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British Appeasement 1936-1939:

The Debate between Parliament and the Public

Kylie Johnson

Dr. Michelle Tusan

Following the Great War, the countries in Europe were wary of another devastating war plaguing the world. The years of fighting and the immense loss of life permeated the minds of the people of the world for decades. The Great Depression left the countries of Europe grasping for a more stable economic situation, and to achieve this, they turned inward. The United States pulled out of Europe and the League of Nations, the parliament of Great Britain began focusing on domestic policy, and various countries throughout the Eurasian continent began working towards economic development. With focus facing to internal matters, the governments of many European countries put international affairs on the back burner, choosing to focus on their state and their own people first. Meanwhile, Adolf Hitler began rebuilding Germany and rearming the military limited by the Treaty of Versailles. Once Germany was well on its way to having a substantial force, Hitler began making demands on the states surrounding Germany. Rather than stopping Hitler with the power of the League of Nations, Great Britain began implementing a policy of appeasement. Appeasement included the making of concessions in order to lessen tensions or conflict between parties.

While it is now clear that appeasement of Nazi Germany and Adolf Hitler did not prevent another war, there is a historical debate on whether British appeasement policies were shameful, a set of well-intentioned blunders, an attempt at keeping peace internationally, or a strategy to keep domestic resources focused on Britain. Within the debate between historians, lies a debate between the British public and Parliament, and even within Parliament itself. In Britain, the fear of another great war, the belief that they were the directors of international collective security, and the many domestic issues that commanded the majority of parliamentary attention all affected policy decisions. Continental Europe was not the leading priority for Great Britain as a leading power in the world. An important factor in the British decision to implement

appeasement policy in the 1930s that is often underemphasized in the literature is the governmental prioritizing of domestic issues and national security over collective, or international, security. This is most prevalent in the period of 1936-1939 and is accompanied by the divergence and convergence of public and parliamentary opinion. Understanding this relationship allows for a better understanding of the period, and the relationship between people and their government, especially in times of crisis.

In the key years of 1936-1939, many incidents played into the changing opinions and beliefs of the public and government of Great Britain. The year 1936 saw the beginnings of conflict in Europe that threatened the balance of power in the world and drew the attention of the public to matters outside of their homes and the ongoing economic crisis of the Great Depression. The Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935-36) and the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) are just two of the incidents in this time that illustrate the turn of a relative amount of attention to German and Italian (perhaps Fascist?) aggression. In the case of the Spanish Civil War, there was also the implementation of the League of Nations policy of nonintervention in the internal affairs of the European states that would limit the ability for countries to become involved in the issues within other European states. The year 1936 also brought the Japanese-German Anti-Comintern Pact, the later joining of Italy to the Pact, and the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance that led to Hitler's claim to occupying the Rhineland for protection from hostile neighbors. Neville Chamberlain became Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1937 and the decision making fell to him. In 1938, German self-determination and aggression came to the forefront with the Czechoslovak Crisis, the *Anschluss*, and *Kristallnacht*, which brought public concern to continental Europe. By 1939, with the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the invasion of Poland, the public was calling for war and parliament was catching up to the curve.

My paper will explore the debate over appeasement in Great Britain from 1936-1939 as this period shows the most evidence of the debates between the public and parliament on the issue of appeasement. This paper is driven by the belief that appeasement prior to World War II is more complex than definitions suggest. Focusing on the British perspective and decision-making process in these years allows for a situational analysis of the complexities of the historical debate of appeasement. Using a collection of secondary sources from traditionalist, “old revisionist,” revisionist, and “new revisionist” historians of appeasement, and primary sources such as articles from the *London Times*, the Chamberlain and Churchill papers, the HANSARD database of United Kingdom Parliamentary documents, and the UK Parliamentary papers, I will explore the debate of appeasement and seek to answer three key questions. 1) What issues contributed to the British policy of appeasement? 2) How did appeasement policy affect British policy reactions to continental Europe and how did these reactions change prior to the war beginning? 3) How did the debate between the public and the government diverge/converge throughout this period? I will be using the *London Times* articles and sources to represent the voice of the public, as I believe that these article best represent the wide and changing opinions of the average British person. For the voices of the British Parliament, I will use the HANSARD documents as well as speeches and articles made and printed by members of Parliament.

