TO LONDON

Mr. Chamberlain had his first conversation with Herr Hitler at Berchtesgaden early last evening. They talked for more than two hours, and afterwards the following *communiqué* was issued :—

“The Führer and Reich Chancellor had a comprehensive exchange of views with Mr. Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, on the Obersalzberg to-day. The British Prime Minister is returning to England to-morrow to confer with the British Cabinet. In a few days a new conference will take place.”

It is believed that Mr. Chamberlain will return to Germany in a few days to resume the conversations. It is announced that Lord Runciman is coming to London to consult the Prime Minister.

Herr Henlein yesterday declared that the Sudeten Germans wanted union with Germany. The Czechoslovak Cabinet decided to take all measures to crush any revolt, and it was stated on the wireless that Herr Henlein would be arrested if found.

Figure 18.1: *The Times*, 16 September 1938, p. 12.

So after Chamberlain's sudden departure for Germany **yesterday** comes his equally sudden return to Britain. As the above headlines (from *The Times*, p. 12) hint, it had been expected that he would be gone for several days in order to talk to Hitler. It's unclear what conclusions, if any, were

actually reached, but we do have an account of the tea party Hitler hosted for Chamberlain:

The conversation over the tea table was on non-political lines. Mr. Chamberlain was able to say to Herr Hitler that he had enjoyed very much his first experience of air travel.¹

He mentioned that he had been much impressed by the beauty of the scenery, although to-day clouds and mists spoiled the prospect, and his surprise that cars could climb so easily the precipitous road leading from Berchtesgaden to the Berghof.

Even given the lack of positive developments – the Czech government has ordered the arrest of Henlein, the Sudeten leader, who is now demanding the cession of the Sudetenland to Germany – it seems that people are breathing easier today. *The Times* reports (p. 12) that Whitehall is ‘more like its normal self’, and that the markets are recovering (Guinness is up 3/6 on yesterday’s close, though still down on its price two days ago, before the **market jitters began**). For the first time since **6 September**, *The Times* hasn’t devoted a leading article to the crisis. For the *Daily Mail* (p. 10), Chamberlain’s flight has already prevented war:

Mr. Chamberlain’s magnificent bid for peace throws into greater prominence the mad folly of the alternative that might have been – war. Already it seems incredible that until yesterday Europe was on the verge of devastating conflict over the reshaping of the Constitution of Czecho-Slovakia.

A feature article on the same page reassuringly notes previous crises which did not result in wars: the [Congress of Berlin](#) (1878), [Agadir](#) (1911), [Chanak](#) (1922), [Fashoda](#) (1898) and [Venezuela](#) (1895). (Far away in Marrakech, [George Orwell](#) can detect ‘no belief in war being imminent’.)

But it seems that not everybody has got the message. The *Manchester Guardian* reports (p. 11) that the Manchester Borough Labour Party has called for a special meeting of the Manchester City Council. The reason for this is that, according to Labour’s statement, ‘Manchester is apparently in a state of almost complete unpreparedness against air attack.’

¹It’s certainly widely believed that this was Chamberlain’s first flight. However, recent authors have claimed that it was only his first international flight, and that he had flown domestically on political or ministerial business. But no actual evidence is offered, and it’s hard to think where he would have needed to go that he couldn’t have got to just as easily by train.

We consider that a state of emergency has really existed in the last few days, and that authority should have shown some sign of being aware of it. Even our gas masks have not been issued, and they will take some days to distribute. What sort of position would we be in if war suddenly came?

A letter (p. 18) from A. R. Warden of Heaten Moor in Manchester, backs up this point of view. (That would be a pseudonym – Air Raid Warden, get it?)

In view of the possibility of this country being drawn into a devastating war, I suggest that now is the time to look into the question of what provision has actually been made for the protection of civilians from air raids.

Where are the gas masks? What are employers doing to protect their workers?

Could not the Government employ the unemployed (nearly 2,000,000) on constructing “shelters”.

Wembley, at least, is getting its gas masks: according to the *The Times* (p. 17), 100,000 have been transferred there from the government’s depot. All schools in Wembley are going to be open until 9pm for the next week, so that residents can get their masks fitted. A Wembley ARP official claimed that this measure was entirely routine, and ‘in no way due to the European situation’.

Finally, a poem which appeared in *The Times* (p. 13):

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN

As Priam to Achilles for his Son,
So you, into the night, divinely led,
To ask that young men’s bodies, not yet dead,
Be given from the battle not begun.

It’s by [John Masefield](#), the [Poet Laureate](#).

Chapter 19

Saturday, 17 September 1938



Figure 19.1: *Daily Mail*, 17 September 1938, p. 9.

Once again, the *Daily Mail* has big news (p. 9) that *The Times* and *Manchester Guardian* aren't carrying (they merely have rather anodyne reports that Chamberlain has returned and has been meeting with colleagues); again I suspect it's because we're looking at an afternoon edition. The banner headline is truncated above, so here's the full text:

PREMIER PLANS NEUTRAL STATE FOR CZECHS GUARANTEED BY POWERS

Chamberlain is reported to be 'fresh, vigorous, and calmly optimistic' after his 1200-mile round air trip. He went to Germany 'with the determination to preserve the peace of Europe by drastic measures to reorganise the Czecho-Slovak State'.

First among these proposals was cantonisation of the Sudeten district. The second, and probably most important of them all, was his suggestion that Czecho-Slovakia should become a

neutral State, under guarantee of her immediate neighbours and with an overriding guarantee by Britain, France, and Italy.

Thirdly, Mr. Chamberlain was in favour of the principle of the self-determination of the people of Czecho-Slovakia who he believed should have the right, but not necessarily immediately, to state what form of government they would prefer.

It is further stated that ‘there was not much difference of opinion between Mr. Chamberlain and Herr Hitler’. So this all sounds very encouraging.

But the situation in central Europe is still tense. The *Manchester Guardian* reports (p. 11) that the Czech government first dissolved the Sudeten German party, then changed this to a mere ‘suspension of the party’s activities’. A new organisation, the Bohemian German party, is being formed by four moderate leaders of the old party. The Sudetenland itself is quiet now that the less moderate leaders (including Henlein) have fled to Germany, and everyone in German or mixed German-Czech districts in Bohemia has been ordered to give up their arms in the next 24 hours (presumably irrespective of whether they are Czechs or Germans). The *Guardian* samples some headlines from the German press:

CZECHS RAID IN SUDETEN GERMAN LAND JUST LIKE
THE BOLSHEVIKS IN SPAIN

PRAGUE UNLEASHES BLOODY TERROR

GERMAN POPULATION WITHOUT SELF-DEFENCE

15,000 SUDETEN GERMANS FLEE INTO GERMAN TER-
RITORY

CZECH MADNESS AND TERROR OVERREACHES IT-
SELF

MOB RULE IN BOHEMIA

PRAGUE’S CATASTROPHIC POLICY OF MILITARY
MEASURES AND TERROR

FROM HOUR TO HOUR THE SUFFERINGS OF THE
SUDETEN GERMANS GET WORSE AND WORSE

GERMANY’S [?] PATIENCE ALMOST EXHAUSTED

ALL WARNINGS FALL ON DEAF EARS

50 SOVIET RUSSIAN AEROPLANES HAVE LANDED IN
[KOENIGGRANTZ](#) [sic]

The press commentary is a bit more encouraging on the other side of the world, in Australia (as reported by *The Times*, p. 9). The *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Melbourne Age* and the *Melbourne Herald* all ‘warmly commend’ the statement of the Prime Minister, Joseph Lyons, that Britain has Australia’s full support, ‘up to the hilt’. Indeed, it seems that they wished he’d been even more direct. Of course it is agreed that ‘There was never any doubt that in Great Britain’s hour of need Australia would be there, as always in the past’ (as the *SMH* put it). Which is clearly a bit of a stretch, since another article on the same page reports that the South Australian Premier, [Richard Butler](#), says that the Czech crisis should not lead to a world war. And the [Australasian Council of Trade Unions](#) has resolved to resist any attempt to involve Australia in a European war, after hearing a message from the NSW Premier, [Jack Lang](#):

The Labour [sic] Party, said Mr. Lang, must prepare to organize the Australian people against participation in a European war. If Australia were embroiled in a European war she would be inviting attack from hostile powers, and at the same time would be dissipating her forces of resistance.

Closer to home, the war in Spain is still raging. *The Times* reports (p. 9) that the [battle on the Ebro front](#) is deadlocked, but that the Nationalists are preparing a fresh offensive. [Richard Acland](#), at this time a Liberal MP, has written to the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 6) to point out that if Britain goes to war with Germany now,

we would find that German guns quickly appeared on both sides of Gibraltar and that German aeroplanes from Northern Spain bombarded the towns of Southeast France.

He thinks there would be two options in that case. The first would be to send weapons and, perhaps, troops to help the Republicans ‘sweep the Germans and the Italians and Franco out of Spain’. The second would be to bribe Italy to turn on the Germans, which would mean sacrificing the Republicans to Franco and would turn many Britons against their own government. On the one hand, this seems to be something of a distraction to the modern reader from the main danger (well, it does to me); on the other, it shows that the Spanish war has a strong hold on the minds of many politically-engaged people. Just because the Czech crisis has flared up does not mean that the Spanish one is going to go away or be forgotten.

ARP preparations are being sped up. The *Manchester Guardian* reports that the Home Office has called upon local authorities to review their

ARP progress, and that ‘many of those meetings were far from happy’ (p. 12). Evidently, ‘A really serious threat to peace was needed to make Lancashire take interest in the Government’s Air Raid Precautions scheme’. Partly this is due to apathy on the part of the public, who have not exactly been rushing to volunteer as air wardens (though the numbers are up, with the current threat of war). But many towns have not even undertaken a census to determine how many gas masks they will need for their citizens, and Bolton, for example, with a population of 174,000, doesn’t even have any yet. It’s expecting 100,000 ‘next month’ – bad luck if the Luftwaffe decides it can’t wait that long ...

Chapter 20

Monday, 19 September 1938



Figure 20.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 19 September 1938, p. 11.

Another week of crisis begins. How much longer can this go on? The most significant news from the weekend concerns another round of shuttle diplomacy – this time it's the French Premier, [Édouard Daladier](#), and Foreign Minister, [Georges Bonnet](#), who have flown to London to consult

with their British counterparts. The official communique, which can be read above (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 11) is pretty bland and just says that France and Britain are in complete agreement as to their policy over Czechoslovakia, without saying just what that is. But the *Manchester Guardian*'s diplomatic correspondent has some more information. It seems that they are cooling on the idea of a plebiscite of the Sudeten people to see what they want to do, and warming to the idea of ceding at least part of the Sudetenland to Germany. Of course, the Czech government hasn't been consulted at this stage. No decision has been made on the question of an international guarantee of Czechoslovakian guarantee after a settlement. Henlein, in exile in Germany, has called for his followers to take arms and rebel against their Czech oppressors, but (perhaps surprisingly) they seem to have ignored him (p. 14).

The other big piece of news is that Mussolini has referred to the Czech crisis in a speech given at Trieste (itself a contested area). According to the headline in the *Guardian*, he declared that Italy will be 'Beside Germany in a Major Conflict', but that seems to be a (no doubt logical) inference. Mussolini is reported to have said that

When the problems raised by history have reached a stage of tormented complication, the solution which imposes itself is the simplest, the most logical, the most radical – that which we Fascists call totalitarian.

This sounds rather bellicose, except that he went on to say that 'the solution has only one name – plebiscites'. He praised Chamberlain as 'a flying messenger of peace' and hopes that a peaceful solution will be found:

But if this does not happen and were to end in a ranging of forces for or against Prague, let it be known that Italy's position is already chosen.

This is a fairly-well veiled threat, it seems to me. Mussolini also said that Moscow was behind attempts to denigrate the plebiscite solution, and Moscow has indeed come out and publicly denounced Chamberlain's efforts for peace (p. 14). According to *Pravda*, Chamberlain's foreign policy is always to make a deal with an aggressor. 'The purpose of his German visit was a bargain for which Czecho-Slovakia would be force to pay', and anyway will only bring war closer, not prevent it.

The question of war or peace is certainly on everyone's minds. According to the *Manchester Guardian*'s London correspondent (p. 10), 'The streets are beginning to take on an unpleasant resemblance to the end of

July, 1914'. Examining the faces of the crowds waiting and watching at Downing Street, it was thought that they 'expressed anxiety, and people don't talk much to one another as waiting folk usually do at moments of political crisis'. The leading article, on the same page, begins:

It seems likely that this week we shall reach the turning-point between peace and the dreadful catastrophe of war, and as the hours pass we can only trust that it will still prove possible to preserve the peace and to preserve it with credit to ourselves.

It's that last bit – 'with credit to ourselves' – which worries the left. Last night, thousands of 'demonstrators' marched up and down Whitehall shouting 'Stand by the Czechs' (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 5). Police had to bar entrance to Downing Street and then clear Whitehall itself of pedestrians: 'It is many years since Whitehall was thus closed to pedestrian traffic'. Three people were arrested. The demonstration formed in Trafalgar Square, and seems to have organised by the [International Peace Campaign](#). Despite its name, it does seem to want Chamberlain to use military force, if necessary, to prevent Germany from violently dismembering Czechoslovakia. '[Red Ellen](#)' Wilkinson, a fiery Labour MP who had organised the [Jarrow hunger march](#) in 1936, told the crowd:

We say to Neville Chamberlain: We don't trust you. We believe that you went to Germany to fix up a sale of the liberties of Czecho-Slovakia.

Also speaking that night, but over in Limehouse, was [Clement Attlee](#), leader of the Labour Party (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 5). He spoke in similar vein to Wilkinson, though much more measured. But he attracted a demonstration of his own – a fascist one:

[...] a crowd of over five hundred assembled on the pavement outside the hall and shouted "We want peace, Attlee wants war." Mounted police arrived and broke up the crowd, most of which had come from a Fascist meeting held earlier in one of the side streets.

There's a hopeful piece on pp. 11 and 12 of the *Guardian* (it's a good issue today!). It's entitled 'Air power in war-time' and is by Major Frederic Arthur de Vere Robertson (about whom I know next to nothing, so if anybody can enlighten me, I'd be grateful). Given the war fears and all the ARP preparations going on, it's not so surprising to see an article on this topic, but it *is* surprising that it is so sceptical of the power of the

bomber. He opens by saying that a former senior RAF officer had told him that his fighters aimed to inflict 100% wastage on enemy raiders over three weeks, a rate of loss which they could not possibly sustain.

Since those words were uttered the defences of Great Britain have grown immeasurably stronger, and though for a time the technical improvement of bombers in speed outstripped the improvement in fighters, the advent of the Hurricane and the Spitfire, each mounting eight machine-guns and each with a top speed of at least 340 m.p.h., has reversed the process.

He also notes that the theory of the knock-out blow – that the bomber can smash civilian morale and thus force capitulation – is ‘a theory unsupported by the facts of history and least of all by the results of bombing cities in Spain and China’. This correlates with a general rise in scepticism of the knock-out blow at this time among airpower experts, but whether this new thinking will have much effect on popular beliefs remains to be seen.

That’s all pretty heavy going; here are a couple of lighter bits to end with. The first is a ‘day in the life’ piece on Chamberlain, from the *Daily Mail* (p. 12). It’s very sympathetic (the leading article on the same page is, after all, entitled ‘**TRUST CHAMBERLAIN**’) and portrays him as a strong and decisive leader, on top of the situation, etc. More unexpected is the emphasis on his interest in natural history (he’s a bit of a twitcher), his sense of humour, his intellectual interests (Shakespeare, art). But mainly I wanted to point out the accompanying photo:



His eyes show his fierce concentration on one subject to the exclusion of all others.

Figure 20.2: *Daily Mail*, 19 September 1938, p. 12.

Is it just me, or could you equally plausibly caption that photo ‘**WOULD YOU TRUST THIS MAN TO NEGOTIATE WITH HITLER ON YOUR BEHALF – AND YOUR FAMILY’S?**’ Or even ‘**ARE THESE THE EYES OF A SERIAL KILLER?**’ Well, possibly that one is going too far.

