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Book Review
Munich, 1939
Appeasement and World War II
David Faber

David Faber's book *Munich, 1938 Appeasement and World War II* is a readable re-examination of the key events leading up to the Munich Agreement and its aftermath. In this work, he uncovered and portrayed the political infighting that occurred in the Nazi inner circle. That allowed for a more vivid depiction of characters that at times were pooled together simplistically as an evil unified force that bound together with the seemingly amalgamated desire to dominate the world at any cost. Instead, through the use of both informative and narrative writing techniques Faber was able to transport the reader into the war rooms and into the mind and emotions of the key figures that shaped both foreign and domestic policy which led to the second Great War.

Faber himself had experience with the inner dealings of government as he served as a Conservative Member of Parliament from 1992 until 2001. Further, his education at Eton College and Balliol College has prepared him for his scholarly research. He utilized his background to direct his research and focus on not only governmental archives but also drawing from the rich insight found in various diaries or the inner circle of both Chamberlain and Hitler. As well as, a distinguished grouping of Published Articles and excerpts from published historians focusing on German.

It was Faber's contention that the Munich Agreement was a culminated event that was precipitated by a series of executive decisions made by Chamberlain in his own false belief that he could appease Hitler. As he deftly shows, the ill fated moves which led to another World War was not only on made by an optimistic Chamberlain but also an enthusiastic ambassador to Germany Sir Neville Henderson which was described by some British newspapers as "our Nazi British ambassador at Berlin"¹ Faber described many instances in which Henderson "informed the German Government that England would

¹ Faber, David, *Munich, 1938 Appeasement and World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008. P.22

make no objections if Hitler seized Austria and Czechoslovakia”² These factors in combination with a war obsessed Hitler that would not be even by his own inner circle to back down from his desire to gain lebensraum, that would initiate chess play between appeasement and aggression on an unstoppable path to war.

Munich, 1938 weaves the story ranging from day to day to at times minute by minute account of the key events, meetings, and hopeful flights that marked the play by play gamble in which Hitler manipulated everyone in order to satisfy his own agenda and changing moods. Faber’s account begins with the ceremonious flight in which Chamberlain returns from signing the Munich Agreement and proudly proclaims to the crowds as he disembarks from the plane that he has secured “Peace for Our Time”. The optimism he displayed was not his to share alone. It was reverberated by the masses throughout Britain that were not prepared and had no will for another war to send their children, husbands, and fathers to.

From this point, Faber fades back to paint the picture in a chapter by chapter sequence of the events which led to the ill fated agreement. In the first chapter, Faber describes how Hitler clearly was well aware of the importance of timing. He emphasized that his chance to expand and attain the living space that Germany needed to become the great empire, could only be gained in a small window of time. He knew that he had to act while he still had the support of his party as well as the window of surprise and technical advantage over his foe’s. Hitler believed that “the summer of 1938 was the date which seemed to him possible for this”³ Hitler was...”convinced of Britain’s nonparticipation”.⁴

² Faber, David, *Munich, 1938 Appeasement and World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008. P.22

³ Faber, David, *Munich, 1938 Appeasement and World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008. P.17

⁴ Ibid

It is evident that this in great part was because he was assured time and time again from both Chamberlain and Henderson that this was the case.

In a meeting at Hitler's retreat, Berchtesgarden in mid November, Lord President of the Council, Lord Halifax met with Hitler to discuss the tenuous situation between Britain and Germany. It was at this meeting that Hitler had insisted that Halifax agreed that there were problems or questions about the Versailles settlement such as over the Danzig, Austria, Czechoslovakia. He further went on to state that if "reasonable settlements could be reached with the free assent and goodwill of those primarily concerned we certainly had no desire to block."⁵ With this statement it is clear that Great Britain would not take a stand over a territory if a there was a way in which the taking of that land could be validated.