In a keyword search of the London Times<sup>1</sup>, I found that in an advanced search of “Appeasement and War and Germany” there was an increase of articles from 1936 to 1938 and a decrease in 1939. The same is true for the terms “Appeasement and War and Germany and Rearmament,” “Appeasement,” and “Rearmament.” Data shows that the term “rearmament” showed up significantly more in articles in the Times than “appeasement.” Despite the drop after

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendices A & B

1938, use of these terms in 1939 remained higher than they had been in 1936.<sup>2</sup> In a search of the HANSARD database of Parliamentary documents, using the same keyword search terms, a similar trend stands out. Each of the four search terms shows an increase from 1936-1938, followed by a decrease in 1939 that remained higher than it had been in 1936. In contrast, the HANSARD United Kingdom Parliamentary documents show less attention to such terms and a domination of domestic policy (as it appears more often in the documents than appeasement and rearmament do).<sup>3</sup> The decrease in 1939, the year in which Germany and the Soviet Union invaded Poland, may suggest that both the public/media and Parliament became more concerned with readying for war than with the idea of appeasement and even considerations of rearmament. Overall, this data shows that the terms of appeasement and rearmament did increase and become more prominent in public and Parliamentary attention throughout the years discussed, and more so in the *London Times* as the voice of the public.

Appeasement policy in Great Britain changed and adapted as events progressed between the years 1936 and 1939. With the rise of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP), or Nazi Party, in 1933, to the acts of aggression beginning in 1936, British public and parliamentary views changed and adapted as well. In the beginning, the public and parliament agreed: avoiding the disaster of war, still prevalent in the minds of everyone, was the number one goal. Britain was not ready for another war and neither were her people. As events progressed, Parliament continued prioritizing domestic issues over international concerns, only pursuing rearmament and war preparation in the name of defense. However, the public, on the other side, began focusing on the violations occurring on continental Europe and Britain's

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix A

<sup>3</sup> Appendix B

power to stop them. Eventually, as German aggression began to threaten the very idea of freedom, Parliament and the public began to come back together to prepare for war.

### Historiography

Appeasement as a political policy has gained a relatively negative reputation. In the scholarship, appeasement is often discussed as beginning in a time where there was no other option, and ending after Hitler went a step too far in his demands, namely following the Munich Conference in 1938. Many modern historians, the “new revisionists,” such as James P. Levy and Norrin Ripsman have called for a broader definition of appeasement and a deeper analysis of the policy, its implementation, and its effects in the prewar years. James Levy also calls attention to the fact that even while Britain was pursuing appeasement, the country was beginning a process of rearmament, though only with defense in mind.<sup>4</sup> Rather than a diplomatic policy aimed at preventing war by making concessions to another power, Ripsman and Jack S. Levy defined appeasement differently. For these two historians, the policy was “a strategy that could reduce tensions with one power to use the resources on another adversary, as a way to separate adversaries, a way to redirect hostilities to another target, and/or as a way to buy time for building of one’s own defense.”<sup>5</sup> Ripsman and Levy hold that British Appeasement policy goes beyond what traditional historians believed. Rather than a strategy fueled by fear and moral corruption, appeasement bought time for the country to rearm and level the playing field with what they assumed was a militarily superior Germany.<sup>6</sup> These scholars provided the base of my research into appeasement and led to my focus on the debate between the public and Parliament.