Finally, here’s [Herbert Morrison](#), Labour MP and leader of the London County Council, speaking in London last night – evidently his audience were a bit glum over the continuing crisis:

Cheer up. I know it is not easy, particularly for me who knows more than most of you what the position is.

Yeah, I’m sure that did the trick!

Chapter 21

Tuesday, 20 September 1938

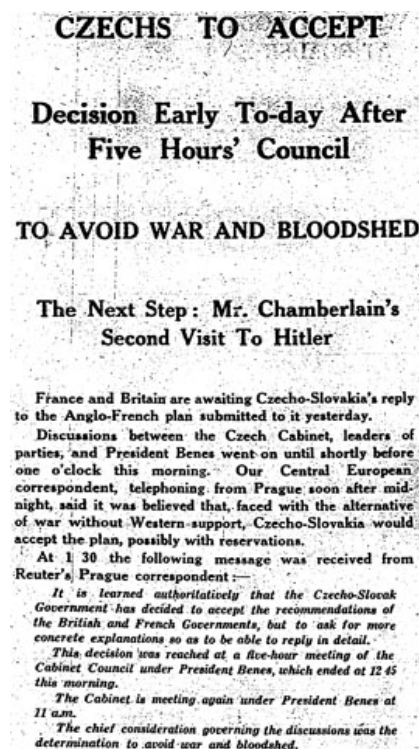


Figure 21.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 20 September 1938, p. 11.

This time it's the *Manchester Guardian* which has the scoop (p. 11): in late night meetings last night, the Czechs decided to accept the 'recommendations' of the French and British governments, albeit 'possibly with reservations'. There's still no official confirmation of what those recom-

mendations are, but the London correspondent has some information from 'responsible quarters in London', which generally confirm the speculations of **yesterday** :

1. Areas in Czecho-Slovakia with a predominant German population to be ceded without a plebiscite.
2. Other areas to remain in the Czecho-Slovakian State under the federal system proposed in Dr. Benes's Fourth Plan.
3. An international commission to "rectify" the new boundaries.
4. The independence of Czecho-Slovakia within these boundaries to be guaranteed by Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Rumania, and Yugo-Slavia.
5. The neutralisation of Czecho-Slovakia and cancellation of her treaties of alliance.
6. The interchange of populations to be arranged by which German sympathisers within Czecho-Slovakia can go to the new German provinces and the population in these provinces that does not wish to remain there can go within the new boundaries of Czecho-Slovakia.

There doesn't seem to have been any reaction from the German side, yet. It appears that Chamberlain's planned second visit to Germany is going ahead, though the date is not yet set. But Henlein's 'Free Corps' of Sudeten Germans is going to continue raiding Czech border posts from German territory (last night they attacked a customs post near Grumbach). The international news section (p. 15) reports that Poland and Hungary are lining up to press their own claims on Czechoslovakian territory. The American press is disgusted by the British and French plan: the *New York Post* says that it seems 'like the world's greatest betrayal' and says that if this is collective security then the United States is lucky to be well out of it: 'Thank God for the Atlantic Ocean!'

Rather happier with the government's diplomatic moves are the Fascists: two fascist speakers in Finsbury Square claimed (p. 10) that 'the Premier is now following the policy of Sir **Oswald Mosley**'. Welsh Congregationalists (p. 6) are also pleased – to be precise, the South Caernarvonshire Welsh Congregationalist Association, which unanimously passed a resolution commending Chamberlain for his efforts to resolve the crisis by way of 'consultation and co-operation'.

[U]nless peace be secured on these lines we shall not take part in war in any shape or form. We hold war to be a sin before God.

Businessmen ought to be happy too. The chairman of the Empire Exhibition, Sir Cecil M. Weir, spoke at the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce last night, where he said that the ‘commercial community [...] are sick to death of the recurring crises in foreign affairs which have done so much to destroy confidence, create periodic serious unemployment, and heighten taxation’. He called for ‘a large-scale settlement on honourable and realistic lines of the many problems’ which cause problems in international relations.

The home front is being prepared for war, though there is much confusion. The *Manchester Guardian* has a report on the question of school children (p. 12). If there is an air raid, should they be sent home, or should they stay in school? The Board of Education’s official stance is that the schools should close ‘during the whole period for which air raids may be expected’. This is very vague, and different school districts are interpreting it differently: Oldham is going to close its schools on the outbreak of war, for at least a week, but Salford intends to close them only when an air raid occurs. That’s going to mean large numbers of children flooding onto the streets at once, and not all of them are going to be able to get home within the 7 to 10 minutes which might be the maximum warning time.

Somewhat more reassuring, at least for the sense that the government knows what it is doing, is the confident statement in the *Daily Mail* (p. 13) that if war comes, 1500 ‘local food officers throughout Britain will ’know exactly what to do if the emergency arose. Action could be taken within 24 hours’. That is to say, rationing will be imposed, and quickly. This is according to Sir Henry French, director of the Food Defence Department of the Board of Trade. A couple of interesting points: since the transport of food is much more efficient than in the last war, shops and warehouses are carrying less stock now, meaning that there’s less margin for safety in the system. Efficiency is not always a benefit, then. And a leading article on the same subject (p. 10) looks forward to rationing because it will lead to improved nutrition, since ‘some 12,000,000 to 22,000,000 people, even when there is no lack of money, do not know how to extract the biggest measure of health from their diet in peace time’. So enforcing a sensible diet through rationing will help here. (Which, as I understand it, was indeed one benefit of wartime rationing.) But this implies a long war, or else there’d be no time for better nutrition to lead to better health!

I’ll close with what I think is another example of crisis-related advertising, from the *Daily Mail* (p. 7): It’s certainly a period of bad news, rumours, uncertainty, stress and strain. And maybe Dr. Cassells Tablets were just the thing!

**DON'T LET YOUR
'NERVES'
GET YOU DOWN!**

Ask yourself these Questions:

- (1) Do you find it difficult to face bad news calmly?
- (2) Do you lie awake at night worrying?
- (3) In times of stress and strain do you 'go off your food'?
- (4) When rumours fly do you 'get the jitters'?
- (5) Does the uncertainty from day to day put your nerves on edge—make you irritable?

If you have answered YES to any of these questions it is a warning to you to watch your nerves, as they will let you in for a breakdown. They are not taking the strain as they should. They are in that 'weak' condition of undernourishment when good sense is needed if you are to avoid serious health trouble.



MAKE UP YOUR MIND NOW that you are going to keep your nerves in perfect trim to take the stress and strain of these worrying days. Get a supply of Dr. Cassell's Tablets. Take them according to directions. They enable your nervous system capable of re-energizing tissues, of restoring impaired vitality, of enabling you to carry on with cheerfulness when things look bleak and disheartening. Dr. Cassell's Tablets are the finest tonic you can take—they contain the five mineral foods which are needed for the maintenance of life itself. Start a course of Dr. Cassell's Tablets to-day. Surely, surely they will invigorate you. You will then be able to meet all stress and build up much needed reserves of strength. Sold everywhere 6d., 1/3, 2/6, and 5/.

**KEEP YOUR NERVES STRONG with
Dr. CASSELL'S TABLETS**

Figure 21.2: *Daily Mail*, 20 September 1938, p. 7.

Chapter 22

Wednesday, 21 September
1938

**BACK TO GERMANY
TO-MORROW**

PRIME MINISTER'S DECISION

**CZECHOSLOVAK REPLY RECEIVED IN
LONDON**

OBJECTIONS TO THE PLAN

The Prime Minister is to resume his conversation with Herr Hitler at Godesberg, on the Rhine, to-morrow at 3 p.m. This decision was taken last night shortly after the receipt in London of the Czechoslovak reply to the Anglo-French proposals for the settlement of the Sudeten-German problem.

The reply was stated yesterday by the Czechoslovak Government to make possible further negotiations in a spirit of conciliation. Later the Government stated that they had asked the British and French Governments to revise their proposal for transferring certain frontier districts to Germany.

The British and French Governments late last night addressed a further urgent appeal to Prague for a sufficiently definite reply to enable Mr. Chamberlain to go to Godesberg with a clear idea of what he has or has not to offer.

Herr Hitler yesterday received at Berchtesgaden the Hungarian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister and the Polish Ambassador. It is inferred that further far-reaching demands are to be made on Czechoslovakia by her neighbours.

Concern is felt in France at German Press hints that nothing less than the complete disintegration of Czechoslovakia will satisfy German ambitions.

Figure 22.1: *The Times*, 21 September 1938, p. 10.

As indicated when he returned from Munich **last week**, Chamberlain is to fly back to Germany to meet with Hitler a second time. (Above headlines

are from *The Times*, p. 10.) This time, they are meeting at [Godesberg](#), a spa town in the Rhineland. Chamberlain will take the Anglo-French plan to Hitler, which may be a problem, because the Czech attitude to it is now characterised as ‘Neither acceptance nor rejection’. It seems that the *Manchester Guardian*’s scoop of yesterday was somewhat premature, for a later message from the Czech government was much more equivocal, asking for revisions to be made to the plan. France and Britain are pressuring Czechoslovakia to prove ‘a more definite reply to the Anglo-French proposals’, so that the Prime Minister and the Führer will have something to talk about.

The Czechs aren’t the only ones with doubts about the plan to transfer parts of the Sudetenland to Germany. (Though they are understandably more concerned than most!) The Paris correspondent of *The Times* reports (p. 10) on the mixed reactions in France, quoting the socialist leader [Léon Blum](#) as an exemplar:

Whatever may happen, the consequences will be far-reaching in Europe and in France. War has probably been averted, but in such conditions that I, who have never ceased to strive for peace, who for many years past have sanctified my life to its cause – I can experience no joy, but feel myself divided between a cowardly relief and shame.

Though the correspondent acerbically suggests that some of the criticism comes from those who would be the first to withdraw it, if they thought it might have any effect. That is, they are being brave after the fact.

Yesterday, the *Manchester Guardian* suggested that business opinion was in favour of the plan. Today, the London correspondent – in a section headed ‘Revolting City Tories’ – says (p. 8) that high finance has the opposite opinion, speaking of a ‘rapidly growing revolt’ in the City against Chamberlain. A ‘well-known City authority’ says that ‘he would do anything, even stand as a Labour candidate, in order to protest’. At a Tory club, there was shock at the proposals. These men are solidly Conservative, yet here they are denouncing the government: giving Germany the Sudetenland is ‘too weak for England’, according to one.

This bellicosity is very interesting, given a story in the same paper (p. 13) about how the City would fare in wartime. Firstly, ‘The City’s location is well indicated to aircraft by the rectangular bend of the Thames at Waterloo’, so businesses would have every reason ‘to want to scatter away from the “City mile” in case of emergency’. For one thing, suburban train services would be cut to a minimum, so the banking houses would have a skeleton staff only, hopefully protected to some degree by anti-gas curtains

and other ARP measures. Otherwise business will be conducted by those ‘scattered outside London and linked up only by telephone’. Furthermore, it’s clear that in wartime the government will want to restrict the mobility of capital and the ability to maximise profits. In short, war will be bad for the City, so why are bankers so keen for Britain to stand up to Germany?

The conservative press is doing its best to get people behind the Anglo-French plan. Here are a couple examples of some very slanted language. *The Times* has a leading article today (p. 11) which says:

To-day it becomes French as well as British policy to find, if it can yet be found, the way of agreement in place of blind and timid resistance.

So to stand up to Hitler over Czechoslovakia is to be ‘timid’. And the *Daily Mail* has an article (p. 10) explaining that ‘Europe is always changing’ – so that makes carving up Czechoslovakia ok then.

Finally, let’s go to Geneva. The [League of Nations](#) has been sidelined by all the personal, bilateral diplomacy that’s been going on during the crisis (and also because it has proved fairly toothless in previous crises). And this story is no different, because it has nothing to do with the crisis either. The *Daily Mail* reports that Captain [Euan Wallace](#), Financial Secretary to the Treasury, yesterday recommended the following principles to the League’s Committee on Disarmament:

1. Intentional bombing of civilian populations is illegal.
2. Targets which are aimed at from the air must be legitimate objectives and must be capable of identification.
3. Any attack on a legitimate objective must be made in such a manner that the civilian population in the neighbourhood is not bombed through carelessness.

This is an attempt to humanise aerial warfare by extending the laws of war on land and sea which have developed over time – just the start, the final rules would be much more comprehensive. It arose out of British outrage (public and parliamentary) over bombing in Spain and China earlier in the year, as a leader in the *Manchester Guardian* notes (p. 8). But whether Wallace’s principles will have any more success than any of the other attempts to limit bombing through international law seems doubtful. They certainly come too late for [Alcoy](#), an industrial town in Spain which was bombed yesterday by Italian-made Savoia bombers. 12 people were killed, and 50 injured.

Chapter 23

Thursday, 22 September 1938



Figure 23.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 22 September 1938, p. 11.

Chamberlain is meeting Hitler at Godesberg today (the headlines are from the *Manchester Guardian*, p. 11). The good news (for Chamberlain, anyway) is that the Czechoslovakian government has finally, and very reluctantly, accepted the Anglo-French plan for the transfer of German-majority

areas to Germany. (Which, it seems, still hasn't been officially published.) That would mean that Hitler would get what he wants without war, which is what Chamberlain is trying to avoid. The bad news is that it's now clear that Poland and Hungary are lining up for their own pieces of Czechoslovakia: the German press is referring to a 'united front' of Germans, Poles and Hungarians. And the Anglo-French plan doesn't provide for this at all. As *The Times* notes (p. 10):

Czechoslovakia is faced with the loss in the near future of Western Bohemia, Northern Bohemia, German Silesia, Polish Silesia, and the Hungarian Parts in the south.

[Maxim Litvinov](#), the Soviet Foreign Minister, has announced at the League of Nations Assembly that the Soviet Union will give Czechoslovakia 'immediate and effective assistance' under the terms of the Soviet-Czech pact, providing France (Czechoslovakia's other ally) does the same. But he criticised the Anglo-French plan as 'a capitulation which was bound sooner or later to have quite catastrophic and disastrous consequences' (*The Times*, p. 10).

To add insult to injury, there's a growing chorus of disapproval of the plan, at home and abroad. According to a leader in the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 10), 'A week ago Mr. Chamberlain has the admiration and trust of the world.' But:

If Mr. Chamberlain reads his papers to-day as he flies once again to Germany he will see no trace of admiration for his part as the head of a great democracy, no trust that he can save any shred of principle from the wreck, no belief even that he can recover his country's honour.

Prominent political figures are lining up to criticise Chamberlain, including some from his own side (though, as yet, the ministerial ranks are holding firm), as several articles in *The Times* show (p. 15). Sir [Archibald Sinclair](#), leader of the Liberals said in a speech at the National Liberal Club that Britain's 'submission' to Hitler's demands is simply due to 'threat of war'. [Anthony Eden](#), who was Chamberlain's Foreign Secretary until he resigned in February over relations with Italy, spoke at the Stratford-on-Avon branch of the English-speaking Union (and on the wireless in America too). He did not attack appeasement as such:

But if appeasement is to mean what it says, it must not be at the expense of either our vital interests, or of our national reputation, or of our sense of fair dealing.

Don't be deluded that appeasement is preserving peace: 'each recurrent crisis brings us closer to war; we slither ever closer to the abyss'. And [Winston Churchill](#), a prominent backbench MP, in a statement (press release?) to the Press Association, warned of 'the disaster into which we are being led'.

The neutralization of Czechoslovakia alone means the liberation of 25 German divisions to threaten the Western Front. The path to the Black Sea will be laid wide open to triumphant Nazism.

This menaces 'the cause of freedom and democracy in every country'. And because German 'war power' will grow faster than British or French 'preparations for defence', he implies that the time for war is now.