The second chapter seems to takes a detour from main topic to discuss a political scandal that struck the German Minister of War Marshal von Blomberg. His marriage to a prostitute was somewhat widely known and scandalous. However, it is one point in the book that seems to tangent too far from the main topic and in my opinion could have been omitted. The thirty pages utilized to weave the sorted tale could have been better spent instead of propagating sensationalism that barely touches the surface of relevancy to the overall thesis of the book. It's seemingly placed to illustrate the tenuous situation in which Hitler found himself that a possible scandal of this magnitude may have been a potentially devastating blow to his prestige in Germany and abroad.⁶

From Chapter three forward Faber jumps back on track with the fragile foreign relations situation facing Europe. He utilized a secret message from President

⁵ Faber, David, *Munich, 1938 Appeasement and World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008. P.38

⁶ Faber, David, *Munich, 1938 Appeasement and World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008. P.71

Franklin Roosevelt to the Prime Minister to illustrate that Roosevelt had taken allegiance with Great Britain but further tried to impress the importance of stopping a new world order from occurring. Faber revealed Roosevelt's hope that "essential and fundamental principles which should be observed in international relations" would include the "...most effective methods of achieving limitation and reduction of armaments"; equality of access for all to "raw materials and other elements necessary to their economic life"; and, "in the unhappy event of war, rights and obligations of Governments...and laws and customs of warfare whose observance neutrals may be entitled to require."⁷ He made reference as well to making concessions in regards to the Treaty of Versailles in hopes that this may dissipate some of the need for actions. It was made clear that these recommendations were given to the British alone. Not to add more international pressure to an already heated European political firestorm. Chamberlain decided not to accept or follow through with Roosevelt suggestions concerned that it would incite Germany to action.

This book not only illustrates Chamberlain's insistence on keeping the peace but strongly illustrates Hitler's equally strong desire to gain living space at any cost. He will ignore his own high command that was too frightened of Hitler than the war that they may lose. It was recognized by Halifax upon the report of Henderson's emergency recall from Berlin that there really were only two possible scenarios that could occur in regards to the Czechoslovakia dilemma. Either Hitler, "against the advice of the Army and the moderate party"⁸ wanted a great success in order to gain international recognition and bargaining points and would move forward or Great Britain would have to take a stance

⁷ Faber, David, *Munich, 1938 Appeasement and World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008. P.78

⁸ Faber, David, *Munich, 1938 Appeasement and World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008. P. 232

and “ the only deterrent which would be likely to be effective would be an announcement that if Germany invaded Czechoslovakia we should declare war on her.”⁹ The failure in the second scenario would be that follow through would be a must and much of the population in Great Britain would not have supported war over Czechoslovakia. Further, there would be no guarantee that they could defend the Republic before it was totally taken over anyways.

The last chapter culminates with the signing of the agreement and its immediate aftermath. Faber reflects the shift in public opinion which occurred across Great Britain over the harsh treatment of the Jews. Chamberlain, in a letter to sister after Kristallnacht wrote: I am horrified by the Germans behaviors of the Jews. There does seem to be some fatality about Anglo-German relations which invariably blocks every effort to improve them” While he privately recognizes that the time of appeasement will soon be coming to an end as it will become increasingly more difficult to turn a blind eye to a deteriorating situations. Halifax admits that it was time to correct “the false impression that we are decadent, spineless and could with impunity be kicked about.”¹⁰

It was clear by December of 1928 Hitler felt that he was unstoppable. He had gained the Sudetenland without resistance and as of the 17th of December he would begin to acquire the rest of Czecho-Slovakia with little resistance after brow beating it’s ruler, Hacha to the point of a heart attack. Hitler again was able to “peacefully” take territory with no international opposition.

Faber chooses to end his book at this point. His ending words were that of Hitler in the formal proclamation incorporating Czechoslovakia into the Reich. “Czecho-

⁹ Faber, David, *Munich, 1938 Appeasement and World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008. P.232

¹⁰ Faber, David, *Munich, 1938 Appeasement and World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008. P.433

Slovakia,”...has ceased to exist”.¹¹ This abruptness in ending bodes well within the story line of Hitler’s reign. The abruptness of his actions and the failed responses of the allies leave a cliff hanging that the reader even if they had no other knowledge of the following events could infer that the next season or in this case the next chapter would have included the next eventual conquest that Hitler set his sites on. The only question would be; would the next territory be valuable enough for the British or any of the Allies to take action.

¹¹ Faber, David, *Munich, 1938 Appeasement and World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008. P.437