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<sup>4</sup> James P. Levy, *Appeasement & rearmament: Britain 1936-1939* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Norrin M. Ripsman and Jack S. Levy, "Wishful Thinking or Buying Time? The Logic of British Appeasement in the 1930s" (*International Security* 33, no. 2 (2008): 148-81), 150.

<sup>6</sup> Norrin M. Ripsman and Jack S. Levy, "Wishful Thinking or Buying Time?"

Other historians, such as Gustav Schmidt<sup>7</sup> and Gaines Post Jr.<sup>8</sup> hold that appeasement went through stages of evolution in the years leading up to the Second World War. These stages helped define my years, 1936-1939, and guided my attention to articles and Parliamentary documents that would allow for a more particular analysis of the changing opinions of the time from both sides of the debate. Peter Beck called attention to the position of Great Britain as the international peacekeeper and leading power of the League of Nations, stressing that no country was willing to act without Britain's backing.<sup>9</sup> Benny Morris provided an analysis of the public opinion of appeasement through the *British Weekly Press*. His work brought the importance of domestic issues over international crises to my attention, and introduced the idea of newspapers as a reflection of public opinion.<sup>10</sup> Finally, Gordon Martel challenges the work of whom he calls an "old revisionist thinker" historian A.J.P Taylor's *The Origins of the Second World War*, showing the complexity of the historiography on appeasement.<sup>11</sup> For my research, I am meeting the challenge of filling in the gaps between the traditionalist, "old revisionist," revisionist, and "new revisionist" appeasement historians by taking an "even newer revisionism" approach.

As historians Norrin M. Ripsman, Jack S. Levy, and James P. Levy call for, I will analyze appeasement under the idea of a broader definition, purpose, and interpretation by investigating the debate between the public and government. While there were governmental goals that took precedence, the divergence between public and parliamentary support and loss of support for appeasement add another layer to the definition and history of the British policy prior

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<sup>7</sup> Gustav Schmidt, *The politics and economics of appeasement: British foreign policy in the 1930s*, trans. Jackie Bennett-Ruete (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> Gaines Post Jr., *Dilemmas of appeasement: British deterrence and defense, 1934-1937* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Peter J. Beck, "The League of Nations and the Great Powers, 1936-1940" (*World Affairs* vol. 157, no. 4 (Spring 1995): 175-189).

<sup>10</sup> Benny Morris, *The roots of appeasement: The British weekly press and Nazi Germany during the 1930s* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Evan Mawdsley, *World War II: A new history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).



to WWII. Analysis of this relationship between the public and Parliament allows for a better understanding of the period and the actions taken by the governments throughout Europe, a deeper understanding of the complexity of appeasement, and a look into the broader relationship between people and their government in times of crisis.

### Britain in the 1930s

The Great War permeated the minds of the people and governments in Europe. The loss of life, damage to infrastructure, and strain on foreign relations became the backdrop for major decision making since the end of the war in 1918. The Great Depression, known as the “Great Slump” in Britain, hit Europe after the stock market crash in the United States in 1929. From 1929 to 1933, industry output fell by a third, world trade by half, and unemployment increased drastically. A housing crisis combined with inflation and unemployment left many people homeless. The Depression in Britain hit areas of industry and mining the hardest. In order to bring the country out of the crisis, British policy makers focused their attention on the economy and trade relations, all with the wellbeing of the British people and the wealth and stability of the country as the top priority. The welfare state needed funding, and policy decisions to provide for the public kept those in office on a sharply focused path towards fighting the “Great Slump” and stabilizing the British economy. Following 1931, British policy tended to avoid any decisions that could compete with domestic priorities, or involve Britain on the continent.<sup>12</sup> Thus, turning the country away from many economic negotiations with allied countries, such as the new economic policy proposed by France that would limit the British economy,<sup>13</sup> and focusing on the British economy first.

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<sup>12</sup> Gustav Schmidt, *The politics and economics of appeasement: British foreign policy in the 1930s*, 31-41.