It's hard to define precisely, but my impression is that the tone of the press coverage of the crisis has become more desperate in the last few days. Panic is definitely too strong a word, but the anxiety level is certainly rising rapidly. Fully 10 of the 20 pages in today's *Manchester Guardian* are wholly or partly given over to the crisis, or to the air raid precautions (ARP) which are now assuming such urgency because of it. (Though the following picture of a sign at the [Blackpool illuminations](#), from the *Manchester Guardian*, p. 9, would have been planned well before the current unpleasantness. That's the local war memorial beside it, by the way.)

On the one hand, there are those who favour some form of compulsion in order to force people to undertake ARP. Sir [Edward Grigg](#), a Conservative MP, spoke at the luncheon of the Altrincham Show (!) on the need to organise the civilian population for air attack, in part through a form of national service (*The Times*, p. 15). Surgeon-Commander G. Ernest MacLeod (RN, ret'd.) writes to the *Daily Mail* (p. 10) to ask

If people refuse to take precautions after the reasons for doing so have been explained should not the Home Office step in and make it a penal offence not to do so?

Others try scaremongering: James Wilson, the Chief Constable of Cardiff, complains about a shortfall of nearly 3000 ARP wardens, out of 4200 needed (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 4):

I ask the public to visualise the indescribable chaos and panic which would exist in this city in the event of a raid simply through their failure to play unselfishly to play unselfishly their part in the scheme in good time.

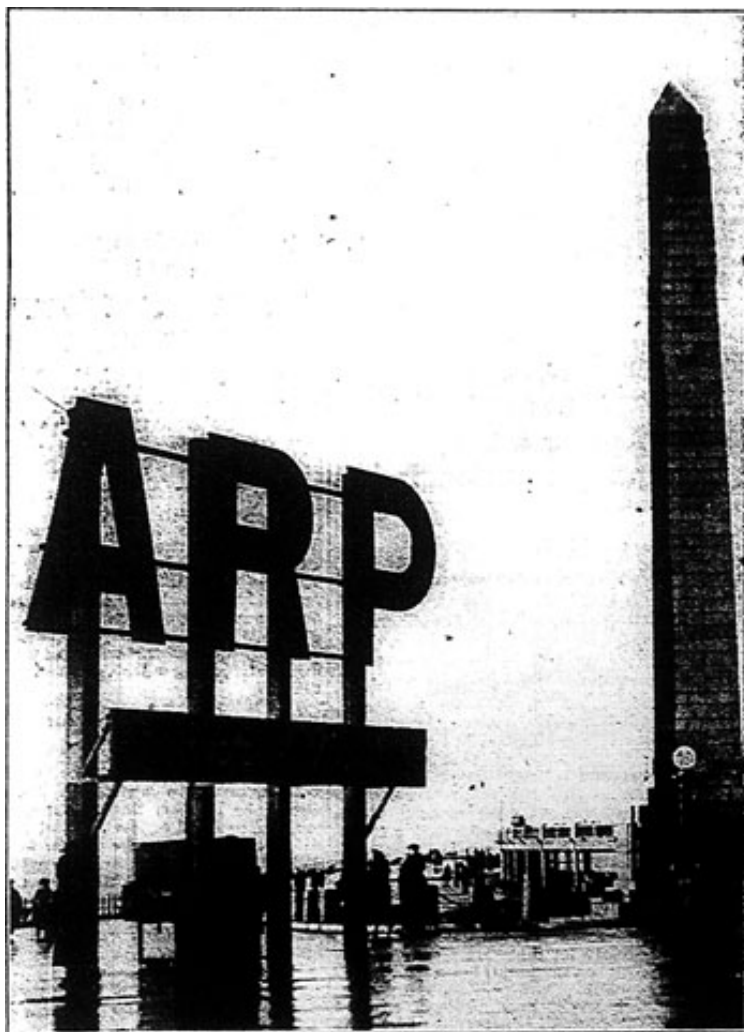


Figure 23.2: *Manchester Guardian*, 22 September 1938, p. 9.

He's got plainclothesman out door-knocking, looking for volunteers. Professor [J. B. S. Haldane](#), a biologist and a socialist, has also been talking to the people, in the form of the thousand employees of [Messrs. L. Gardner and Sons](#)' oil engine works in Salford (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 13). He explained his system of deep shelters to them, which would cost about £500 million. 'That is a lot of money, but I would sooner know that my skin was safe than know that foreigners were being bombed in their countries for my defence.' (Of course, deep shelters couldn't be built in time to be of use should the current crisis turn into a war, and Haldane didn't suggest that they could.) Lastly, there's a touching letter in *The Times* (p. 6), signed 'THREE YOUNG FATHERS'. They complain about a '[Handbook of A.R.P. Instructions for Householders](#)' which the Home Office drew up over a year ago and then never distributed (except to ARP volunteers). And despite the crisis, it still hasn't been distributed. And yet people who ask their local ARP authorities for advice are being referred to this handbook.

In time of emergency it is quite fantastic to assume that air raid wardens will have the time to interview personally each inhabitant of their zones. But without such visits or the publication of the handbook the ordinary householder is left ignorant and worried. It is surely realized in official quarters that young parents are unable to help as A.R.P. volunteers. The men are needed elsewhere and the women have their children to look after. What, then, are young husbands and wives to do about A.R.P.?

Chapter 24

Friday, 23 September 1938



Figure 24.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 23 September 1938, p. 9.

So Chamberlain, having flown to Germany **yesterday**, is still there, talking to Hitler. There's no official word on what they talked about, but afterward Chamberlain appealed (via communique) for calm in the Sudetenland and other afflicted areas, or to be precise, he 'appeals most earnestly, therefore,

to everybody to assist in maintaining from action of any kind that would be likely to lead to incidents' (this and the above headlines are from *Manchester Guardian*, p. 9). The situation in Czechoslovakia is indeed looking pretty bleak. The German press is reporting more of these 'incidents' (the *Manchester Guardian* uses scare quotes, too, p. 9), including a Czech official throwing a grenade into a crowd. They also report that the Czech army is withdrawing from the Sudetenland, blowing up bridges as it goes – the *Manchester Guardian* doubts that any such thing has happened (p. 9) but the *Daily Mail*'s own correspondent, Paul Bretherton, has apparently seen this with his own eyes (p. 11. I say apparently because my printout is very poor quality at this point!) But it does seem true that two Sudeten towns have been evacuated by Czech authorities, and taken over by Sudetens (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 13). The Polish minority in the border town of [Teschen](#) has taken control of the Czech police stations there (*Daily Mail*, p. 11), or maybe they only attacked them (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 9). It's very confusing, but in no sense reassuring. The British legation in Prague has instructed all British subjects to leave immediately, and an Imperial Airways H.P. 42 ([Heracles](#), for the planespotters among you) has made a mercy dash to evacuate some of them (*Daily Mail*, p. 11). The other big news (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 9) is that the government of the Czech Prime Minister, Hodza, has resigned, to be replaced by a 'national reconstruction' cabinet under the Inspector General of the Army, General [Jan Syrový](#), the popular one-eyed former commander of the legendary [Czech Legion](#). It's not a military government but it's not a good look for democracy either.

The first leading article in the *Daily Mail* today (p. 10) is urging readers to stay the course and trust Chamberlain:

Those who hurl bitter accusations at the Prime Minister at this time are attacking his noble project at its foundations [...] Much of the information which decided the Government's policy is necessarily hidden from the public. The critics will find that the Prime Minister has a complete answer when he comes to make his statement to Parliament.

And the critics are multiplying. A crowd of nearly 10000 blocked Whitehall last night, nearly breaking through a police cordon two deep, backed up by 4 mounted police, according to the *Daily Mail* (p. 11. But the *Manchester Guardian*, p. 12, says the crowd numbered only three or four thousand: I'm not sure why the right-wing *Mail* would exaggerate the numbers or the liberal *Guardian* would minimise them?) The chants included 'Chamberlain Must Go', 'Stand by the Czechs', 'Save Britain', and 'Stop Hitler'.

Many more protests are being organised across the country this week-end: Labour is planning some two thousand, culminating in a big meeting at the Empress Hall in Earls Court on Monday night where Attlee will speak (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 8).

But there are those who support Chamberlain's fight for peace. A deputation (including, among others, [George Lansbury](#) and [Vera Brittain](#)) from the [Peace Pledge Union](#) (which [still exists](#)) visited Downing Street in the Prime Minister's absence and left a manifesto stating that nothing could justify a war (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 12):

The present crisis is the clearest possible example of historical retribution and a clear justification of pacifist policy. Blame undoubtedly attaches to Germany at the moment, but neither this country nor any other Great Power is less to blame for the present situation.

[J. F. C. Fuller](#), decidedly not a pacifist, doesn't want to add 'unnecessary fuel to the present crisis'. His way of avoiding this is to make assertions such as (*Spectator*, p. 483):

I am further informed, on good authority, that in the Sudeten areas is to be found the highest death rate, suicide rate and infant mortality in Europe. Are these statements true or are they lies?

And to imply that the Soviet Union is pulling the strings behind the scenes in an attempt to start an 'Imperialistic War'. Boney is a fully paid-up member of the British Union of Fascists – just so you know.

Some other bits and pieces. On 2 October, Hoare, the Home Secretary is going to launch a drive to recruit half a million ARP volunteers: 1.6 million posters are being printed, and the Football Association and the Greyhound Racing Association (among other sporting organisations) are going to broadcast appeals at their events (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 4). Which suggests to me that they are particularly trying to get working-class volunteers. There is speculation in Berlin that one fruit of the Chamberlain-Hitler meeting may be an 'air pact' (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 13). I'm not precisely sure what is meant by this; an air pact was the topic of much discussion in 1935, where it meant a sort of air [Locarno](#), a mutual air defence pact. But I suspect that here it might be an agreement not to bomb each other's civilians in wartime. The *Manchester Guardian* (pp. 10-1) has an article by an up-and-coming historian named [A. J. P. Taylor](#) comparing Czechoslovakia 1938 with Belgium 1830. He ends with a list of criteria for even temporary success in preserving peace, of which the last is:

(4) that there shall be as close an “ideological” bond between the Government of England and Germany as there was between between the constitutional monarchies of England and France a century ago. Of these conditions only the last seems likely of fulfillment.

Nice to see that AJP was always the controversialist! Lastly, another letter from a concerned parent: this time Therese Vogler wonders about the lack of gas masks for very young children (*Spectator*, p. 484):

A kind of gas-proof tent is, I believe, contemplated for infants in arms, but a frightened child between the unreasoning ages of eighteen months and four years could neither be kept forcibly enclosed for any length of time without suffering great terror, or induced to wear a gas-mask if it could possibly tear it off.

She wants to know ‘what chances there are, if any, for an adequate form of protection for small children’.

Chapter 25

Saturday, 24 September 1938



Figure 25.1: *Daily Mail*, 24 September 1938, p. 9.

It's hard to believe, but it's only a week since Chamberlain **returned** from his first flight to Germany. Everyone was then full of hope. He is returning from his second trip today, and hope has been replaced by despair. The above headlines from the *Daily Mail* (p. 9) tell us that the talks between Chamberlain and Hitler have broken down, that the Czech and Hungarian armed forces have been mobilised. On the other side of the page, Germany and France are said to be massing troops. Hitler has refused to give a pledge that German troops won't unilaterally move into the Sudetenland in response to the Czech reoccupation of Eger. And he has set a firm time limit of one week for the conclusion of negotiations – i.e., by Saturday 1 October. After that, the implication is, he will take what he wants by force.

This is stunning. After all, there has been widespread (if not universal) condemnation of the Anglo-French plan to cede the Sudetenland to Germany as a craven submission to Hitler's desires. So why is Hitler threatening to take by force what has been offered to him peacefully? The leading article in the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 12):

He knew that these regions were already his: is it credible that he should refuse to wait for the short time that would be necessary and should risk all and revive again the imminent danger of a great war by ordering his troops to occupy the Sudeten [sic] districts? His troops are already reported to be moving, but even now one can scarcely imagine anything so completely fantastic as that he should invade Czecho-Slovakia and attack the great mountain barrier when he knows that it would shortly in any case be given to him without cost. Until the unbelievable is proved to be true, we must suppose that his intention is something less summary than invasion. But the Czechs have ordered a general mobilisation and the danger is acute.

Even at this late date, it's evidently all too easy to mirror-image, to project onto others one's own values. The idea of actually *wanting* war is incomprehensible to the British; surely Hitler can see that it would be catastrophic for all concerned? Why is he being so obstinate and threatening? He can't actually prefer to plunge Europe into a devastating war rather than simply accept the gift of the disputed territories? After all, he has proclaimed his love of peace as loudly as any statesman in the past few years. What's going on here?

Incomprehensible as this may be, nobody is taking the possibility of war lightly. The *Manchester Guardian's* London correspondent reports (p. 12):

Anxieties are beginning to harden into acceptance and preparation for the worst, and to-day one heard more often than previously people discussing definite plans to be used in the event of war.

And 'First and foremost, people in London are thinking about air-raid precautions'. There's been a run on first-aid kits at chemists, those who are able to are making arrangements to evacuate their families to the country if war breaks out. A loud-speaker van has been patrolling Fleet Street calling for volunteers for the new [Auxiliary Fire Service](#). In Manchester, the City Council held a heated session on ARP (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 15): there is to be a survey of ground suitable for building underground shelters, and demonstration trenches (so that people can dig their own in the backyard – if they have one) will be dug next week. But one councillor calls ARP 'cant, hypocrisy and humbug', preferring to trust in Chamberlain's diplomacy. In contrast, another says that 'the real remedy, of course, is to get rid of the people who are causing the fear of air raids, and that is the Government of

the day'. An ARP propaganda campaign is planned for the week beginning 3 October. Part of this will be a demonstration at Belle Vue (at the [greyhound track](#)?) to 'give the citizens an idea of what is likely to happen in the event of an air raid' (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 14). The set will be an ordinary street, with a newspaper vendor and people promenading, all carrying gas masks. The siren will sound, the wardens will get everybody under cover: 'Reasonable excitement to be evident, though everybody on set calm and purposeful'. Aeroplanes (RAF?) will approach and fly around in circles, hopefully to be found by the searchlights. Nine detonations will be heard, to represent three each of high explosive, gas and incendiary bombs. A mock house on the set 'will become on fire'. Fire-engine bells will sound, firemen, gas detection squads, and first aid details will arrive to perform their duties. At the end a decontamination squad will show how mustard gas would be removed, and a demolition team will blow up the side of a house.



Figure 25.2: *The Times*, 24 September 1938, p. 14.

Local authorities everywhere are setting up gas mask fitting and distribution centres, like this one in Westminster (*The Times*, 24 September 1938, p. 14).

Yet another moving letter, this time from 'HIS FATHER':

After hearing the broadcast news on the night before he returned to school a boy of 14 remarked, quietly and dispassionately, that at least he had three more years before he would

probably be killed in battle [...] We have indeed come to a sorry pass when the joy and hope natural to childhood are turned into bitter contemplation of the chances of survival and the end of school life marks the end of either purpose or security.

The Times, p. 6.

Chapter 26

Monday, 26 September 1938



Figure 26.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 26 September 1938, p. 9.

Unfortunately, the situation has deteriorated since **Saturday** (above, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 9). Hitler has made new demands which are described by the *Manchester Guardian*'s diplomatic correspondent (p. 9) as 'fantastic'. At Berchtesgaden, **a week and a half ago**, Hitler said he

wanted only those districts where Sudetens were a majority of the population. This was the basis of the Anglo-French plan, to which Czechoslovakia eventually agreed. And now he wants:

The immediate cession of all the territories (with scarcely any considerable exception) where there are Sudeten Germans. There is no longer any question of only such districts where they make up more than 50 per cent. Districts where they are in conspicuous minorities or even where there are no Sudeten Germans at all are included.

These areas are to be handed over to Germany on 1 October, meaning that there would be no time for the Czechs to remove any factories or fortifications. This, the correspondent speculates, is part of the point of the rush. Germany will secure its rear and gain valuable natural resources, factories and military stores. And then Germany will turn west:

She would be able to present another ultimatum, demanding, perhaps, colonies, or the surrender of the Maginot Line, or a "plebiscite" in the Flemish regions of Belgium, and so on. She would be able to back this ultimatum with a vastly superior Air Force, a vastly augmented armament, and almost complete invulnerability. In other words, she would have achieved her maximum of offensive and defensive power in relation to France and Britain.

