The History of the Twentieth Century
Episode 305
“Peace for Our Time”
Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Even before the plebiscite that confirmed the annexation of Austria by Germany, Adolf Hitler was already on to the next thing.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century.*

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 305. Peace for Our Time.

In the past two episodes, we looked at how Germany and Italy, and their respective dictators, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, were drawing closer together, beginning in 1936, when both countries began aiding the Spanish generals in the civil war there.

In the fall of 1937, Hitler had scandals on his hands, involving both his war minister, Werner von Blomberg, and his military commander-in-chief, Werner von Fritsch. He had told both of them of his aim to eliminate both Austria and Czechoslovakia, and they had warned him of dire consequences, possibly a war with France and/or Britian, a war for which Germany was not yet prepared. Just months later, both of them were gone and Hitler was able to resolve those scandals and force through unification of Austria with Germany, the *Anschluss,* a process that involved threats of military intervention, but in the end was effected peacefully.

The newly unified German Reich was bigger and stronger than ever, and Adolf Hitler was more popular than ever, both in Germany and Austria. As had happened two years earlier, when he had ordered German soldiers into the Rhineland, his military and foreign policy advisers had warned him that the risks were grave. And as had happened two years ago, he forged ahead anyway, got what he wanted, winning widespread approval with the German public while the French and the British stood aside and did no more than make diplomatic protests.

These two dramatic successes left Hitler convinced he had a special ability, a special flair, a special *feel* for international relations not shared by his advisers and supporters. He began to speak in mystical language of how he had been appointed by Providence, with a capital P, as

leader of Germany, and how the appointment came with heavy responsibilities that no one but he could fulfill. Even some of those closest to him found this Messianic language disturbing.

Hitler also had a health scare in 1935, as we saw, which left him anxious about his health and with a superstitious fear that he might not have much time left to fulfill this special destiny. That may explain why, on March 19, 1938, just days after he'd returned to Berlin from his triumphant visit to Austria, and even before the *Anschluss* was made official, he confided to Joseph Goebbels that with the issue of Austria resolved, "Now it's the Czechs' turn."

Nine days later, he met with Konrad Henlein, leader of the Sudeten German Party of Czechoslovakia. Hitler advised Henlein that he planned to deal with the Sudeten question soon, and instructed Henlein that he and his Party could help matters along by making demands of the Czechoslovak government in Prague, lots of demands, demands that Prague could never agree to.

[music: Smetana, Ma Vlast]

Woodrow Wilson passed away almost fifteen years ago, and if there are any Wilsonian idealists left in the world of 1938, they must be sorely disappointed. The Great War had been terrible, but there was some solace in the thought that it had ushered in a better world: a world in which might no longer makes right, nations have agreed to settle their disputes through arbitration at the League of Nations, and autocracy is dead. Long live liberal democracy.

But the years since the Paris Peace Conference have not been kind to idealists. There are the big problems, of course: Germany is rearming, Italy has annexed Ethiopia, and Japan has started a war with China. Spain had a liberal revolution, but then a military revolt began rolling it back. The situation in Portugal is similar. And in Central Europe, most of the new democracies that were created at the Peace Conference have gone authoritarian: Poland, the Baltic States, Yugoslavia, Austria, and Hungary.

That leaves only two of the new nations created in the aftermath of the war that remain what you could confidently call liberal democratic states: Finland and Czechoslovakia.

We talked at some length about the creation of Czechoslovakia, especially episode 176. Czechoslovakia was not a creation of the Paris Peace Conference, as was Yugoslavia. Czechoslovakia created itself. It was conceived by Czech and Slovak emigrants and expatriates living in the United States and was born in the splintering of Austria-Hungary in the chaotic final weeks of the Great War.

This makes the birth of Czechoslovakia something of an anomaly. The guiding principle of the Paris Peace Conference was supposed to be the self-determination of all peoples, and yet Czechoslovakia ended up a multi-ethnic state in which the predominant ethnicity was Czech, though they were a bare majority. Slovaks made up just 16% of the population, with Ukrainians and Magyars comprising 5% and 4% of the population, respectively. The second-largest ethnic

group in Czechoslovakia was Germans. At 22% of the population, they were a bigger share of the country than were the Slovaks.