<sup>13</sup> "Economics And Peace." 11 Feb. 1937: 9.

Part of British international commitments directly after the Great War involved the policing of Germany and the maintenance of the balance of power in Europe. Two countries, Russia and Germany, were now out of the balance of “great powers”: Russia torn apart due to civil war, and Germany in a period of minimized industry and disarmament with the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles. In an effort to maintain power relations, the British government began a disarmament process as well, urging the other countries in the League of Nations to follow suit in the name of peace. The Ten Years’ Rule set the timeline for disarmament and rearmament in Great Britain. Put together by the Finance Committee of the Cabinet in 1919, edited, and redrafted until its passing in 1928, the Rule concluded that there would not be another European war that would require British forces for the next ten years (after the passing of the legislation). This directly led the cutting of the British Expeditionary Forces (BEF), and the belief that France would assume control over any issues in enforcing the rearmament restrictions in Germany on her own.<sup>14</sup> This, in turn, freed Great Britain from her “enforcement” commitments and responsibilities and allowed Parliament to focus that attention elsewhere.

In 1934, British policymaking shifted away from strictly domestic concerns towards an emphasis on security and defense of the commonwealth. The empire of Great Britain ensured the state’s continued power, prestige, and wealth. Trade between the British Isles and her colonies kept the country strong and wealthy. Without her empire, Britain would not hold her place in world politics, thus the defense of the commonwealth came before aiding allies on the continent.<sup>15</sup> While maintenance of the domestic sphere still dominated parliamentary consideration and time, the protection of the British Isles and commonwealth became the number one goal. Still, with these goals in mind, British policy focused on appeasement of Germany by

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<sup>14</sup> Gustav Schmidt, *The politics and economics of appeasement*, 226-227.

<sup>15</sup> Schmidt, 229.

pursuing diplomatic peace through the sharing of concerns between the countries and making assurances, rather than committing to another war. The resources used to prepare for war were occupied with defense of the commonwealth and Great Britain's standing in the world.

In 1933, the issue of German rearmament entered parliament. An assumption that Germany rearmament would take five years to be a threat to Britain led to a plan of gradual rearmament for that period. As German rearmament increased, so did British rearmament (though the figures of German progress were only estimates and ended up being less than what Germany was actually achieving at the time).<sup>16</sup> Stanley Baldwin, Leader of the House of Commons in 1936, stated, "In the post war years we had to choose between a policy of disarmament, social reform and latterly financial rehabilitation... and a heavy expenditure on armaments. Under a powerful impulse for development every government of every party elected for the former."<sup>17</sup> The British Parliament as a whole decided that while disarmament was necessary in the beginning to achieve financial stability, and while rearmament would still be taxing on British finances, it was becoming more necessary to meet the potential threat and rearm in the instance that Britain would have to defend herself.

Eventually, British rearmament matched that of Germany as a way to deter the Germans from making any actions and to remind the government that Germany shared borders with powers that would stop her from becoming belligerent. Negotiations seemed likely as one reporter puts it, "The tension of 1937 arises chiefly out of a passionate demand for the recognition of German equality... clearly within the bounds of negotiation."<sup>18</sup> The public belief that the German people were not inferior to the British, and that they had the right to self-

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<sup>16</sup> Schmidt, 231-236.

<sup>17</sup> Schmidt, *The politics and economics of appeasement*, 228. (St. Baldwin, 9 March 1936, Parl. Deb., House of Commons, ser. 5, vol. 309, col. 1832.).

<sup>18</sup> "The Way Of Appeasement." 25 Nov. 1937: 15.

determination the same as any other country, began to permeate parliamentary decision-making. This conflicted with the goal to maintain and protect the commonwealth, as India and other British protectorates and colonies fought for their own independence. The issue of self-determination continued to plague Parliament and grow into a conflict between Government and the people, contributing to the split in beliefs and then later convergence as opinions continued to change and develop with events.