The Czechs have, of course, rejected this ultimatum. Which, it would seem, means war. Daladier and Bonnet have again flown to London to consult with their British colleagues. Yugoslavia and Romania have promised to support Czechoslovakia if Hungary attacks, under the terms of the [Little Entente](#); but it appears that Poland is to get its territorial demands (Teschen) without a fight (*Daily Mail*, p. 11). Czechoslovakia has mobilised all men under 40; a million are expected to be under arms by tomorrow (*Daily Mail*, p. 12).

At home, the news is dominated by the mass distribution of gas masks and the digging of trenches in parks. As the *Daily Mail* reports (p. 11):

Yesterday will go down in history as A.R.P. Sunday. Until late last night hundreds of thousands were still flocking to schools, town halls and other public buildings all over London and the Home Counties to be fitted for gas masks.

With only eleventh-hour warning to the public and the hastiest of preparations by local authorities, more people were fitted

yesterday than during the previous six months: by the end of this week the Home Office expects that practically the whole of Britain will have been provided for.

The public has responded quickly but calmly, which reflects ‘not only the anxiety caused by the European situation but also the sanity and orderliness of the British people’.

The trenches – in London they have been dug in Hyde Park, St. James’s Park, and Green Park, among others – are intended as emergency public shelter, for people who are caught away from home or work during air raids. They are quick and dirty. As a leader in the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 8) reflects:

The digging of trenches in the public parks of London, Manchester, and other large cities is perhaps the most vivid of all reminders that if war comes the front line will be at home. As a measure of protection against the blast and splinter of high explosive the plan has the merit that it can be resorted to wherever land available, and in this respect those cities which for reasons quite unconnected with defence have provided themselves with “lungs” in their midst have an advantage. Entrenchment, moreover, can be quickly extended if emergency is prolonged [...]

But everyone can join in the fun (if they have a backyard, that is, which many of the working class do not). The following (from *Manchester Guardian*, p. 10) is based on recommendations for a home slit trench: it’s 4’6” wide at the top and 4’6” deep.

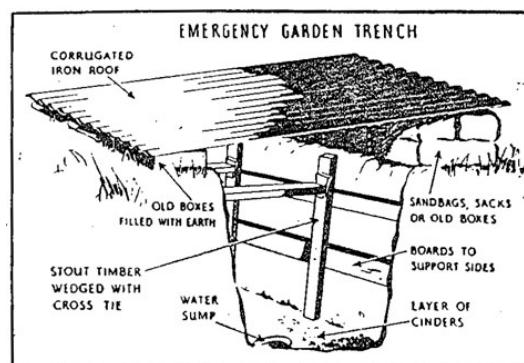


Figure 26.2: *Manchester Guardian*, 26 September 1938, p. 10.

In Whitehall itself, the crowds have exhibited a ‘passive curiosity’, although there were some ‘minor clashes’ resulting in 17 arrests (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 8; *The Times*, p. 14). There don’t seem to have been any spectacular outcomes from the two thousand protests planned for the weekend, though a number of speeches are quoted. Colonel Wedgwood, Liberal MP, said at Peterborough (*The Times*, p. 7):

that Mr. Chamberlain had surrendered to Hitler in vain. The only result had been that Hungary, Poland, and Italy and come into the open as satellite States under Hitler’s wing, determined on their share of the spoils of victory.

Sir Walter Citrine, general secretary of the Trades Union Congress said that the self-determination of the Sudetens is no longer the issue, for ‘This had merely been used as pretext to cover the aggressive intentions of Nazi Germany in Central Europe’. Nobody can be proud of the part Britain and France have played in this, but at least it appears that, at their second meeting, Chamberlain was not prepared to accede to Hitler’s latest demands. Charles White, organiser of the National Council of Action (which National Council of Action, I’m not sure!), told a weekend school (on social reconstruction, not the crisis) in Manchester that he believed that Hitler’s aim was world empire (*Manchester Guardian*, p.11):

Once the Hitler aim was achieved who could tell how many ages of darkness might pass before the yoke of Nazism was thrown off? It was not improbable that mankind would know ages of darkness comparable to those which followed the collapse of the Roman Empire.

For Leo Amery, a senior Tory backbencher, it’s simple (letter, *The Times*, p. 13):

Are we to surrender to ruthless brutality a free people whose cause we have espoused but are now to throw to the wolves to save our own skins, or are we still able to stand up to a bully? It is not Czechoslovakia but our own soul that is at stake.

That’s all pretty heavy stuff. To end on a note of absurdity, the *Daily Mail* describes (p. 10) General Gamelin, the commander of the French armed forces, as a ‘New Napoleon’. This seems unfortunate on several levels, and not only in hindsight!

Chapter 27

Tuesday, 27 September 1938



Figure 27.1: *Daily Mail*, 27 September 1938, p. 11.

Hitler made a speech in Berlin last night in which he repeated the demands he made at Godesberg. Again, Czechoslovakia has until 1 October to cede the Sudetenland to Germany: otherwise he threatens to take it forcibly. But at least he promises that this is his last territorial claim in Europe. My copy of the *Daily Mail* headlines, p. 11, chops a bit off, so here's the text:

**HITLER SAYS OCTOBER 1 Patience is at an End:
Czechs must give us Territory Immediately or we will
Fetch it Ourselves
I WANT PEACE WITH ENGLAND
Last Demand in Europe: I Will Not Renounce It
BRITAIN & RUSSIA WILL BACK FRANCE**

Today's leading article in *The Times* (p. 13) calls this 'tempestuous and rather offensive', but thinks the most important point is that Hitler 'did not seem absolutely to close the door to negotiation'.

Chamberlain would seem to agree, as he has already replied to Hitler's speech by way of a public statement released at 1am this morning (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 9). He says that it seems 'incredible' that Europe should be plunged into war when both sides are largely in agreement (i.e., that Czechoslovakia should cede the Sudetenland). His interpretation is that:

It is evident that the Chancellor has no faith that the promises made will be carried out.

So Chamberlain assures Hitler that the British government is morally responsible for seeing that the Czechs will carry out their promises. He hopes that Hitler will accept this and negotiate a settlement for the Sudeten transfer to take place in a reasonable timeframe. The leader in the *Daily Mail* also favours continued diplomacy in these 'four days which remain between civilisation and catastrophe' (p. 10).

Parliament has been recalled – something which Labour has been agitating for for weeks – and will meet tomorrow (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 9). Chamberlain will likely get a hot reception. Attlee has written a letter to No. 10 urging firmness:

The British Government must leave no doubt in the mind of the German Government that it will unite with the French and Soviet Governments to resist any attack upon Czecho-Slovakia [...] Whatever the risks involved, Great Britain must make its stand against aggression.

On the other side of the ideological divide, Churchill says exactly the same thing.

After **ARP Sunday**, there was a 'sudden spurt' in ARP preparations around the country yesterday, according to the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 10; the above **ARP tram** is from p. 7). Bolton's schools, for example, will be closed for the rest of the week because they are being used as centres for the fitting of gas masks. Nine miles of trenches are going to be dug in Cardiff, enough to hold 24000 people, ten percent of the population. Morrison has appealed urgently for thousands of volunteers for ARP duties. The Home Office has decided to issue every household with a copy of a booklet called *The Protection of Your Home Against Air Raids*, and **William Astor** (Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Home Secretary) advises anyone who has a garden to build a shelter in it at once. 'We may not have to wait until Saturday' for war.

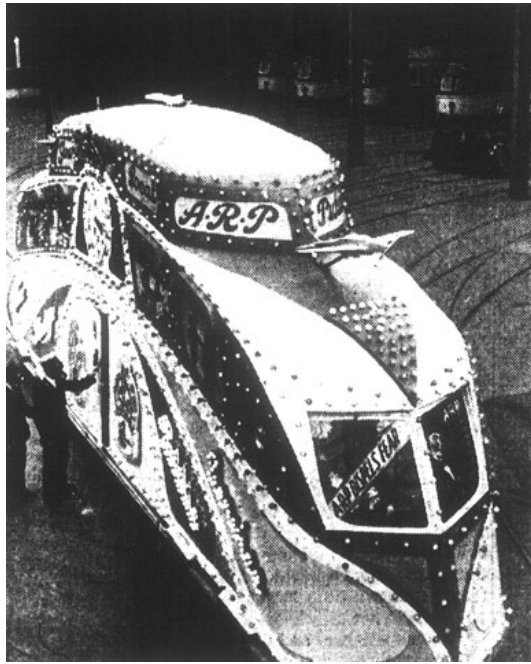


Figure 27.2: *Manchester Guardian*, 27 September 1938, p. 7.

A leader in the *Manchester Guardian* on the subject says (p. 8):

The lesson that has been burned into our consciousness in the past weeks is that of the need for immediate preparedness. It holds whether peace lasts only a few days or a matter of months, for what the British people has at last realised is that we can safely count on no more than a breathing-space.

And preparedness is lacking: 'our record on A.R.P. is, as a whole, bad'. The current activity is necessary and commendable – though authorities have been slow to recognise that high explosive is probably a greater danger than gas – but the public would be reassured to have a proper system of public air-raid shelters, rather than the hasty digging of trenches. As Haldane says, 'we must have efficient A.R.P. or offer ourselves as a victim'.

Wm. Kenyon & Sons in Cheshire are doing their part, advertising ropes and rope ladders for use in ARP (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 16):

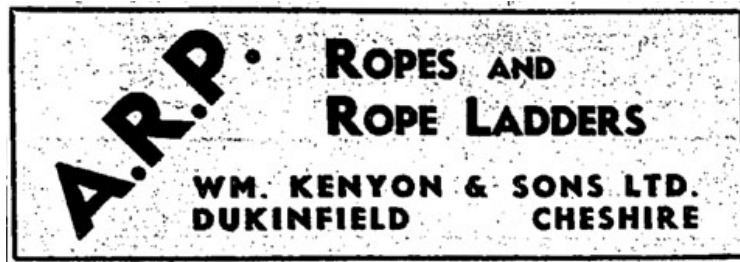


Figure 27.3: *Manchester Guardian*, 27 September 1938, p. 16.

Eagle Star Insurance is offering home insurance which includes ‘Damage arising from Aircraft or articles dropped therefrom’:

A vertical advertisement for Eagle Star Insurance. At the top, a black box contains the text 'AN OFFER to HOUSEHOLDERS and HOUSE-OWNERS' in white. Below this, the text reads: 'In the event of your making no claim on your 'ALL-IN' policy during five years, the policy will be granted FREE for the sixth year'. Further down, it states: 'The 'ALL-IN' policy protects your possessions against every serious risk—fire, burglary, larceny, liability to servants and many others.' A small box contains the text: 'Damage arising from Aircraft or articles dropped therefrom also included.' Below this is the Eagle Star logo, featuring an eagle with spread wings above the words 'EAGLE STAR'. Underneath the logo is 'INSURANCE COMPANY LIMITED' and 'ASSETS EXCEED £25,000,000'. The advertisement concludes with 'Complete this FORM for full details.' and 'HEAD OFFICE: 1 Threadneedle Street, E.C.2.' followed by a form for 'Name' and 'Address'. At the bottom right, the words 'EAGLE STAR' are printed.

Figure 27.4: *Daily Mail*, 27 September 1938, p. 12.

Admittedly, though, it’s not clear if this refers to war damage – there was a shocking accident earlier in the month at [Edmonton](#), when an aeroplane crashed into a suburban street and killed 12 people (8 from 2 families). But there might be deliberate ambiguity, too.

Women and children have been evacuating Paris for Brittany and Normandy. Extra trains have been laid on, and authorities believe that the population of the inner city can be brought down from 3 million to only 500,000. Cities closer to the German frontier are already nearly empty of civilians (*Daily Mail*, p. 5).

At the request of the Food Defence Plans Department, the price of bacon, ham, butter, cheese, lard, cooking fat and margarine will remain fixed for the next 14 days (*Daily Mail*, p. 11).

RAF personnel have been recalled from leave. The men of the fighter squadrons and barrage balloon units of the Auxiliary Air Force have been called up, as have those in the Observer Corps and the anti-aircraft units of the Territorial Army. The air-raid warning system has been activated. All 'Purely as a precautionary measure' (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 9).

Chapter 28

Wednesday, 28 September 1938

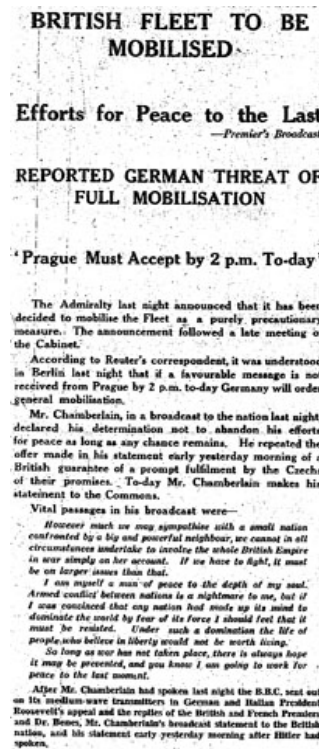


Figure 28.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 28 September 1938, p. 9.

The German ultimatum for the Czech withdrawal from the Sudetenland by 1 October remains. But there is a report of a new deadline: the ulti-

matum must be accepted by 2pm *today*, or else Germany will mobilise its armed forces (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 9). Hungary has already begun mobilising, and the Royal Navy has been given its orders this morning. It seems probable that war will start any day now – maybe tomorrow, if no way to peace can be found.

A speech by Chamberlain was broadcast by the BBC last night. He repeated his pledge to Hitler to make sure the Czechs keep their promise to hand over the Sudetenland (i.e. at a time to be decided, not by Saturday). He can't take the Empire into war just to save one nation, there would have to be more important issues at stake.

How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing.

(You can hear the whole speech [here](#), found [here](#).) The leader-writer for the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 8) sees this as 'an ungenerous reference to a gallant State that has made enormous sacrifices for peace'. In fact, the whole speech is deemed to be directed more at Hitler than at the British people, who won't find it much in sympathy with their views. For example, Hitler is merely described as 'unreasonable', 'a phrase that may become classical for its understatement'.

Two-thirds of the population now have their gas masks or have been fitted for one, according to the *Daily Mail* (p. 3). A gas-proof kennel has been developed for pets (p. 7), and the Home Office says they've finally got a means of gas-protection for babies in protection (*The Times*, p. 12). Plans are being made for the evacuation of schoolchildren from London. This will not be compulsory, but if parents give their consent their children will be evacuated with their school. Some public schools, orphanages and 'schools for physical defectives' have already been evacuated (p. 15). The government is ready for food rationing: 50 million ration cards and 18 million application forms (one for every household) have been printed. The police have issued black-out instructions for houses and motor-vehicles. Trench-digging, of course, is proceeding as fast as possible, in many places continuing through the night.

In quiet Lincoln's Inn Fields, for example, trenches were being dug, and during the luncheon hour huge crowds of office workers were inspecting them, many, no doubt, with the Home Office plan for protective trenches in private gardens in their minds, wanting to see how experts constructed these splinter-proof shelters.

The imminence of war is altering behaviour and creating new problems. There's been a run on petrol in London's suburbs, as car-owners fill up their tanks in anticipation of rationing (p. 7). Though it also has to do with

the increase in the volume of traffic on the arterial roads, caused by the fact that many men are taking their wives and families to live in the country.

The Postmaster-General has appealed to telephone subscribers to limit their non-essential conversations as much as possible. These are causing unusually heavy demands on trunk and local telephone systems, leading to delays for essential calls (p. 10). The BBC has warned the public to ignore rumours, such as the one that 'normal railway services are to close down on Friday night' (p. 10). And instances of ARP profiteering have emerged: in one case, a local official in Essex was placing a telephone order, turned away for a moment, and then when he returned to the call was told that the price for whatever it was that he was ordering had gone up by £3 per ton (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 3)!