Czechoslovakia turned out this way for historical and pragmatic reasons, not for logical ones, and for the whole complicated story, I'd refer you back to episode 176. Today, of course, we are going to focus on that ethnically German segment of the Czechoslovak population.

Back in the days of Austria-Hungary, (Remember Austria-Hungary? Good times.) ethnic Germans within the Empire were broken down into three subgroups. Alpine Germans lived in the Alpine region and after the war became Austrians. Balkan Germans lived in the Balkans. They tended to be merchants or landlords, and as is only appropriate for the Balkans, were balkanized, that is, they were broken up into many small communities, mostly within the cities of Hungary and the Balkan states. After the war, they either learned to live as minorities in someone else's country or they moved out.

The third group was called the Sudeten Germans, who lived in the Sudetenland, which is the oval ring of mountains that surround Bohemia and Moravia. Back in our 1919 series, I explained to you how after the war, the new nation of Austria attempted to claim these lands, but that wasn't practical, let alone enforceable. The new Czechoslovak government, led by Tomáš Masaryk, claimed all the territory within what had been Austria's border with Germany through this region, and the German government did not contest this claim, as they had plenty of other things on their minds at the time.

This left the Sudeten Germans as a minority ethnic group within Czechoslovakia, a status they weren't exactly thrilled with. Czechoslovakia was a liberal democracy, but its government was more centralized than, say, multiethnic Yugoslavia. In particular, there was no regional Sudeten government controlled by ethnic Germans; the Sudetenland was run from Prague.

Many, probably most, of the Germans in the Sudetenland had supported Austria's attempt to claim their lands. Before the war, these lands were part of Austria, and the German-speaking people living here thought of themselves as Austrians. That this aspiration was rejected by the Allies created resentment.

Then came the Great Depression. Most Sudeten Germans were employed in small manufacturing businesses, often family run. Major industries in the region included textiles, glassworks, jewelry, and toy-making, and much of what these businesses produced was exported to Austria or Germany. The Great Depression hit these small manufacturers hard. In the 1930s, unemployment was higher among ethnic Germans than among other Czechoslovak citizens. In this economic environment, it was easy for demagogues to blame the woes of the Sudeten Germans on the malice of the ethnic Czechs who were running the country.

And that brings us to Konrad Henlein. He was born in 1898 in the city that the Czechs call Liberec and the Germans called Reichenberg. At the time, Reichenberg was a predominantly

German-speaking town with a large number of rural ethnic Czechs who moved there seeking factory work. The educated, comfortable, middle-class German-speakers of the town tended to look down on these poor, uneducated Czechs who were willing to work for wages no German would accept. This was the world in which Konrad Henlein grew up, and no doubt this upbringing influenced his worldview.

Henlein served as an officer in the Austrian Army during the Great War, on the Italian front. He was gassed and taken prisoner in late 1917, and spent the rest of the war in an Italian POW camp. Upon his return after the war to what was now Czechoslovakia, Henlein became a gymnastics coach. Now, this is more significant than it sounds, because gymnastics clubs were a big deal among the Sudeten Germans. Like a few other right-wing ethnic Germans in the region, Henlein melded his extremist German nationalism with his interest in gymnastics into an ideology in which physical fitness in men and traditional masculinity were crucial to preserving and strengthening the German people.

Henlein was a strict coach, who exhorted his gymnasts to be strong and manly and heroic and "complete men," as he put it. If you're like me, you're shifting uncomfortably right about now and wondering if you are detecting an undercurrent of homoeroticism in all this. Considering that Henlein never married or had children, the modern historian can't help wondering if he was a deeply closeted gay man. But in the 1930s, people didn't notice those things, or they pretended not to. What they did notice was that Henlein's gymnasts were regularly winning competitions, which was sufficient to make Henlein into a Sudeten celebrity. In 1931, he was elected president of the Sudeten gymnastics organization. By then, he was writing articles talking up the strength and discipline that gymnastics requires as consonant with National Socialism and contrary to decadent liberal democracy.

In 1933, perhaps inspired by Adolf Hitler's rise to the German chancellorship, Henlein formed a right-wing political party called the *Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront,* which means roughly, Sudeten German Homeland Front. In the 1935 Czechoslovak parliamentary election, Henlein's party won the largest share of seats. That's because it swept the Sudeten German vote, while the ethnic Czechs split their votes among several parties.