Appeasement also made the process of deal making through arms limitations more viable as talks between Britain and Germany surrounded the reduction of rearmament and the allowance of more arms to Germany than was allowed in the treaties following the Great War. Appeasement kept Great Britain from entering into the Franco-Russian Pact that ensured cooperation if a third power were to attack the Treaty members. This left Britain in a position that allowed her to deter Germany, maintain relations with past allies, and force everyone to the bargaining table rather than a battlefield.<sup>19</sup> The “Britain first” strategy was key in the 1930s to keep Britain safe, but that did not mean that it could not have effects on the continent as well. Prime Minister Chamberlain said to a colleague, “This sort of contributions which Britain might possibly make would primarily be measures to ensure *British* security, but which could and would be represented as constituting contributions to European and French security.”<sup>20</sup> While Britain gained a defensive edge through the negotiations and peace talks, that defense carried over and affected the safety of other countries, including France (even if she insisted against talks and for action). In the beginning, the public and Parliament were in agreement that Appeasement was the way to proceed as it allowed for the stabilizing and protection of Great Britain, allowed her to stay out of another war, and still worked towards lasting peace in Europe.

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<sup>19</sup> Schmidt, 235-238.

<sup>20</sup> Schmidt, 239. (Neville Chamberlain to Simon, 23 September 1936, Simon-Mss.)

## The Public and Parliament

In 1936, with the Great Slump in full force, the formation of the Axis in Central Europe, and the increasing hostilities and discontent throughout continental Europe and Asia, the public and Parliament had similar agendas. British policymakers focused on domestic concerns such as the unemployment and economic crises. While the Italians invaded Ethiopia, and the Italians and Germans interfered in Spain, Britain remained focused inward. She could not help maintain peace internationally if she was not at peace herself. This meant that the British economy was more important than helping allies and honoring agreements in full when they were detrimental to Britain. For example, the French proposed economic plan that included sanctions on Germany would harm British exports. Articles in the *London Times* show that both Parliament and the people did not wish to honor and agree to the economic plan.<sup>21</sup> An article from the *Times* titled “Trade and Peace” (25 Feb. 1937), and another titled “Economics and Peace: (11 Feb. 1937) discuss the public and parliamentary discontent with the economics plan proposed by the French and its inherent and unwanted effects on the British economy.<sup>22</sup>

Prior to involving the country in another war, the people needed relief from the domestic crises that were plaguing Britain. Without economic stability, the country was in no position to commit itself to other countries. British policy makers argued that if the world wanted peace, then a solution to the current economic crisis had to come prior to any involvement in another conflict. If the economy was not prepared, then the conflict would only get worse and peace would be further away on the horizon. An article entitled “British Foreign Policy” stated “Economic distress is in itself a danger to peace. All friends of peace, therefore, must wish to see

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<sup>21</sup> “Way to Peace.” 12 May 1936: 18.

<sup>22</sup> “Trade And Peace.” 25 Feb. 1937: 9, & “Economics And Peace.” 11 Feb. 1937: 9.

that distress relieved.”<sup>23</sup> To achieve peace, an international effort had to lead the way to fixing trade relations and reestablishing a secure global economy. This was not the only international concern that both the public and Parliament deemed necessary. The maintenance of the balance of power in Europe also required international effort, not just the power of Great Britain on her own.<sup>24</sup> The call went out to the people and governments of the world, and Britain and her people waited to see what would happen.