Speaking of which, here are some advertisements which use the crisis as their selling point: From the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 7), Cephos cold and headache remedy:



Figure 28.2: *Manchester Guardian*, 28 September 1938, p. 7.

From the same newspaper (p. 10), [British Cellophane](#) (i.e. to gas-proof windows and protect against flying glass shards):

A. R. P.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT TO OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS OF FACTORIES, WAREHOUSES, BUSINESS PREMISES, INSTITUTIONS, DEPARTMENT AND RETAIL STORES, ETC. ETC.

WINDOW PROTECTION

At a time of National Emergency it is vitally important that means should be found of protecting staffs against the danger of flying glass and the invasion of gas. Factories and Workshops that are dependent upon constant humidity of temperature must be able, at a moment's notice, to remove shuttled windows in order to carry on production.

HOME OFFICE RECOMMENDATION

The official Air Raid Protection Handbook issued by the Home Office recommends the use of "Cellophane" film. To meet the special requirements of large business premises and factories, etc., British Cellophane, Limited, has produced a ready-gummed roll of "Cellophane" film of special thickness. This material can be quickly and easily applied, requiring only immersion in water.

APPLY NOW!

These A.R.P. Window Rolls of "Cellophane" film, which are 50 feet long and 36 inches wide, cost 10/- each. So great has been the demand for this material in the past few days that British Cellophane, Limited, has had to increase the price of these special A.R.P. Window Rolls to order their requirements immediately from the Sales Division, British Cellophane, Limited, at the address below. Orders will be dealt with in strict rotation, and it is important to note that all orders placed are non-refundable.

BRITISH CELLOPHANE LIMITED
117E, STRATFORD PLACE, GUY'S STREET, LONDON, W.1.

British Cellophane Ltd. are members of the National Trade Union "Cellophane" and "Cellulose" of London E.C.4.

Figure 28.3: *Manchester Guardian*, 28 September 1938, p. 10.

And from the *Daily Mail*, Zylex, for lining your garden trench shelter (p. 3):

LINE YOUR A.R.P. SHELTER with REINFORCED ZYLEX

7d. per yard, 15/6 per roll of 24 yds., 36 ins. wide
CHEAP • WATERPROOF • UNTEARABLE
Saves costly timber. Ensures dry comfort.

FROM ALL BUILDERS' MERCHANTS

The RUBEROID CO., LTD., 296/302, High Holborn, London, W.C.1. Tel: Hol. 9993 (9 lines)

Branches:
Birmingham 64, Corporation St. Edinburgh 1, Canongate Park, West
Manchester 708, Chester Road Glasgow 1, Chambers Road, Greenock
Sheffield 1, Broad Street Dublin 1, Arden Place
Newcastle 1, Tyne Street, St. James' Belfast 7/77, Great Patrick Street

Figure 28.4: *Daily Mail*, 28 September 1938, p. 3.

I haven't been able to pay much attention to the letters columns for a while, because there is just too much else going on. Rest assured that they have been busy. Here's one I can't resist noting, because it's by a man named Fleming – [Ian Fleming](#).¹ It's a long letter, in *The Times* (p. 12); in it he argues for the appeasement of Hitler on the basis of the relevant parts of the [Nazi Party's original 25-point programme](#) issued in February 1920. Essentially this boils down to (1) the union of all German-speaking peoples; (2) the equality of Germany with respect to other nations; and (3) colonies for food and emigration. Fleming sees these principles as consistent with Hitler's recent actions, and so Britain should treat his demands as sincere. And since appeasing Germany is the only way to peace, this is what should be attempted. But he adds that:

If and when Herr Hitler refuses a settlement on these lines – if, that is to say, it is made clear that Germany already aims once again at world domination by aggression – then it will be time to organize this country on a wartime basis and announce to Germany that we shall fight at the first act of aggression against our fundamental treaty obligations.

Although in his closing sentence he seems to hold out neutrality as another option:

[...] then it will be time to turn a reluctant ear either to the dangerous counsels of the slaughter-house brigade or to the bemused vapourings of those who long for the day when England is another Holland and out of the fight forever.

Not an atypical sentiment in Britain in late September 1938, I'd say, although his familiarity with early Nazi policy is rather more unusual!

¹I thought I might actually have discovered something that nobody else was aware of, but somebody noticed it back in [June](#)!

Chapter 29

Thursday, 29 September 1938

**HERR HITLER HOLDS
HIS HAND**

**FOUR STATESMEN TO MEET
IN MUNICH TO-DAY**

SIGNOR MUSSOLINI'S COOPERATION

**DRAMATIC CLIMAX TO PRIME
MINISTER'S SPEECH**

In a dramatic statement to the House of Commons yesterday Mr. Chamberlain announced that he was flying to-day to Munich, where he would meet Herr Hitler, M. Daladier, and Signor Mussolini.

The German Government, in reply to representations from Mr. Chamberlain and Signor Mussolini, had already postponed for 24 hours the decision to mobilize the army.

Relief is felt in Paris and Rome at the calling of the Four-Power Conference. In Rome it is thought that the crisis has entered a new phase.

Figure 29.1: *The Times*, 29 September 1938, p. 12.

Well, just look at this! This is my 28th post on the Sudeten crisis, and a new word has entered the headlines: 'Munich' (*The Times*, p. 12). [See what I mean?](#) 'Munich' and 'crisis' shouldn't go together.

This is a very dramatic, and very hopeful development. Yesterday af-

ternoon, Chamberlain was nearing the end of a long and important speech to the House of Commons, giving an account of his actions and the Government's policy during the crisis. Germany was due to mobilise its forces today at 2pm, but he had asked Mussolini to use his influence with Hitler to gain a delay of at least 24 hours so that another round of diplomacy could take place. But in the course of his speech, Chamberlain was informed, firstly that the request for a delay had been granted. Then he was handed a note which bore a message from Hitler inviting Chamberlain to meet with him, Mussolini and Daladier in Munich tomorrow morning:

This is not all. I have something further to say to the House yet. I have now been informed by Herr Hitler that he invites me to meet him at Munich to-morrow morning. He has also invited Signor Mussolini and M. Daladier. Signor Mussolini has accepted, and I have no doubt that M. Daladier will also accept. I need not say what my answer will be. We are all patriots, and there can be no hon. member of this House who did not feel his heart leap that the crisis has been once more postponed to give us once more an opportunity to try what reason and goodwill and discussion will do to settle a problem which is already in sight of settlement. I go now to see what I can make of this last effort.

It's clear that the sense of relief, of deliverance, in the House (which was packed to the rafters) at hearing this news was enormous. The *Manchester Guardian's* parliamentary correspondent waxed biblical (p. 9):

Members of the House of Commons got as near to-day to a sense of the peace of God which passeth all understanding as human beings are ever likely to do. It was a brief vision, but it was clear and will not be forgotten.

The leading article in *The Times* (p. 13) does warn that it would be 'reckless' to place too much faith in this last-ditch diplomacy. But it also casts back to the start of the last war for some hope:

A few days' delay in 1914 would have saved eight million lives. Europe then had lost control of its policies. One country carried another, like climbers roped together, into the abyss. The same rope binds the nations to-day, but it is choice and not blind necessity that now governs possible catastrophe.

As the leader also notes, Chamberlain's announcement puts the rest of his speech and the accompanying White Paper in the shade. The White Paper

(which is reprinted in the *Manchester Guardian*, pp. 13-4) is obviously an attempt to convince world opinion that British diplomacy has been above reproach: it contains the text of ten official letters or memoranda, sent to or by the British government, which have hitherto been secret, including for the first time (I think) the Anglo-French proposals for the cession of the Sudetenland. Here's the last part of the most recent letter, dated 27 September and addressed to Chamberlain:

In these circumstances, I must assume that the Government in Prague is only using a proposal for the occupation by German troops in order, by distorting the meaning and object of my proposal, to mobilise those forces in other countries, in particular in England and France, from which they hope to receive unreserved support for their aim and this to achieve the possibility of a general warlike conflagration. I must leave it to your judgment whether, in view of these facts, you consider that you should continue your effort, for which I should like to take this opportunity of once more sincerely thanking you, to spoil such manoeuvres and bring the Government in Prague to reason at the very last hour. (Signed) ADOLF HITLER

So, you see, Hitler wants peace: it's those warmongers in Prague who want to plunge Europe into the abyss.

The news of the Munich meeting trickled through to the crowds outside Parliament and in Whitehall, but when it did there was a perceptible lightening of the mood (*The Times*, p. 7). When Chamberlain returned to 10 Downing Street by car he was surrounded by well-wishers, and

seemed a changed man since his departure two hours earlier. Now he was smiling: he waved his hat in response to the cheering and handclaps, and said: "It's all right this time." He took his wife's arm affectionately as they turned to enter the house.

But still the preparations for war continue (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 8). Waterloo Station is overrun with naval reservists as well as Americans taking one of the six special trains taking them to the *Queen Mary* and home.

The war atmosphere for the first time was definitely there. To see the A.R.P. and gas-mask posters on Coutts's exclusive windows in the Strand and cars unloading sand for offices and shops and to see crowds of little girls being marshalled along with their belongings into motor-coaches for the coast were the sort of things that set people talking.

This sort of activity is still feverishly taking place all around the country. A couple of local ARP updates in the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 11) gives a flavour:

Stalybridge.—The quota of wardens was completed after three public meetings last night. A gas mask census has been taken and respirators will be issued to-night. **Stockbridge.**—Schools have been closed for the rest of the week and teachers will help in fitting the masks. Volunteers and 120 unemployed people worked all night to assemble the masks, and distribution has begun in Hazel Grove and Bramhall.

Civil defence is turning into a collective, communal activity: everyone is pulling together to make sure the country is as ready as possible for the knock-out blow, if it comes. Another collective form of ARP which is being given serious consideration is evacuation. A leader in the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 8) points to the ‘orderly exodus from Paris’ as evidence of the value of detailed planning:

Not otherwise can the dispersal of a large population be accomplished without disaster. Congested roads and panic-stricken refugees are an incitement to ruthless bombing, to which many ghastly actions in Spain and elsewhere have borne witness.

According to the *Manchester Guardian*’s columnist Lucio (p. 6), the ‘sudden revival of interest in country homes’ due to the crisis could also be an opportunity for owners of stately homes to subdivide and sublet. It might lead to be a permanent shift, and ‘those who are troubled at the bloated size of our great cities may be able to rejoice in the revival of country life’.

Some selections from the *Manchester Guardian*’s illustrated page (p. 7):



Figure 29.2: Trenches being made at the North Shore, Blackpool, with pneumatic drills and excavators. *Manchester Guardian*, 29 September 1938, p. 7.



Figure 29.3: A heap of gravel and sand outside the Charing Cross Underground Station, which is being made into a shelter. *Manchester Guardian*, 29 September 1938, p. 7.



Figure 29.4: Children from a school in the St. Pancras, London, area being evacuated in ambulances and motor-coaches. *Manchester Guardian*, 29 September 1938, p. 7.

Finally, let's end on an air-minded note. One casualty of the crisis is Imperial Airways' pick-a-back test flight. It was planned to fly the [composite seaplane Mercury](#) (with the Maia mail-carrier on top – it's a way of bridging the Atlantic gap for commercial service) non-stop from Dundee to Capetown tomorrow. But 'In view of the international situation the flight has been forbidden by the Air Ministry in the meantime'. Better luck next time, chaps!

Chapter 30

Friday, 30 September 1938



Figure 30.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 30 September 1938, p. 11.

The hopes which were raised **yesterday** by the announcement of a four-power conference at Munich appear to have been justified (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 11). An **agreement** has been reached between Britain, Germany, France and Italy that the Sudetenland will be transferred in stages

to Germany between tomorrow and 10 October. The installations in these areas are to remain intact. An international commission will decide if any other areas should hold plebiscites to decide whether they should also be transferred to Germany, to be held by the end of November. France and Britain guarantee the new Czech borders; Germany and Italy will do so once the Polish and Hungarian claims on Czech territory have been resolved. War has been averted!

Maybe. The *Manchester Guardian's* diplomatic correspondent thinks (p. 11) that the agreement is only provisional, and whereas Germany was about to take all of Czechoslovakia, 'it will now take her the whole winter and perhaps the spring to get all she wants'. Moreover, 'many hold that a "next time" is now inevitable'. The leading article in *The Times* (p. 13), while generally positive, further notes that Czechoslovakia has not yet given its consent. And the outcome is hardly a discouraging precedent for the use of force in international affairs, since the threat of it has been present all along. Still, crowds at public gatherings across London cheered and clapped (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 11) and it's not hard to understand why. What is hard to understand, at least for the leader-writer for the *Daily Mail* (p. 10), is how anyone could be less than pleased with the Munich agreement:

The Council of Munich has aroused angry protests from that professedly peace-loving body, the League of Nations Union. They cry shrilly of "menace" and "betrayal" in a resolution filled with malice against the Four-Power meeting. Cannot these fire-eaters give the statesmen a chance? Or are they determined on war at any price?

W. W. Paine, in a letter to *The Times* (p. 8) similarly asks the Labour Party to realise what their desire for resistance would mean:

It means that they are condemning millions of their fellow-men, women and children to death and mutilation, and are also condemning their survivors, whatever the result of the war may be, to a condition of poverty, which it must destroy our power to alleviate by any Social Services for 50 years to come.

So the next war will put off the welfare state for another half a century.

Irrespective of Munich, ARP preparations are proceeding apace. More schoolchildren have been evacuated from the great cities. The *Daily Mail* reports (p. 5) from a holiday camp at St Mary's Bay in Kent. 2200 'semi-invalids' from London's special schools are here, and it's basically a holiday

for the poor tykes, ‘who will go home bronzed and far fitter than when they arrived’. All the children report having a grand time:

Ruby Strong, a 12-years-old laughing imp of mischief, comes from Gibraltar-road, Bethnal Green. Her father is a motor-driver. “It is thrilling to come here by the sea,” she said.

However, children in regular schools are not being evacuated, for the moment. The *Manchester Guardian*, in a leading article (p. 10), approves of the attention to detail in what has been done so far and in plans released by the Home Office for a future emergency (p. 11), from government payments to billeters right down to a franked postcard to send home. The scheme would be voluntary, one for schoolchildren and another for civilians generally, a million people in total:

The day, we may hope, will never come when large numbers of our city dwellers will set out on appointed trains to destinations unknown, “somewhere in the country,” but it would be folly as things are not to provide for the exodus.

Completely unofficially, people have been leaving London on their own accord for ‘parts of the country regarded as less liable to air attack’ (*The Times*, p. 6). The Munich conference hasn’t lessened the flow appreciably. The stations are crowded: particularly for Scotland and the West Country. Trains for the latter were doubled but were still full.

“Carry on,” is the day’s order for A.R.P. The digging of safety trenches, the distribution of gas masks, the creation of bomb-proof shelters, and everything that prepares civilians for modern war, is to continue at emergency pressure.

So says the *Daily Mail* (p. 7), which also provides instructions for the proper care and handling of gas masks (which remain the property of the government). The *Manchester Guardian* (p. 13), however, reports that gangs of children are donning their gas masks and having mock battles in air raid trenches! Alderman J. A. Dale of Bradford declares himself ‘disgusted’!

Here’s a map of the territories which are going to Germany (shaded) and those which will have their fate decided by plebiscite (cross-hatched). The dashed line is the Czech Maginot Line, which is in fact of similar design to the French system of fortifications. The [British Legion](#) of ex-servicemen has formed a ‘peace force’ of 50,000 unarmed men to maintain order in the Sudeten districts during the hand-over (*Daily Mail*, p. 11). This ‘bowler-hatted force of ordinary men’ could begin for the Sudetenland at any moment, as soon as they are asked.