This made Konrad Henlein into the undisputed political leader and spokesperson for the Sudeten Germans. By 1937, he was appealing to Adolf Hitler to "resolve the Sudeten German question." And after the *Anschluss,* German nationalists in the Sudetenland went nuts. Hitler had achieved the seemingly impossible once with Austria; maybe he could do it again with the Sudetenland.

And that brings me back around to Hitler's meeting with Henlein, just days after the *Anschluss,* in which Hitler counseled Henlein to make demands the Czechoslovak government would never agree to, in order to open up a space for German meddling.

Henlein did as he was told. His party met in the spa town of Karlsbad—which the Czechs call Karlovy Vary—to draw up a list of eight demands, the Karlsbader Programm, asking for legal

recognition of the Germans as an ethnic group and local autonomy for the Sudetenland, among other things. The Czechoslovak government in Prague rejected the list of demands, though it did offer to negotiate.

Meanwhile, in Berlin, Hitler was already meeting with his military chief, Wilhelm Keitel, and instructing him to draw up plans for an invasion of Czechoslovakia, codenamed *Fall Grün,* or Plan Green, to be conducted no later than October 1, six months from now.

Hitler next traveled to Italy, for a promised return visit following Mussolini's visit to Germany last year. He was very uncomfortable on this visit. Italy, unlike Germany, was still officially a monarchy, so diplomatic protocol dictated that Hitler, as Germany's head of state, was a guest not of the prime minister, but of the Italian King Vittorio Emmanuelle III. This meant that Hitler had to stay in the palace and attend royal functions surrounded not by good Italian Fascists but by the aristocracy, whom he later described as "degenerate fools." At the state dinner, Hitler was seated next to the Queen, while Mussolini was relegated to the far end of the table. Hitler complained that the Italian court stared at him as if he were an exotic animal. In this we can see that Hitler, though he was now one of the most powerful people in the world, never lost his sense that he was a lowly commoner unwelcome among the wealthy and mighty.

But when he had the opportunity to talk one-on-one with Mussolini, they got on well enough, and Hitler returned to Germany convinced that Mussolini would support his coming move against Czechoslovakia. But the trip must have worn on him; he followed it with a two-week retreat to the Berghof. While he relaxed, Nazi propagandists went to work overtime, denouncing Czechoslovakian "oppression" of the Sudeten Germans.

Konrad Henlein visited London to make his case to the British. It was against diplomatic protocol for members of the British government to meet with an opposition leader from another country, so Henlein met with backbench MPs from all three major British political parties, and by all accounts he made a good impression. He spoke of Czechoslovak "oppression," such as forcing ethnic German children to study in Czech-language schools, but also insisted he wanted only autonomy for the Sudeten Germans and was not working for the German government or the Nazi Party and was most definitely not seeking *Anschluss* of the Sudetenland with Germany.

In fact, he had been given a memo from the German Foreign Office advising him to say exactly these things.

Among the backbench MPs with whom Henlein met was Conservative MP Winston Churchill. They had lunch together, at which Henlein compared the Sudetenland to Ireland and pointed out that the Irish people were promised Home Rule for decades before the British government was prepared to give it to them, and by then it was too late. The Irish had lost patience and reached a stage in which they would accept no less than independence. The same was true of the Sudetenland, Henlein said. Today, Home Rule would be enough, but if the government in Prague resisted their reasonable demands for too long, the time would come when autonomy would no

longer be enough. Churchill was convinced and told the House of Commons that he hoped the President of Czechoslovakia would agree to negotiate with the Sudeten Germans.

By the way, the President of Czechoslovakia was at this time Edvard Beneš. We've met him before, for examplein episode 164, when he was representing the newly-born state of Czechoslovakia at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, and in episode 265, when he was serving as foreign minister during the Manchuria crisis. Beneš had become President following the retirement of Czechoslovakia's first President, Tomáš Masaryk, in 1935. Masaryk passed on in 1937, at the age of 87. His son, the now-51-year-old Jan Masaryk, is currently in the middle of the developing Sudeten crisis, as he is Czechoslovakia's ambassador to the UK.