Neville Chamberlain, prior to becoming Prime Minister, held a strong belief in peace without force. He argued for the attention strictly to domestic concerns, not speaking of war because it made it more likely to happen, and defense only for the unspeakable instance that everything failed and Britain was attacked. In an address to the people, talking about the defense of the nation he said:

We are determined to seek peace and ensure it; to use what influences we command to induce other nations to settle their grievances by peaceful and not by forceful means. On the other hand, until some general settlement can be reached, we are determined, whatever the sacrifices, to push forward the defense of this country with might and main until we may feel we have secured our own safety and that of the Empire... We most earnestly desire political appeasement. We shall do everything that lies in our power to secure it. Finally, we intend to continue with the utmost energy our efforts to improve the conditions of our own people.<sup>25</sup>

In the beginning, the public agreed, and the support for the German right to self-determination made it easier for Great Britain to allow such actions as the *Anschluss*, the annexation of Austria,

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<sup>23</sup> “British Foreign Policy.” 13 Jan. 1937: 14.

<sup>24</sup> “Reassurance.” 4 Apr. 1936: 15.

<sup>25</sup> “Mr. Chamberlain on Defence.” 30 Jan. 1937: 14.

and the annexation of the Sudetenland to take place, as is illustrate in the various articles by a reporter named Jacob Gould Schurman. In an article titled “Germany and the Rhineland,” Schurman writes that only once Germany had sovereignty over all of her lands, could successful implementation of appeasement occur.<sup>26</sup>

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Anthony Eden was a big supporter of appeasement policy in the 1930s. He argued that for the wellbeing of Great Britain and her people, international cooperation towards the maintenance of the balance of power was key. That cooperation included not just the governments of Europe, but cooperation between the people and their governments as well. In an article on British policy in 1937, Mr. Eden claimed that while Communism was a menace and Hitler was promising to be a barrier to communism in Europe, a war between the Communists and Fascists would be counterproductive to the balance of power in Europe. He continued, holding that pacts and treaties would not be enough, and that armament should only be conducted to achieve the necessary level for adequate defense and as a way to deter any threat to the British Isles and Commonwealth.<sup>27</sup> Eventually, however, the public grew uneasy about the route the government was taking towards defense of their nation and the defense of the rest of Europe.

### The Public Takes Notice

The need for defense of the nation, the realities of a looming war, the breaking of treaties and pacts, and the morality and rights of the people of Europe began to cleave the unity between the public and Parliament in the late 1930s. While Parliament stayed its course of appeasement in an effort to protect the British Isles, the British Commonwealth, and all of her people, the public began calling for action in Europe regardless of the situation at home. Parliament made decisions

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<sup>26</sup> Jacob Gould Schurman. "Germany And The Rhineland." 10 Mar. 1936: 17.

<sup>27</sup> "A Statement of Policy." 20 Jan. 1937: 15.

based on their belief that preserving democracy, institutions, and individual rights and liberties in Britain was more important than committing the nation to another Great War. To do this successfully, the government needed the full support of her people. With all eyes on Britain, she had to be the leading picture of unity.<sup>28</sup>

The public, however, was starting to see the situation in Europe in a different light. Treaties with Germany were just scraps of paper that were honored only until Germany got what she wanted, and then were torn up.<sup>29</sup> The Germans had broken two treaties already, the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Treaty, and Great Britain and the League of Nations were doing nothing to stop it. It was the duty of the state, and the international organization, to maintain the balance of power on the continent and protect the freedom and liberty of all people.<sup>30</sup> As Germany continued breaking the Treaty of Versailles and expanding her borders, threatening other countries, the public took notice. The media reports of rearmament on the continent, civil rights abuses, and the growing power of Hitler and the Nazi Party, all coupled with the fear of war and the love of democracy, liberty, and freedom for all peoples, directed the public to form their own opinions in regards to foreign relations.

A new idea came from the voice of the people through an article entitled "Trade and Peace." If the government was insisting on stabilizing the economy first, then an increase in the rearmament plan, and mobilization of industry could help boost the economy. Already employment was rising and industrial activity expanding with the gradual rearmament campaign. If the government invested in industry, worked on exportation, brought in the aid of her dominions overseas, and increased the rate of war-ready production, the economy would boost.

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<sup>28</sup> "Lords and Foreign Policy," 30 Mar. 1938: 7+.