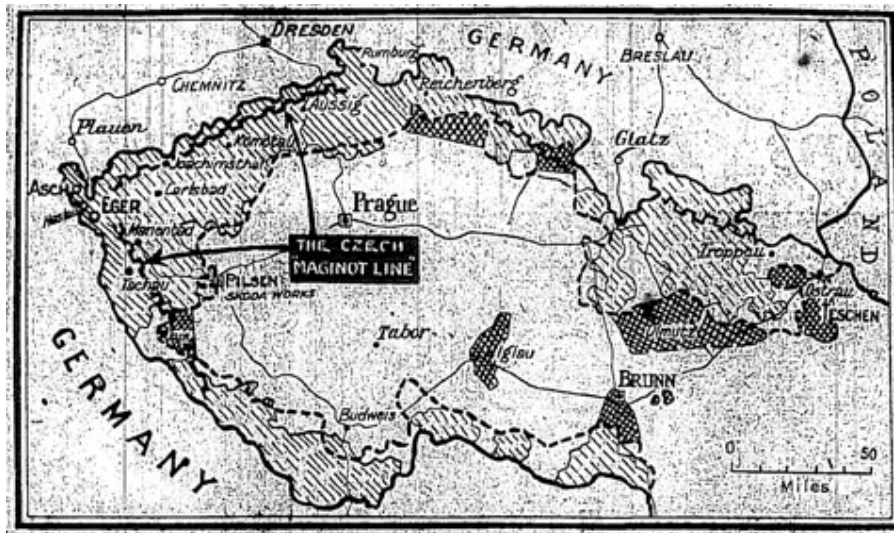


Figure 30.2: *Daily Mail*, 30 September 1938, p. 12.

Chapter 31

Saturday, 1 October 1938



Figure 31.1: *Daily Mail*, 1 October 1938, p. 11.

‘IT IS PEACE FOR OUR TIME’ (*Daily Mail*, p. 11). Chamberlain has returned from Munich, completing his third round-trip to Germany by air in as many weeks. He has been greeted by ecstatic crowds at Heston aerodrome, at 10 Downing Street (as seen above) and at Buckingham Palace, where he appeared on the balcony – the first Prime Minister in history to be accorded this honour. His colleagues also registered their pleasure:

Our Cabinet Ministers – on the doorstep, too, became school-boys again. They clambered about on the window sills [at No. 10], whooped wildly, and threw hats in the air.

The *Sunday Dispatch* is trying to cash in on all the Chamberlain-mania by

telling ‘the unique life story of the man the world applauds’, in tomorrow’s edition (*Daily Mail*, pp. 9, 13):

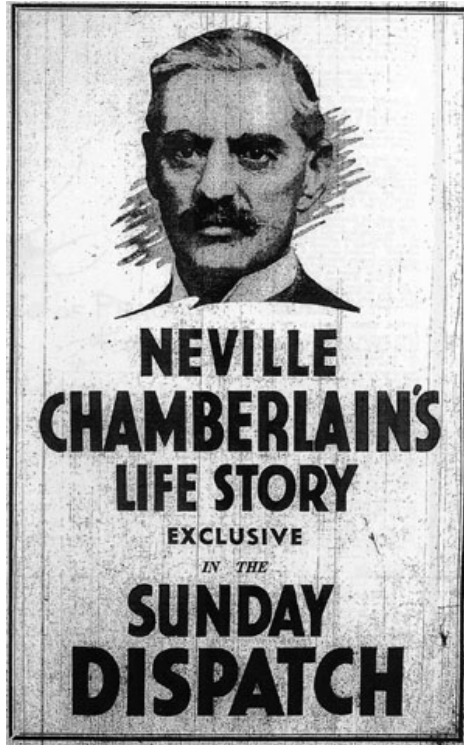


Figure 31.2: *Daily Mail*, 1 October 1938, p. 13.

Politicians and newspapers from around the Empire are also lauding Chamberlain’s statesmanship, though perhaps not as fulsomely as one might expect (the *Sydney Sun*, which I’ve never heard of, calls him the ‘old man who has saved his country from war over matters of procedure’, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 7). The leading article in *The Times* (p. 13) pays him high praise indeed:

Had the Government of the United Kingdom been in less resolute hands [than Chamberlain’s] it is as certain as can be that war, incalculable in its range, would have broken out against the wishes of every people concerned.

The Munich agreement is certainly a massive relief. Crowds of people which might otherwise have been running in panic for shelter as the Luftwaffe rained bombs down on London have been out shopping instead (*Daily Mail*, p. 9). London’s biggest department stores are looking forward to

‘months of prosperity’ – although many customers are trying unsuccessfully to return the hoards of food and other perishable goods that they had bought up when they thought war was coming, only days ago. Many West End shows are standing room only, taking 20,000 last night alone; cinemas are also doing a roaring trade. The nation’s churches and chapels will be holding special services tomorrow, and charitable organisations are hoping that they will benefit from people wanting to express their relief in their good fortune – for example, the [People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals](#):

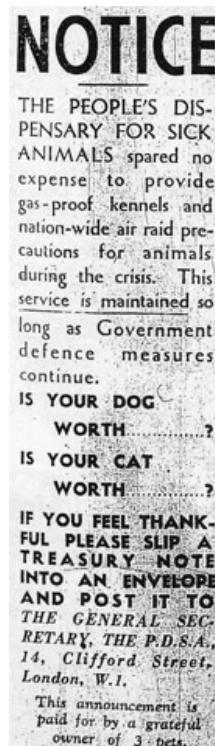


Figure 31.3: *Daily Mail*, 1 October 1938, p. 9.

The *Daily Mail* has called its leading article ‘**WITH HONOUR**’ (p. 10). On the same page is published ‘A Mother’s Thanks’:

SIR – Thank you (how inadequate those two words seem!) for your untiring efforts in the cause of Peace and for your sincere support of Mr. Chamberlain.

Throughout the dark days of crisis I – in common with thousands of mothers – could not concentrate on my children or my home duties.

I prayed with hope and fear in my heart. The news that brought a message of hope – and the solace of those glorious prayers of peace published in the *Daily Mail*. If only you knew how they have helped. I took that page to my room and felt that hope must be justified when a great paper thus showed its readers the way.

Now the sun has come through. Our prayers have been answered and we look forward to peace with indescribable relief.

May God bless you and guide you in your work for the people.

Bristol. (Mrs) G. M.

The Lord Mayor of Cardiff, O. C. Purnell, has ordered the German flag (i.e. the swastika) to fly over the city hall, along with those of Britain, France and Italy, as ‘a gesture of jubilation’ (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 14).

It might seem churlish to express any doubts about the Munich agreement, given this tremendous outpouring of gratitude and relief. But doubts there are. Of course, having accepted, under enormous pressure, the terms of an agreement dismembering their country that they were not party to, the Czechs are none too happy about it: there have been massive protests in the streets of Prague. (The authorities had to blackout the streets in order to get them to disperse; *Daily Mail*, pp. 11-2.) In Britain, Sir [Norman Angell](#) calls the agreement a ‘disgraceful sacrifice of innocent third parties’ (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 14), and [Robert Boothby](#), Conservative MP, calls it a victory for force. Sinclair, leader of the Liberals, says that ‘if war has been averted, peace has not yet been established’. For Leo Amery, the respite from war might be only brief, and should be used to bring in national service at once. The leader-writer of the *Manchester Guardian* admits (p. 12) that even if a war had been fought, there was no way that Czechoslovakia’s borders could remain as they were. But it remains to be seen whether Hitler is sincere in his desire for peaceful territorial revisions. And nobody who reads the terms carefully ‘can feel other than unhappy’, so harsh are they. The London correspondent (on the same page) says that ‘At first it seemed like Armistice Day [...] The resemblance soon passed, but it is peace, however high the price and whoever has had to pay it’. The ARP and defence measures already taken are to remain in place, but nothing further will be done for now. Boxes for gas masks are to be procured and distributed, however! (*Daily Mail*, p. 7.) And Poland still wants Teschen, and it seems Czechoslovakia is unwilling to give it up. (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 13.)

Finally, I’ll note this advertisement from *The Times* (p. 10), one of

B.I. COMMENTARY No. 26

Britain Beware

Those who have read these Commentaries since their commencement will have noted that each Commentary has dealt with current events in the light of Scriptural prophecy. It is the fixed axiom of the British-Israel thesis that the tremendous events of to-day are not the happenings of chance but the inexorable working of a Divine Plan.

For the British in particular the most arresting facts in the Bible are those which deal with the destiny of Israel, because Israel and the British are one. Israel's destiny as God's servant nation is to be that "Stone Kingdom" which forms the nucleus of Christ's governmental order on earth. The old order is crumbling. That is the reason for the distress and perplexity among nations and for the rumours of wars clearly predicted in the Scriptures. England under God is taking the leading part in an attempt to solve the outstanding controversy on which turns the question of peace or world war.

The questions at stake and the results affect every man and woman in this country. Nobody can afford to ignore them.

Come, therefore, to the Nineteenth Annual Congress of the B.-I.-W.F. It will be held at the GREAT HALL, CENTRAL HALL, WESTMINSTER S.W.1, from October 3rd to the 8th. There, the challenge—"BRITAIN BEWARE"—will be amplified in a series of lectures dealing with the underlying forces of the present world upheaval.

Some of the subjects to be dealt with are :— "The National and Religious Outlook," by the Rev. J. Courtenay James, Ph.D., "Danger Signals," by Mr. John J. Morey, B.A., "Britain, Italy, and the Mediterranean," by Mr. T. Foster, "Israel Has Been Warned," by the Rev. Claud Coffin, "Science and Crisis," by Mr. David Davidson, M.C., M.L.S., "Who Are Britain's Enemies," by Mr. George Palmer, "War Against God," by the Rev. Rupert C. Thomas, D.Litt., "The Berlin-Rome Axis," by Mr. B. J. Allen.

Admission is free, or reserved seats can be booked for any session, price 2s., or tickets for the full course of lectures can be obtained, price 20s.

Send to-day for a copy of the Programme, price 3½d. (post free), Records Department, 6, Buckingham Gate, London, S.W.1.

Edw.

Figure 31.4: *The Times*, 1 October 1938, p. 10.

a series from the [British-Israel World Federation](#), a curious group which believed that Britain was in fact the Israel of the Bible (or at least its heir) and so is destined to rule the world (or something). Their ‘commentary’ only obliquely refers to the crisis (‘rumours of war’ which were foretold etc’), but they are holding a series of lectures in London next week which will deal ‘with the underlying forces of the present world upheaval’, with titles like ‘The Rome-Berlin Axis’. I’ve suggested [before](#) that it might be interesting to examine the influence of, shall we say, unconventional thinkers on public opinion about defence and foreign affairs; the British-Israel World Federation might be another place to look.

Chapter 32

Monday, 3 October 1938



Figure 32.1: *Daily Mail*, 3 October 1938, p. 13.

So, after all those weeks of mounting tension over the fate of the Sudetens, it's finally being resolved: German troops have begun occupying the Sudetenland (*Daily Mail*, p. 13). Polish troops have also moved into Teschen, and the Czech government has agreed to let a mixed commission decide the fate of the territory claimed by Hungary. The dismemberment of Czechoslovakia has begun.

But at least it's being done peacefully. The British are still celebrating their escape from war, in their different ways. The King has thanked his people for their steadfastness and his prime minister for his peacemaking. The churches were packed with thanksgivers yesterday, 'Peace Sunday'. A headline in the *Daily Mail* (p. 3) promises '**Fairer Days, Fatter Purses, Full Speed Ahead!**' and claims that 'with the crisis over and peace in our

thoughts it will be the biggest and brightest October ever known'. A man was arrested in Croydon on Saturday night for driving under the influence (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 2). He and his passenger had been to a dance to celebrate the end of the crisis, and the passenger's excuse was that 'I was glad that I had not been called up'. The judge was not impressed and fined him 10s. for being 'drunk and incapable'.

Chamberlain is still 'The Man of the Hour' (the name of a Pathé news-reel brought out about his life as well as his handling of the crisis: *The Times*, p. 10). The new Westminster Hospital has been endowed with 1,000 for a bed, to be named 'The Neville Chamberlain Bed', 'in perpetual remembrance of great efforts made by the Prime Minister in the cause of European peace' (*The Times*, p. 9). Lucio, in the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 6) quotes some of the more fulsome paeans of praise from the press, for example this one from James Douglas in Saturday's *Daily Express*:

God has raised up in Neville Chamberlain a deliverer. Are we going to waste him? Are we as great as he is? Are we as noble? Are we as pure in heart? Beware of the old evil that is lurking within us, thirsting to destroy us.

More prosaically, there is speculation (in *Manchester Guardian*, p. 9) that if the House of Commons is hostile to Chamberlain's report on Munich today, then he may take the country to a general election to capitalise on his popularity among the people. (An election isn't due until 1940.) Chamberlain has already lost one minister over Munich, [Duff Cooper](#), the First Lord of the Admiralty. His resignation speech, if fiery enough, could spark a revolt among those backbenchers who think too high a price has been paid for peace. Certainly Labour will be critical: one prominent Labour MP, Harold Nicolson, spoke in Manchester on Saturday and said (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 11):

We have betrayed a valiant little country and a great democratic idea. There are many people who feel that in so doing we have achieved peace for a generation. They are wholly mistaken. We have not achieved peace for a generation: we have achieved it only for eight months.

And the 'Peace Pact' which Chamberlain signed with Hitler was 'not worth the paper it is written on'.

The preparations for war are winding down. There's much less ARP news in the papers today, and much of what there is is of a minor nature (such as a warning not to test gas masks in gas ovens! *Manchester*

Guardian, p. 10). Sydney King-Farlow, in a letter to the editor of *The Times* (p. 14), describes the disaster which has been averted:

Had war come upon us, and it was hanging on a hair, it would have begun with repeated attacks by fleets of aircraft which speedily would have converted the capital cities of Europe into heaps of smoking rubble. The noblest works of man which belong not only to particular countries but to the whole world would have disappeared for ever and the destruction of human life would have been appalling.

He asks if this is not an opportune moment to try to reach an international agreement to prohibit the bombing of architectural and historical treasures in the great cities? (King-Farlow was a former chief justice in places like Gibraltar and Cyprus, so perhaps it's not surprising that he turned to the law.) [Cosmo Lang](#), the Archbishop of Canterbury, expressed similar sentiments in his BBC broadcast last night, but was rather more ambitious (*Daily Mail*, p. 13):

Surely it is required of nations who have seen the horrors of modern warfare staring them in the face that they should, as a sign of recovered sanity, determine that once for all the use of bombing aircraft shall cease.

The leading article in *The Times* (p. 13) looks forward to:

an era when the race in armaments will be seen for the madness that it is and will be abandoned because it has ceased even to be profitable.

Whereas the *Daily Mail* (p. 12) calls for the government to fill the gaps in Britain's defences, noting particularly that:

The Air Force, both by the production of machines and the training of personnel, must be made, at top speed, second to none.

Members of the Royal Observer Corps have been released back into civilian life, albeit subject to a recall at only two hours' notice (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 13). The Air Ministry has been swamped with offers of service of various kinds and regrets that it may take some time to respond to them all. And the Admiralty has announced that those reservists who have been called up but have not yet actually taken up a post can stay at home or return there.

The [London Brick Company](#) is clearly proud of the part it played in the crisis.



London Brick Company

and the

NATIONAL EMERGENCY

For one urgent Government job London Brick Company Ltd. delivered 600,000 'Phorpres' bricks within 36 hours of the order being received (for 12 hours out of the 36 hours deliveries could not be accepted on the site.)

All the many orders for bricks for A.R.P. work were delivered on the site on the same day as they were ordered.

LONDON BRICK COMPANY LTD

Largest Brickmakers in the World
HEAD OFFICE, AFRICA HOUSE, KINGSWAY, W.C.2
and at
BIRMINGHAM • SHEFFIELD • BRISTOL

Figure 32.2: *The Times*, 3 October 1938, p. 15.

Chapter 33

Tuesday, 4 October 1938



Figure 33.1: *Manchester Guardian*, 4 October 1938, p. 11.