The propaganda campaign, combined with a reported growing German military presence along the border, sufficiently alarmed the government in Prague that it ordered a partial military mobilization on Friday, May 20. The French government publicly reminded everyone that France was committed to defend Czechoslovakia. The UK was not, but the British government warned Berlin that it would not stand idly by. The Soviet government had also made a commitment to defend Czechoslovakia with the French, though the Polish government privately warned the French that if it came to war, Poland would not support Czechoslovakia, nor would it permit the Soviet military to transit Polish territory.

This sudden rallying of international opinion in favor of Czechoslovakia caught the German government by surprise. In fact, no troop buildup was taking place, and the German Foreign Office had to issue a statement denying that Germany was contemplating any military action against Czechoslovakia. Hitler was furious, as the international press was reporting the story as one of Germany forced to back down in the face of Western diplomatic pressure, but in the long run, the weekend kerfuffle redounded to Germany's benefit once it became clear that the Germans were telling the truth. It appeared that, instead of doing the sensible thing and offering to negotiate, Prague had cried wolf and needlessly raised international tensions. This turned Western diplomatic opinion against Czechoslovakia and made Germany look like the victim.

So what happened here? Where did Prague get the idea that the Germans were moving troops to their border? It's possible this was some clever bit of misinformation, but if so, no one's ever demonstrated who did it or why. Maybe it was just a dumb mistake. You know what they say: Never attribute to malice what can be explained by stupidity.

But as I said, Hitler didn't see the incident as an unexpected bit of luck. He saw it as a loss of face. He told his military and diplomatic officials that it had only reinforced his conviction that, as he put it, Czechoslovakia must "disappear from the map." He was confident the Western powers would not stand in the way. Britain was just beginning its military buildup; they would want to wait. France would be afraid to act alone, and Italy would support Germany.

Most of the generals just listened and nodded; one who didn't was the Army Chief of the General Staff, a man named Ludwig Beck. Beck believed that any move against Czechoslovakia

would inevitably lead to war against France and Britain. He tried to convince his fellow officers of this. He proposed a mass resignation of Wehrmacht commanders as a way to get Hitler to see reason. But this idea went nowhere with the generals. Instead, Hitler got wind of it and forced Beck to resign in August. No one else in the military command chose to follow him.

That same month, the British government pressed the Czechoslovak government to accept mediation through the offices of Lord Runciman, a 67-year-old Liberal former Cabinet minister, who traveled to Czechoslovakia to meet separately with the government and with the Sudeten German leadership. Runciman pressed the government hard to agree to the Sudeten German demands to the point that Prague was ready to agree to the Karlsbad Programm. Reporting to the British Cabinet, Lord Runciman told them that Czechoslovakia as they knew it could not continue to exist. Some portion of its territory would have to be ceded to Germany.

Not that any of this did any good on the ground. In Germany, that year's Nuremberg Rally took as its theme "Greater Germany," celebrating the *Anschluss* with Austria. Hitler concluded the rally with a fiery speech about the Sudetenland, declaring that Germany could "no longer accept further oppression against and persecution of three and a half million Germans." He warned Prague that the Sudeten Germans had not been abandoned, and warned the Western democracies of "severe consequences" if they interfered.

Henlein and the Sudeten Germans took their cue and broke off negotiations with the government. Protests erupted across the Sudetenland, some of which led to violence. The government in Prague declared martial law in the region, and no one was happier about it than Hitler himself. His October 1 deadline for military action was two weeks away, and everything was going according to plan.

Then, just two days later, came a development that threw the whole plan out of whack. The British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, sent Hitler a message asking for a face-to-face meeting to resolve the Sudetenland crisis peacefully. Hitler had no choice but to accept and invited Chamberlain to meet with him at the Berghof the following day, September 15. The 69-year-old Chamberlain boarded an airplane for just the second time in his life and flew to Munich; from there he was escorted to the Berghof by Joachim von Ribbentrop.

Hitler subjected Chamberlain to the Schuschnigg treatment. He welcomed Chamberlain warmly on the front steps of his mountain retreat, took tea with him in the Great Hall, then invited him to a one-on-one meeting in his office. No one else was present except Hitler's translator. The talk lasted three hours. Hitler began calmly but became increasingly agitated as he escalated his accusations of Czech mistreatment of the Sudeten Germans. Chamberlain told Hitler he was willing to discuss German complaints so long as Hitler foreswore the use of violence. Hitler snapped that it was Edvard Beneš who was guilty of using violence, violence against the innocent Germans of the Sudetenland. He told Chamberlain, "I'm going to solve this problem myself, one way or the other."