<sup>29</sup> "Germany and Locarno." 12 Mar. 1936: 8.

<sup>30</sup> Austen Chamberlain. "Locarno." 19 Mar. 1936: 15.



Rearmament to meet only the bare bones of defense was not enough to boost the economy and, most importantly, not enough to protect the British people and give them peace of mind.<sup>31</sup> A mantra began that pushed for rearmament of the country: “Armaments cannot make peace: neither can the lack of them.”<sup>32</sup> The public was turning away from letting the government alone make the decisions in regards to Germany, forming their own opinions about how the situation should be handled. However, they remained acutely aware that a surge in rearmament would only increase the chances of war and risk the possibility of a war coming before Britain was ready to successfully defend herself and/or fight back.

Attention began to turn outward to the continent, and the governmental focus on domestic concerns became background to the German aggression, and rights and liberty violations occurring throughout Europe. Allen of Hurtwood wrote, “The discussion of foreign affairs occupies a more prominent place in the mind of the public than ever before.”<sup>33</sup> Not only was the public paying more attention to international relations, but also they noted that German expansion and demands began to encroach on the self-determination and liberties of other Europeans. What was liberty and freedom if another country could impose its will on other people? The British public called for their government to take a stand against the German menace; it was up to Britain to right the wrongs done in continental Europe. Another article from the *Times* states, “The power of Great Britain was the greatest guarantee of peace, and on the strength and wisdom of this country the future of Europe hung.”<sup>34</sup> The eyes of the world turned to Great Britain, for she had the power to stop Germany from further upsetting the balance.

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<sup>31</sup> "Trade And Peace." 25 Feb. 1937: 9.

<sup>32</sup> "Arms and Peace." 4 Mar. 1936: 15.

<sup>33</sup> Allen of Hurtwood. "Parliament And Diplomacy." 30 Nov. 1937: 15.

<sup>34</sup> "Less Risk Of War." 4 Mar. 1937: 7.

### Parliament Carries On

While the public was looking to Europe at this point, Parliament was looking inward towards the defense of Britain and her territories. One article came to the defense of the British parliament stating, "It will be time enough to protest against the Government's crooked or criminal intentions when there is some evidence that they possess them."<sup>35</sup> As of this time, the government had only been acting in the best interests of the British people. Parliament had not actually done anything wrong or immoral; they were only looking after their own people first and the rest of the world last. Parliament's official policy had two parts: lasting peace that could only come with the removal of the causes of war, and collective security that could only come with the sacrifice and commitment of all members. Britain would prepare for an attack just in case, but would only rearm to the point that adequate defense was achieved.<sup>36</sup> Churchill said in an address to the people:

I know from many letters I receive that the fear of war has been hanging over countless homes for many months past... The main object of this Government's foreign policy is the establishment and maintenance of peace so that, instead of building up armaments against one another, we may settle our differences and then devote ourselves to make the world a better place to live in. If anyone were to attack us, we should have to defend ourselves. That is the purpose of *our rearmaments*. We have to make ourselves so strong that it will not be worthwhile for anyone to attempt to attack us.<sup>37</sup>

It was important for the government to stress that British rearmament was merely a precaution. Defense was the word of the day, not attack. Diplomacy would still be the first tool, but defense

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<sup>35</sup> "The Way Of Appeasement." 25 Nov. 1937: 15.

<sup>36</sup> "The British Task." 9 Apr. 1938: 17.

<sup>37</sup> "Dual Peace Policy." 13 May 1938: 11.

of the British Isles and the British Commonwealth called for moderate rearmament. By making herself increasingly stronger, no country would want to attack Britain in fear that she could retaliate with a stronger force. The goal was that the country would not have to fight at all.