A few days ago, Chamberlain said Munich was 'peace for our time'. Now he, in his speech in Parliament yesterday, he is saying that there can be no let-up in the pace of rearmament (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 11). In particular there is to be a 'big increase' in the RAF, especially for 'the

defence of London' (*Daily Mail*, p. 11). Hoare, the Home Secretary, said in his speech that 'on the whole the machinery of A.R.P. had worked well', and it was mainly a matter of filling the gaps revealed by the crisis (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 6). Labour MPs were vocal in response to Chamberlain's speech: the *Daily Mail's* parliamentary correspondent says (p. 10) they 'wrecked his great hour' and turned the occasion into 'a shabby party fight', and the leading article (p. 10) contrasts 'The Government's calm statement of the facts' with 'the frothy diatribes of the Socialists'. Duff Cooper's resignation speech accused the Cabinet of being too timid to give a strong warning to Hitler, who he believed was more open to 'the language of the mailed fist' rather than Chamberlain's approach of 'sweet reasonableness' (*Daily Mail*, p. 5).

Yet Labour did not get the numbers for a censure motion. They themselves are divided between pacifist and anti-fascists, as well as those who don't want to give Chamberlain an excuse to call an election which he would presumably win, given the country's mood (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 11). Anyway, there are only about 20 potential rebels on the government side of the House, the Churchillians and Harold Nicolson (National Labour), not enough to make any dent in Chamberlain's majority. He has decided against going to the country for now; instead there will be a parliamentary vote tomorrow on Munich (*Daily Mail*, p. 11).

Reservists continue to be released back into civilian life – all naval reservists will be allowed to go back home, unless they are already at sea, although they'll remain on the books for the time being (*Daily Mail*, p. 4). The Army will allow men who enlisted last week the option of being discharged, with a week's pay and a gratuity. The few schoolchildren evacuated from London during the crisis are also returning home. A columnist in the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 8) writes of 'The first waking moments that break a nightmare':

Was it only a matter of hours ago that we saw a store counter labelled "A.R.P. Department" besieged by men and women? Had we actually seen young women there handling and comparing various gas masks as normally as they would examine new hats?

The *Daily Mail* has been out on the streets asking punters what they think of the idea of a bank holiday in honour of Chamberlain and peace, perhaps to be called Peace Day (p. 3). Unsurprisingly, everyone's in favour of the idea! Irene Porter, a typist from Upton Park, would call it Chamberlain Day 'as a mark of honour to the great man who prevented war'. But she'd rather it was between Christmas and Easter, rather than on 30 September

when the Munich agreement was signed, ‘so that we could get a taste of spring’.

The letters columns are filled with reactions to Munich. Just to sample a few of the correspondents with the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 20): [Gilbert Murray](#) thinks the agreement unjust, comparing it with Versailles. But he hopes that the worldwide revulsion against war which motivated it can be used to secure a lasting peace. According to [Francis Hirst](#), the former editor of the *Economist*, most Liberal voters would be grateful to Chamberlain for preventing ‘another ghastly Armageddon which would have brought ruin and desolation on countless homes’. But [Tavistock](#) implies that only a Conservative prime minister could have negotiated with Hitler; the Liberal and Labour leaders would have ‘involved millions of innocent people in destruction’ in misguided pursuit of collective security or simply because they hated him.

A cheerful ad from *The Times* (p. 19):

Civilization Shall Survive
Practising a Better Democracy
in Finer and Healthier Cities

Civilization
 THE WILL TO CIVILIZATION
 by John Katz 12s. 6d. net

An analysis of the world's civilizations leads up to the outline of a new ideology and a finer faith for the contemporary world. "Closely reasoned and packed with information, scarcely a page without some striking idea."—*Daily Telegraph*. "Inspired by a courageous faith. I hope he will succeed in gaining a wide audience."—*Lancelot Hogben*.

Democracy
 THE COMING VICTORY OF DEMOCRACY
 by Thomas Mann 2s. 6d. net

A magnificent plea for a better democracy to oppose the growing menace of barbarism. "Of immediate relevance to the international crisis, should be read by everyone who can lay hands on a copy."—*News-Chronicle*. "A confession of faith in democracy, and a summons to democratic reform."—*Yorkshire Post*.

Cities THE CULTURE OF CITIES
 by Lewis Mumford (152 illustrations) 21s. net

The past, present and future of cities, man's most essential inheritance. "This tremendous study of cities, by the most remarkable social critic of our time."—*Spectator*. "An event of the most profound importance in the task that awaits of rebuilding our cities and our civilisation."—*Architectural Review*.

Secker & Warburg

Figure 33.2: *The Times*, 4 October 1938, p. 19.

And an ominous story from the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 6)...

POLAND'S FEAR OF GERMANY

**“Now More Than Ever Sheer Brute Force Will Dominate” – General’s Speech
NO RELYING ON OUTSIDE HELP**

Chapter 34

Wednesday, 5 October 1938

**SERIOUS GAPS
IN DEFENCES**

**Sir T. Inskip's
"System Must
be Improved"**

**PLEDGE TO
DEFEND CZECHS**

THE revelation that the recent crisis had shown that there were serious gaps and defects in our defences was made by Sir Thomas Inskip, Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, replying to the debate in the House of Commons last night on the Munich Conference.

**NEW MOVE
TO END
SPAIN
WAR**

From Daily Mail Correspondent
Rome, Tuesday.

THERE has been great diplomatic activity in Rome in the past few days.

Lord Perth, the British Ambassador, has seen Count Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, several times, and I learn that they have already reached a substantial measure of agreement regarding the liquidation of the Spanish problem.

Italy, I understand, has already agreed to withdraw considerable parties of Italian volunteers in view of the decision of the Barcelona Government to demobilise their foreign volunteers.

It is also expected that Mr. Chamberlain will meet Signor Mussolini somewhere in the Medi-

Figure 34.1: *Daily Mail*, 5 October 1938, p. 11.

The Sudeten crisis, or rather its aftermath, still dominates the headlines. But the headlines themselves are getting smaller – these ones from the *Daily Mail* (p. 11) are only a couple of columns wide, where even a couple of days ago they were nearly the whole page across. The news today is

serious enough: Inskip, the Minister for the Coordination of Defence, told the House of Commons yesterday that the crisis revealed gaps in Britain's defences which need to be filled – though it seems he didn't give actual details of any gaps. Commanders have been named as part of an expansion of anti-aircraft defences: three new AA divisions are to be raised for the Territorial Army (*The Times*, p. 8). W. J. Fawkner writes to the *Daily Mail* to suggest (p. 10) that service in the Territorials should be compulsory for all men aged 18 to 24 – 'Surely this is not asking too much?' It is for J. Fuller, though, who declares that 'compulsory national service is something completely at variance with the British spirit'. So that's that then.

Inskip also defended Chamberlain's handling of the crisis: 'H. M. Government had not broken a single pledge' (*The Times*, p. 7). [A. V. Alexander](#), Labour MP for Sheffield Hillsborough, has a different view, referring to 'the complete betrayal of Czechoslovakia'. Probably the biggest speech in Parliament yesterday, though, was in the Lords: the maiden speech there of Chamberlain's predecessor, [Stanley Baldwin](#), or Earl Baldwin of Bewdley as he now known (*Daily Mail*, p. 6). He paid Chamberlain glowing tribute, saying that he thanks God that Chamberlain was able to take the decision to fly to Berchtesgaden to meet with Hitler, and that 'I know I could not have done it':

Had there been war there would have been tens of thousands of mangled women and children civilians before a single soldier gave his life for his country. That is a very awful thought.

What right had a man to condemn to a terrible death hosts of civilians unless he knew that all that could be done had been done?

The leading article in *The Times* agrees (p. 15), and adds that:

On the most pessimistic estimate of the future we have gained a respite in which to make up a backwardness in armaments that is now recognized even by those who most bitterly opposed all attempts to put it right.

The leader in the *Manchester Guardian* (p. 8), on the other hand, wonders whether it is possible for the democracies to negotiate with the dictatorships on any basis other than 'the new version of give-and-take – that we shall continue to give and they will continue to take?' Where will it all end?

Of course, by 'we' we should read Czechoslovakia, which is paying the greatest price for the peace. Sudetens who apposed the union with

Germany are fleeing from the Sudetenland: readers of the *Manchester Guardian* are sending in funds to be given to the refugees (pp. 9, 12). Hungary is demanding more territory, and German radio is demanding that President Beneš resign. Meanwhile Hitler has triumphantly visited Carlsbad, after the peaceful withdrawal of Czech troops (*The Times*, p. 13). Graffiti has begun appearing on shops throughout the town informing passers-by of the presence of a 'Talmud Jew' or a 'Racial shamer'. 1200 men of the British Legion are gathering in London in order to go to police those areas of Czechoslovakia which will have their ultimate fate decided by plebiscite (*The Times*, p. 11).

Another group who fears they may pay a price for Munich: Ulster unionists. At least two independent MPs in the Northern Ireland House of Commons objected to a motion congratulating Chamberlain's peacemaking. As T. Henderson said: 'If Mr. Chamberlain sold the Czechs he will sell Ulster if it suits him in the event of war'. I wonder if de Valera is taking notes?

Chapter 35

Thursday, 6 October 1938



Figure 35.1: *Daily Mail*, 6 October 1938, p. 11.

The main headlines in today's *Daily Mail* report (p. 11) on a battle raging in Palestine between 'Arab terrorists' and British aircraft and troops. Reinforcements are en route, and the High Commissioner has flown back to London for consultations. Hang on: this isn't about Czechoslovakia at all! For the first time since (at least) 29 August, one of the three major papers in my sample has decided to lead with something other than the Sudeten crisis or a related issue. It's starting to lose its hold on the public's attention.

It's still the major story in the other newspapers, however. The *Manchester Guardian* leads (p. 9) with Churchill's strong attack on the Munich agreement in the House of Commons, yesterday. He spoke of 'The sense of our country falling into the power orbit and influence of Nazi Germany':

The utmost the Prime Minister has been able to secure has been to secure that the German dictator instead of snatching

his victuals from the table has been content to have them served to him course by course.

(Though I think Lady Gladstone has a more striking soundbite: in speaking to a meeting of women Liberals in Bury she called the Munich agreement ‘vivisection without anaesthetic’. *Manchester Guardian*, p. 10.) He has called for a secret session of Parliament on defence. In Paris, Daladier has also been having a hot time of it, but he has finally managed to get Parliament to agree to give him plenary powers in response to the recent crisis – I’m not sure exactly what these entail, but there’s talk of making the working week longer (to increase armaments production?) and revaluing the franc. The debate was contentious, and broke the [Popular Front](#). Can France rely on having any allies? If not, it will need ‘three more Maginot Lines (wherever the money may come from) and buy three thousand bombers’ (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 12). Nobody knows what’s going to happen. The leading article in the *Manchester Guardian* today (p. 8) mulls over the strategic balance: Britain and France need to improve their defences greatly. A German official has boasted that the Luftwaffe has as many aircraft as both of them plus Czechoslovakia, and if Italy fights alongside then the dictatorships will certainly have a preponderance. The ‘reactionary demand for military conscription’ must be resisted, but a ‘national register’ of some form is a good idea, and:

It will also necessarily involve “industrial mobilisation” on a large scale and the organisation of all that is covered by the “home front”. These things are repugnant to most of us, but if they can be approached in the spirit of common concern, if a democratic basis is preserved, they can be made to work even under a Government whose policy we do not trust.

In Czechoslovakia, President Beneš has resigned. Presumably this is in response to the pressure from Germany mentioned in yesterday’s papers. But in his own words, ‘In order not to jeopardize the life of our State in the new circumstances I think that as President I should no longer stand in the way’. That is, because he himself is an irritant to good relations with Germany he has stepped down (*The Times*, p. 12). He might get a consolation prize though – Whately Carrington has written to the *Manchester Guardian* to endorse a previous suggestion that Beneš be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, in ‘appreciation of the unexampled act of sacrifice made by his great people in the cause of peace’ (p. 18). Hitler, however, speaking at the [Berlin Sports Palace](#), has thanked Mussolini (by name) and

Chamberlain and Daladier for their assistance in finding a ‘just solution’ to the Sudeten problem.

I’ll end with a couple of items from *The Times* (p. 15). One is from an article entitled ‘ “Back to normal” ’, purporting to be ‘The afterthoughts of [Mrs. Miniver](#)’. She recalls the height of the crisis just past:

And when things grew really serious – when Clem had gone off with his Anti-Aircraft Battery, and Vin had been sent up to Quern, and the children’s day school had been evacuated to the west country, and the maids had gone down to Starlings to prepare it for refugees, and she herself, staying at her sister’s flat, had signed on as an ambulance driver – during all the rather grim little bouts of staff-work which these arrangements entailed, she had been haunted day and night by the next two lines of the [same poem](#):–

Look thy last on all things lovely
Every hour....

(Mrs. Miniver was later portrayed by Greer Garson for Hollywood in the [1942 film](#) of that name, where she had to go through all this again, this time for ‘real’.)

And here’s an advertisement for one of the British-Israel World Federation lectures mentioned [a few days ago](#):

According to [Wikipedia](#), David Davidson predicted successive dates for the end of the world based on measures of the Great Pyramid, starting with 1954. So that may shed some light on the ‘Light on the crisis’.

**LIGHT ON
THE CRISIS**
IMPORTANT LECTURE BY
DAVID DAVIDSON
M.I. STRUCT. E.
Author of 'The Great Pyramid; Its Divine Message'
at the
CENTRAL HALL
WESTMINSTER
TO-NIGHT
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6th
at 7.30 p.m.
ADMISSION FREE

Figure 35.2: *The Times*, 6 October 1938, p. 11.

Chapter 36

Friday, 7 October 1938

COMMONS SUPPORT PRIME MINISTER



222 MAJORITY BEHIND HIM



**MR. CHAMBERLAIN'S REASONS AGAINST
A GENERAL ELECTION**



ARMAMENTS AND PEACE

The House of Commons endorsed the peace policy of the Prime Minister yesterday by a majority of 222—366 to 144. Mr. Chamberlain had an ovation from his supporters when the figures were announced. The House has adjourned till November 1.

Figure 36.1: *The Times*, 7 October 1938, p. 14.

After four days of debate, the House of Commons has voted on the government's policy during the Sudeten crisis in general, and on the Munich agreement in particular (*The Times*, p. 14). The vote was won by 366 to 144, a majority of 222. *The Times* calls this 'a conclusive vindication of

the Prime Minister', who was afterwards cheered by MPs. The majority is well above normal, despite abstentions from some Conservative MPs; even the terms of Labour's dissent showed 'unusual mildness' according to the leading article in *The Times* (p. 15). On the other hand, the equivalent article in the *Manchester Guardian* says (p. 10) that the speeches in the debate 'reflected all the bewilderment of the people' and 'the voting is not to be taken as any indication of how that feeling runs' (meaning the 'national feeling'). The ovation for the prime minister was not given by 'a confident majority', and 'there was no real happiness about the process by which peace has been preserved'. So who's right?

In response to a question, Chamberlain reaffirmed a previous pledge not to introduce conscription during peacetime (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 5), and rejected the idea of a snap election. He also said that 'Peace for our time [...] was a hope, not a pledge', and so did not contradict the pressing need for increasing Britain's military strength (*The Times*, p. 14). War was now a very different thing than in 1914:

When war starts to-day, in the very first hour, before any professional soldier or sailor or airman has been touched, it will strike the workman, the clerk, the man in the street or in the bus, his wife and children in their homes [...] People running underground, trying to escape from poison gas, knowing that at any hour of the day or night death or mutilation was ready to come upon them [...]

He felt that he could not put the British people in this position over a cause which did not 'transcend ordinary human values', and the Sudetenland was not such a cause (*Daily Mail*, p. 8).

An international commission has met in Berlin to flesh out the Munich agreement. The Czechoslovakian government has protested its decision on the borders of the next area to be ceded to Germany, which includes many areas which have almost entirely Czech populations. Some 800,000 ethnic Czechs will come under German rule on Monday; but the Czech government has decided there is nothing that it can do about it, aside from protesting (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 6). Slovakia has been given a far-reaching autonomy, but one which falls short of independence (which seemed likely earlier in the week). The Hungarian ultimatum expired yesterday, but the Czechs say they can't respond to it due to the change in foreign ministers. However:

There was quite serious fighting yesterday between Hungarian troops and the Czechs.