Chamberlain kept his cool and calmly replied that if Hitler had already resolved to use force against Czechoslovakia, then this meeting was pointless, and perhaps it was better if they ended it now.

Hitler hesitated, then collected himself and said that if Chamberlain were willing to agree that the principle of self-determination should apply to the Sudeten Germans, then there would be room to negotiate over how to put the principle into practice. Chamberlain told Hitler he would first have to consult with his Cabinet and proposed a second meeting, asking Hitler to pledge not to use force against Czechoslovakia in the interim. Hitler agreed.

Afterward, Hitler was delighted. In his view, Chamberlain would have no choice but to agree to the principle of self-determination, which in turn guaranteed the Sudetenland would be ceded to Germany. In London, Chamberlain described Hitler as unimpressive, but said he believed the German chancellor was a man of his word.

That judgment has haunted Chamberlain's reputation ever since.

The British and French governments agreed on a joint position and communicated it to Prague. Czechoslovakia must concede all territories in which German speakers account for more than half the population, in return for which, Britain and France would guarantee Czechoslovakia's new borders. If Czechoslovakia refused, sorry guys, you're on your own. The Czech government reluctantly agreed. The Czechoslovak prime minister, an ethnic Slovak named Milan Hodža, resigned.

On September 22, Neville Chamberlain returned to Germany, this time to the spa town of Bad Godesburg, in western Germany, for a second meeting with Hitler. He went into the meeting confident he had resolved the crisis. His government, and those of France and Czechoslovakia, had agreed to Hitler's central demand. But when the meeting began, Hitler told him the offer was now unacceptable. Giving up the Sudetenland was all well and good, but Czechoslovakia would have to agree to withdrawal from those lands by September 26, four days from now, and even then, Hitler would not pledge to honor Czechoslovakia's new borders. Both Poland and Hungary also had territorial claims against Czechoslovakia, he noted, and these would also have to be resolved.

A frustrated Chamberlain told Hitler that all he could do now was communicate Hitler's demands to Prague and ask for their response. He asked Hitler to draft a written memorandum laying out all his demands in writing, to lock them down, since they had proved to be something of a moving target. He got Hitler to agree not to take military action while negotiations were in progress and to extend his deadline to October 1. As Chamberlain left, Hitler assured him that the Sudetenland was his last territorial demand in Europe.

The Czechoslovak government rejected Hitler's proposal; no surprise there. On September 26, Hitler gave a speech at Berlin's Sportpalast, the city's largest indoor venue. American journalist

William Shirer, who attended the speech, described Hitler as "in the worst state of excitement I have ever seen him in." Hitler recounted his efforts to make peace: the German-Polish non-aggression pact, the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, his agreement to Germany's current western border, his close relationship with Italy, and the peaceful *Anschluss* with Austria. Now, Hitler said, "we stand before the final problem that must and will be solved. It is the last territorial demand I will make on Europe, but it is a demand on which I will not yield…" He accused the Czechoslovak government of waging a "war of extinction" against the Sudeten Germans. He told the crowd he had issued a memorandum stating his demands to President Beneš. "The decision is now in his hands. War or peace. Either he can accept this offer and give Germans their freedom, or we will take this freedom ourselves!...Herr Beneš now has the choice."

The following day, Sir Horace Wilson, Head of the Home Civil Service, came to Berlin to deliver a letter from Neville Chamberlain. It said that Britain would guarantee that Czechoslovakia would surrender the Sudetenland, if Hitler would in turn renounce the use of force. Hitler rejected the proposal and told Sir Horace that unless Prague agreed to his memorandum by 2:00 PM September 28, Germany would invade on October 1. Sir Horace replied that in that case, he had been instructed to deliver the following message: If France's obligations to Czechoslovakia compelled it to engage in hostilities against Germany, Britain would support France.

Hitler shot back that it didn't matter, but after Sir Horace left, he was shaken. He had assumed all along that Britain would not go to war; now it seemed clear that any move against Czechoslovakia would also mean war with Britain and France. That same afternoon, a Wehrmacht motorized infantry unit drove down Berlin's Wilhelmstrasse, on its way to the Czechoslovak border. It was intended as a patriotic show, but to the surprise and disappointment of Hitler and other top-ranking Nazis, only a few Berliners stopped to watch. Most went about their business. When Hitler appeared at the window of his Chancellery office, there were no crowds, no cheers. The mood of the German public was clear: the prospect of another European war was about as appealing as a serving of rat soufflé.