On 28 September, the height of the crisis, the Post Office's Central Telegraph Office handled 403,831 telegrams, well over double the normal number (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 5).

The Short-Mayo composite aircraft has finally taken off on its non-stop flight from Dundee to Capetown, after many delays due to weather and **the crisis** (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 11). The composite took off from the Tay at 1pm yesterday, and the upper component, Mercury, separated from the lower, Maia, 20 minutes later. At last report it was near the border between Algeria and Tunis. It is hoped that it will break the non-stop distance record, currently held by the Soviet Union (6305 miles, Moscow to California).

Chapter 37

Saturday, 8 October 1938

PROBLEMS FOR BERLIN

GERMANS OUTSIDE THE ZONES

AN EXCHANGE OF POPULATIONS

NO PLEBISCITE

Figure 37.1: *The Times*, 8 October 1938, p. 12.

As *The Times* reports today (p. 12), the Berlin Commission of Ambassadors which is implementing the Munich agreement has finished demarcating the major zones to be transferred to Germany, and has adjourned until Monday. But there's still much to do. For example, there's still the question of what to about Sudeten Germans outside the transfer zones. Originally their fate was to be decided by plebiscite, but it seems an exchange of populations is now preferred by the Commission. This might mean that the volunteers of the British Legion, who are to police the plebiscite areas, won't be going after all (*Manchester Guardian*, p. 17). The [British Legion Volunteer Police](#) are nearly ready to go, however, if called upon: they

paraded in their uniforms ('blue serge suit with special constable's peaked cap') at Olympia yesterday and will do so again today (*The Times*, p. 9). The President of the Legion's North-Eastern Area, Brigadier-General E. P. A. Riddell, sent the following letter to the contingent from his chapter:

You are going to a foreign country as Great Britain's representatives of peace and order. On your personal conduct, tact, and understanding depends the success of your mission. The prestige of England and the British Legion is in your keeping. One false step on your part might have disastrous results for your country and your great organization. Watch your step. I wish I were physically fit to go with you. God bless you and guide you.

On the other hand, the National Council of Labour (representing the Labour Party, parliamentary and national executive, and the Trades Union Congress) is going to send observers to Prague:

[...] so that it may receive direct information of the consequences of the carrying out of the Munich Agreement and, in particular, learn the position of the minority of German democrats, Jews, and Czechs in the ceded territories.

This group is estimated to number about a million people; there are many refugees and reports, already, of concentration camps being set up the occupying Germans. The Council will need to secure Foreign Office approval first, but Attlee and [Arthur Greenwood](#) have been to see Halifax already so perhaps that's a formality.

Herbert Morrison, leader of the London County Council, has asked for 35000 ARP volunteers, men and women, in particular for fire and ambulance services (*Daily Mail*, p. 5). Men aged between 18 and 25 are not eligible. The *Daily Mail* understands (p. 11) that all major cities are to get balloon barrages (London's is going into operation today for the first time). And the Air Ministry has announced that officers and men of Auxiliary Air Force fighter and balloon squadrons, called up on 26 September, are to be released from service.

The head boys of [Bembridge School](#) on the Isle of Wight sent this letter to Chamberlain (*The Times*, p. 7):

To the Right Hon. Neville Chamberlain.

Dear Prime Minister, – At the unanimous wish of the boys of the school we desire to express our gratitude for your supreme

achievement in preventing war. Many of those on whose behalf we are addressing to you this letter would have been amongst the first victims of the threatened war, for, although we are not yet old enough to vote and have no influence on public policy, we should have been called upon almost immediately to sacrifice perhaps our lives. We are thus representative of many millions of the youth of the world.

We thank you for your courage, patience, and wisdom and for the further steps of justice and conciliation which you have outlined for the appeasement of Europe.

We are, dear Prime Minister, very respectfully and sincerely yours, (Signed by head boys).

Late-breaking news on the flight of the Mercury: flares have been set up at Table Bay (near Capetown) to guide it in (*Daily Mail*, p. 11).

Well, that's the last of my post-blogs on the Sudeten crisis! In the next day or so, I'll put up one more post as some sort of summary.

Chapter 38

Post-blogging the Sudeten crisis: thoughts and conclusions

So the [Sudeten crisis experiment](#) has ended. How useful has it been?

I think it's been a very different view of the crisis. It's small-scale, not big-picture; confused, not lucid; bottom-up, not top-down (well, sorta: it could be more bottom-up). Most accounts that I've read are from the diplomatic-political-military point of view: Chamberlain's decision to fly to Berchtesgaden, Churchill's denunciations of the Munich agreement, the lack of readiness of the RAF to defend London. Some of these things are not apparent from the day-to-day press accounts, while others are, but take on a different complexion. For example, Plan Z – Chamberlain's flight – was not the sudden, impulsive act that it appeared to be from the press accounts which appeared on [15 September](#). He had in fact conceived of the idea days earlier – he announced it to Cabinet on 12 September, and had discussed the idea with Halifax even earlier. Churchill does appear in the press record from [time](#) to [time](#), but his voice was only one among many, even among appeasement's critics, and not the loudest. His years in the wilderness seem much more significant in retrospect: 1938 was not 1940. And the RAF is practically nowhere to be seen. Nobody's questioning whether it's ready for war or not, whether it can defend London or bomb Berlin – with [very few exceptions](#), it's just ignored, as being of no account.

The things which stand out for me are fourfold, corresponding to the evolution of the crisis itself. Firstly, there are the events on the ground in [Czechoslovakia](#) and [the Sudetenland](#) itself. The accounts published in the British press likely were not fully accurate – rarely were British correspondents there in person, and some reports came from the Nazi-influenced Ger-

man press, which definitely can't be taken at face value. But it's clear that there was real tension and some violence between Sudetens and Czechs, and this seems to have convinced people that there was a real problem that wasn't going to go away.

The next phase, which started shortly after **Chamberlain's first flight** (and the subsequent **visit to London by Daladier**) is marked by the **Anglo-French plan** to cede the Sudetenland to Germany. It was generally assumed that this would solve the problem, because it gave Hitler what he said he wanted. But it was this plan that caused deep cleavages in British public opinion – at least as expressed in the letter columns. Some applauded Chamberlain's work in preserving peace in Europe, other his caving to threats of force by a dictatorship. On balance, I'd guess that the latter group were composed of people already opposed to Chamberlain and appeasement – mainly the left – whereas the former had more moderates as well as conservatives.

After that came **Hitler's shocking demand** for the Czechs to cede the Sudetenland by 1 October. No more talking, no more diplomacy: the territory was to be handed over or else taken by force. This ultimatum upped the ante so ridiculously, given the generosity to Germany of the Anglo-French plan, that it began to look like it was war that Hitler wanted, or at least the destruction of Czechoslovakia, rather than gathering ethnic Germans to the Fatherland. No matter how earnest Chamberlain's diplomacy, he might not be able to prevent war. And it was now that the possibility, in fact the probability of war sank in to the British public. Schools closed to become distribution centres for gas masks (**ARP Sunday**). Parks in cities around the country were ripped up to provide trenches for air raid shelters. Reservists were called up. Schoolchildren began to be evacuated to the country. People worried about what to do about their pets in the event of a gas attack. Anxiety and fear were clearly widespread. The knock-out blow seemed imminent.

Which explains the intense relief at the sudden **resolution of the crisis at Munich**. Chamberlain was **cheered on his return**, thanks were given in church, a hospital bed was donated in his name. And why not? That weekend might otherwise have seen tens of thousands of civilians be killed or maimed in London alone – or so it was feared. But that doesn't mean Chamberlain got a free pass. He was **criticised** in Parliament and in the letter columns. Britain was not united either during the crisis or after it. There was a section of the public which was prepared to face the risks of aerial bombardment and go to war, not so much for the sake of a far-away country of which they knew nothing but to stop Hitler from running

rampant through Europe. But there was another, probably larger group, which did not see why there should be war with Germany over the Sudeten issue.

From that point of view, my reading of this exercise is that it supports the idea that appeasement was necessary, among other reasons, in order to convince the British people that everything possible – within reason – had been done to accommodate Hitler’s demands. And this was supposedly the last of them: according to Hitler himself, his last territorial demand in Europe. In March 1939 he proved that to be a lie when Germany occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia. There was then no question that Hitler could be appeased, and when another crisis built over the summer of 1939, this time over Poland, there was no question of appeasing anybody. Well, that’s not strictly true, of course, but there seem to have been fewer divisions of opinion than there were during the Sudeten crisis.

As far as an experiment in blogging goes, I think the series has been a success. It was a lot of work, that’s for sure, something like 30,000 words in total. And I even wrote a chapter of my thesis in the same period, and put in a few extra hours at work too! But the series didn’t quite pan out as planned. I had initially hoped to talk about radio and even television coverage of the crisis, but there was far too much material to cover just from the dailies so I had to drop that idea, and the same happened with the weeklies as the crisis heated up. I also couldn’t cover all the issues that cropped up, even sporadically; for example, in its letters pages *The Times* hosted an interesting debate about moral rearmament, which I didn’t mention at all. So, inevitably, I had to make choices about what to include and what to leave out, framing the material within my own narrative choices. So readers weren’t experiencing an unmediated recreation of the Sudeten crisis, but my own version of it. But that’s history for you.

I wonder how these posts will be used in future. They were designed to be read sequentially, day-by-day, and some of you have done so; but in future I expect people will more commonly surf in randomly from search engines, maybe read a few entries and surf out again. The context built up by following the development of the crisis will be lost. Also, as far as search engines go, my pedantic insistence on “Sudeten crisis” over “Munich crisis” may be a hindrance; on Google I come in at 4th place for the [former term](#) but only 49th for the [latter](#), and even then that was for my earlier post on [terminology](#).

At this point, I’d be very interested to hear what (if anything!) you, the readers, took from this exercise, either as history or as blogging or both!

Index

- Abyssinia, 46
Acland, Richard, 61
Adams, Vyvyan, 31
Alexander, A. V., 127
Altrincham, 77
Amery, Leo, 91, 115
Angell, Sir Norman, 115
Appeasement, 8, 27, 35, 38, 41, 76, 101, 138, 139
Army, 50, 96, 123, 127
ARP (air raid precautions), 17, 31, 39, 50, 57, 61, 65, 74, 77, 82, 85, 89, 93, 94, 99, 104, 109, 110, 115, 119, 123, 137, 140
Astor, William, 93
Attlee, Clement, 65, 82, 93, 137
Aussig, 49
Backhouse, Sir Roger, 50
Baldwin, Stanley, 127
Beck, Ludwig, 34
Belle Vue, 86
Beneš, Edvard, 6, 19, 21, 69, 128, 130
Berchtesgaden, 15, 54, 57, 88, 127, 139
Berlin, 7, 17, 49, 54, 57, 82, 92, 117, 130, 134, 136, 139
Bethnal Green, 110
Blackpool, 22, 77, 93, 106
Blum, Léon, 73
Bolton, 62, 93
Bombing, 10, 16, 39, 53, 61, 66, 74, 79, 82, 86, 105, 113, 120, 130
Bonnet, Georges, 63, 89
Boothby, Robert, 115
Brittain, Vera, 82
Butler, Richard, 61
Cadogan, Sir Alexander, 37
Cardiff, 77, 93, 115
Carlsbad, 13, 19, 24, 44, 128
Chamberlain, Neville, 4, 8, 22, 34, 37, 49, 52, 56, 59, 64, 69, 72, 75, 80, 84, 91, 93, 98, 103, 112, 113, 119, 122, 127, 131, 134, 137, 139
China, 7, 46, 66, 74
Churchill, Winston, 77, 93, 123, 129, 139
Citrine, Sir Walter, 91
Cooper, Alfred Duff, 50, 119, 123
Croydon, 119
Daladier, Édouard, 63, 89, 103, 130, 140
Earls Court, 82
Eden, Anthony, 76
Edmonton, 95
Eger, 49, 84
Falkenau, 49
Fleming, Ian, 101
Fuller, J. F. C., 82
Gamelin, Maurice, 91
Gas masks, 50, 58, 62, 83, 86, 89, 93, 98, 105, 110, 115, 119, 123, 140

- Geneva, 34, 74
 Godesberg, 73, 75, 92
 Goering, Hermann, 40
 Goodchild, William, 34
 Gort, Lord, 50
 Greenwood, Arthur, 137
 Grigg, Sir Edward, 77

 Haldane, J. B. S., 79, 94
 Halifax, Lord, 34, 37, 43, 49, 137, 139
 Hassocks, 39
 Henderson, Sir Nevile, 4, 37, 41
 Henlein, Konrad, 4, 6, 7, 13, 15, 18, 22, 24, 44, 49, 57, 60, 64, 69
 Hicks, George, 34
 Hirst, Francis, 124
 Hitler, Adolf, 5, 7, 13, 15, 18, 22, 25, 27, 34, 37, 40, 44, 48, 53, 56, 67, 72, 75, 80, 84, 88, 92, 98, 103, 115, 119, 123, 127, 130, 140
 Hoare, Sir Samuel, 49, 82, 123
 Hodza, Milan, 10, 22, 33, 81
 Hore-Belisha, Leslie, 50
 Hungary, 69, 76, 84, 89, 98, 109, 118, 128, 134

 Inskip, Sir Thomas, 50, 127

 Koeniggratz, 60
 Krumau, 32

 Lang, Cosmo, 120
 Lang, Jack, 61
 Lansbury, George, 82
 Leitmeritz, 5
 Limehouse, 65
 Litvinov, Maxim, 76
 Lyons, Joseph, 10, 61

 Mährisch-Ostrau, 30, 33, 36

 Mackenzie, Ian, 10
 Manchester, 46, 57, 85, 90, 91, 119
 Manchuria, 41
 Martin, Kingsley, 19
 Masfield, John, 58
 Morrison, Herbert, 67, 93, 137
 Moscow, 40, 64
 Mosley, Sir Oswald, 69
 Munich, 2, 27, 54, 72, 102, 108, 112, 119, 122, 128, 129, 133, 136, 139
 Murray, Gilbert, 124
 Mussolini, Benito, 25, 64, 103, 130

 Nehru, Jawaharlal, 41
 Newall, Sir Cyril, 50
 Nicolson, Harold, 119, 123
 Nuremberg, 13, 37, 40, 49

 Oldham, 70
 Olympia, 137
 Orwell, George, 2, 28, 57

 Palestine, 129
 Paris, 7, 19, 53, 73, 96, 105, 130
 Plebiscite, 41, 53, 64, 69, 89, 109, 128, 136
 Poland, 69, 76, 81, 89, 109, 115, 118, 124, 141
 Prague, 7, 10, 37, 45, 54, 60, 64, 81, 104, 115, 137

 Ramsay, Archibald Maule, 45
 Royal Air Force, 50, 66, 86, 96, 122, 139
 Royal Navy, 50, 98, 104, 123
 Runciman, Lord, 4, 6, 16, 21, 49

 Salford, 70, 79
 Samuel, Viscount, 41
 Simon, Sir John, 4, 10, 16, 37, 49
 Sinclair, Sir Archibald, 76, 115

- Spain, 7, 11, 16, 41, 46, 60, 61, 66,
74, 105
- St Mary's Bay, 109
- Stalybridge, 105
- Stockbridge, 105
- Stratford-on-Avon, 76
- Sutton-Pratt, Reginald, 36
- Swanwick, H. M., 46
- Syrový, Jan, 81
- Tavistock, Lord, 124
- Taylor, A. J. P., 82
- Teschen, 81, 89, 115, 118
- Trenches, 85, 89, 93, 98, 140
- Vansittart, Sir Robert, 37
- Wallace, Euan, 74
- Wedgwood, Josiah, 91
- Wembley, 58
- Westminster, 86
- Whitehall, 43, 57, 65, 81, 91, 104
- Wilkinson, Ellen, 65
- Williams, John Fischer, 38
- Wilson, Sir Arnold, 35
- Wood, Sir Kingsley, 50