By the following morning, the 28th, the day of his ultimatum, Hitler had come around to the realization that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Or, as the French ambassador, André François-Poncet, put it to Hitler during a morning meeting at the Chancellery, "Why do you want to take this risk, seeing that you can get your fundamental demands fulfilled without war?"

The meeting was interrupted by the news that the Italian ambassador, Bernardo Attolico, had arrived with an urgent message from Benito Mussolini. Hitler excused himself to hear it. It seemed the British government had asked Mussolini to mediate. Mussolini had agreed, and was now asking Hitler to halt the mobilization of the Wehrmacht for 24 hours for further talks. Then arrived the British ambassador, Sir Neville Henderson, with a message from Neville Chamberlain, proposing a four-way conference with the prime ministers of France and Italy to

find a peaceful solution. At 12:15 PM, with less than two hours to go to the deadline, Hitler agreed.

Hitler and Mussolini both rode overnight trains to reach Munich on the morning of September 29. There, the two dictators conferred privately to coordinate their negotiating strategy. Neville Chamberlain and French Prime Minister Edouard Daladier each traveled by air to Munich's Oberwiesenfeld airport. The four leaders met in a mostly friendly atmosphere, though eyewitnesses described Hitler as nervous, and sticking close to Mussolini. All four of them stated their views; all four of them stated they wanted to reach a peaceful settlement.

Then Benito Mussolini produced a document, a draft settlement proposal. It had actually been drafted for him by a German government group headed by Hermann Göring. Under its terms, Germany would begin occupying the Sudetenland on October 1. A referendum would be held in the disputed lands to settle the final borders. An international commission composed of representatives of Germany, Italy, Czechoslovakia, France, and Britain would be created to consider Polish and Hungarian claims to Czechoslovak territory.

The discussions ran late into the night, and at 1:30AM on September 30, an agreement was signed. The British and French governments also agreed to a separate declaration, in which those two governments would guarantee Czechoslovakia's new borders. It was left to the British and French diplomats to explain the terms of the new agreement to the representatives of Czechoslovakia, who were not invited to the talks. The British and French told the Czechoslovaks that if they did not consent to the agreement and resisted the entry of German soldiers into the Sudetenland, they would be on their own. The government in Prague reluctantly accepted the agreement.

All Europe breathed a sigh of relief. Even most of the leadership in the German government were pleased with the outcome. The one exception was Adolf Hitler himself. The Sudetenland was to have been the excuse for a military occupation of all Czechoslovakia. Now, those plans had to be delayed, owing to, as Hitler would put it, the "governessy interference" of an "umbrella politician." He has been quoted as saying, "If ever that silly old man comes interfering here again with his umbrella, I'll kick him downstairs and jump on his stomach in front of the photographers."

In fact, Hitler had to have noticed the cheering crowds that lined the route Neville Chamberlain's car took through Munich on his way back to the airport. The contrast between the chilly reception the Army had gotten in Berlin and the jubilation that greeted Neville Chamberlain in Munich made the attitude of the German public plain enough and left Hitler disappointed. "There is no way I can wage war with these people," he lamented.

I'm tempted to quote Berthold Brecht here, and say, well then, perhaps you should dissolve your people and elect another one.

Neville Chamberlain received an even warmer reception from the crowds back in London. The Royal Family bent the rules of protocol and invited the prime minister onto the balcony at Buckingham Palace to receive their cheers. It turned out the British public didn't want another Great War any more than the German public did. George Gallup's polling organization tested public opinion of the Munich Agreement in the US, UK, and France and found that majorities supported it in all three countries.

One of the few dissenters was Winston Churchill, who said this in the House of Commons:

We have suffered a total and unmitigated defeat... [Y]ou will find that in a period of time which may be measured by years, but may be measured by months, Czechoslovakia will be engulfed in the Nazi régime...[W]e have sustained a defeat without a war…And do not suppose that this is the end. This is only the beginning of the reckoning…

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Andrus for his kind donation, and thank you to Steven for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Andrus and Steven help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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The holiday season is upon us once again, and as I do every year, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you that donations and patronages to *The History of the Twentieth Century* make the perfect holiday gift—for me. And they're so easy to give. No worries about whether they're the right size or the right color, and you have my personal assurance they will be deeply appreciated and never be returned. As a patron, you have your choice of tiers, and donations are welcome in any amount. And if neither of those are in the budget, how about a rating and review at the iTunes store, or wherever fine podcasts are distributed. I promise you these are deeply appreciated, too.

I also have my little story, "The Boy Who Didn't Know How to Recognize a King," for sale at Amazon for 99 cents. There's a link to it on the podcast website. If a few of you wanted to buy that for Christmas and read it, that would make me happy.

Speaking of holidays, it has been my custom for the past few years to produce a special Christmas episode of the podcast. I mean this as my Christmas gift to you, my listeners, and I

have one ready to go this year. Funny thing about how this year's calendar works. December 25 falls on a Sunday, and in the normal course of the podcast release schedule, the 25th would be a bye week. So what I'm going to do is release the Christmas episode on Sunday the 25th at the usual time. This means I'll be releasing a total of nine episodes in nine weeks without a break, so wish me luck on that.

And I hope you'll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century,* as the euphoria over the Munich Agreement quickly evaporates. What does it take to change the mood across Europe so quickly? All it takes is a pogrom. The November Pogrom, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century.*

Oh, and one more thing.

The desire for peace is noble. And yet the ultimate failure of the Munich Agreement will have consequences that go far beyond even what I'm going to talk about in the coming episodes. Far beyond the Second World War even. Ever since 1938, the very word *appeasement* has fallen into discredit, and even in our time, the words "appeasement" and "Munich" are often heard from those who demand a military response to, well, just about anything.

In 1950, US President Harry Truman spoke of Munich to justify sending US troops to Korea. Fifteen years later, Lyndon Johnson would use the same argument to justify intervention in Vietnam. In 1956, the British government invoked Munich as its justification for military action against Egypt. In 1980, Presidential candidate Ronald Reagan denounced arms control talks between the US and the Soviet Union as another Munich.

The lesson of Munich is certainly not "negotiations are bad; war is good," although it seems as if some people think it is. In fact, the biggest foreign policy mistakes made by the US and UK in the 85 years since the Munich Agreement have been made by the very same people bandying the word *appeasement*.

The real lesson of Munich is this: you get one freebie. Neville Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier believed they were sacrificing Czechoslovakian control over the Sudetenland in exchange for peace in Europe. They believed this because this is what Adolf Hitler told them.

American cowboy humorist Will Rogers died in a plane crash in 1935 at the age of 55, alas, and he and his homespun wisdom will be missed. He once said, "It takes a lifetime to build a good reputation, but you can lose it in a minute." Chamberlain and Daladier were willing to accept Hitler's word that the Sudetenland would be his last territorial demand in Europe. They were willing to trust him because Hitler had always spoken of peace, and so far had kept his word.

Allied propaganda during and after the Second World War portrayed the militarization of the Rhineland and the *Anschluss* with Austria as the first steps on a master plan to dominate Europe, with Czechoslovakia the next step. But that's not how it appeared at the time. The militarization

of the Rhineland and the *Anschluss* were popular in Germany and in Austria. They were effected without significant opposition, either domestic or international, and without violence. Here in Czechoslovakia was the first time Hitler demanded something from a people unwilling to give it to him. Chamberlain and Daladier were willing to concede the Sudetenland anyway, for the sake of peace, on the understanding that this was a one-off situation. You get one freebie.

They took a risk for peace. The path of peace is risky; that's undeniable, but then, something that the people who toss around the word "appeasement" never seem willing to acknowledge is that war is risky, too. Time will show that Neville Chamberlain misjudged Hitler, but then, Hitler misjudged Chamberlain and Daladier as well. A staggeringly dishonest person himself, Adolf Hitler failed to understand the degree to which this peace agreement hinged on his keeping his word. When he broke his word, the attitudes of Britain and France changed overnight.

That change in attitude would take Hitler entirely by surprise. Not grasping the value of honesty himself, Hitler was unable to comprehend the value other people would put on it. It was not Neville Chamberlain's miscalculation that plunged Europe into a second world war. It was Adolf Hitler who made the miscalculation.

[music: Closing Theme]

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