Articles from this time state that with the industrial recovery, employment was increasing gradually. The number of those on welfare decreased, and the effects of the Great Slump lessened every day. These same articles defended the Government, stating that it was not ignoring the international community as the public had accused, but was appealing to the world market to cooperate and open trade for the boosting of the world economy. An article entitled “Dual Peace Policy” states, “The significance for economic cooperation and world peace of the currency agreement must, however, depend on the measure of the freer exchange in real wealth in the shape of goods and services across the frontiers of nations which it secures.”<sup>38</sup> This article speaks to the necessity of negotiation and international cooperation in the name of peace, economic security being one of the ways to pursue that peace. With the idea of economic peace in mind, Parliament continued as it had been, negotiating and looking for international cooperation, not war.

When it came down to the rational possibility of war occurring, or an attack on the British Isles, Parliament recognized that Britain was at a disadvantage militarily. As early as November 1936, questions of German air superiority and the amount of production needed to meet that imbalance were dominating parliamentary debates. In many sessions of Parliament, at least one member questioned if Britain could meet the Germans in arms at the current rate. A session in November 1936 included a query by Colonel Wedgwood, asking the Minister for the Coordination of Defense if the German air force was a threat to British security.<sup>39</sup> Beyond this,

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<sup>38</sup> "Economics And Peace." 11 Feb. 1937: 9.

<sup>39</sup> HC Deb 18 November 1936 vol. 317 cc1806-8W.

the government had to recognize its obligations to other countries, though the wellbeing of the British Empire took precedence over any treaties or agreements with allies such as France.

Keeping Britain's best interests at heart, the government had the right to decide when and if the country would enter into a war. Though parliamentary figures such as Prime Minister Chamberlain strongly believed that war could be avoided, their continental allies, namely France, insisted on preparing for war. Regardless, no mutual reassurance treaties would order Britain into battle in Europe. Negotiations with France and Belgium left Britain free from full commitments in the instance of war while still maintaining relationships with the two allies. Negotiations on a new Treaty with France and Belgium would "approximate as closely as possible to those in the Treaty of Locarno," but Britain would not commit herself to going to war simply because her allies were entering into one.<sup>40</sup>

The discussions in Parliament continued to surround the reasons as to why Britain should urge the countries of Europe to pursue the peaceful diplomacy of appeasement rather than war. Another debate in Parliament states there was nothing the government could do about the territorial claims that Germany had in Africa as the territories were under League of Nations mandate, not British.<sup>41</sup> On top of this, Parliament held that the annexation of Austria, while not ideal, was bound to happen as Austrians were in fact German and only the Treaty of Versailles kept the territories separate.<sup>42</sup> In yet another session, members were assured that despite the annexation, there were assurances from the Germans that Austria would remain an independent territory, just as a part of a larger Germany.<sup>43</sup> It was important for Parliament, as well as the public, to keep in mind that everything the government was doing was working towards a lasting

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<sup>40</sup> HC Deb 02 December 1936 vol. 318 cc1229-30.

<sup>41</sup> HC Deb 22 December 1937 vol. 330 c1949.

<sup>42</sup> HC Deb 14 March 1938 vol. 333 cc45-169.

<sup>43</sup> HL Deb 14 March 1938 vol. 108 cc45-52.

peace. Forceful action now would only exacerbate the situation before Britain was ready to handle it.

By 1938, Chamberlain continued to reassure the public that appeasement was in fact working. He heard their concerns about British security, and rearmament was progressing “just in case.” Chamberlain returned to Britain following the Munich Conference, stating that the Munich Agreement (October 1938), a product of a conference between Germany, Britain, France, and Italy that gave the Sudetenland area of Czechoslovakia to Germany, would bring peace. He insisted that the Sudetenland was the last of Hitler’s demands, and that the Czech government should be revered for their restraint and willingness to go along with the concessions in the name of peace.<sup>44</sup> The “peaceful solution” was still in reach and Chamberlain was not going to stop until he reached it. The Prime Minister proclaimed that the public should wait calmly while events progress and the government analyzed all options available to it.<sup>45</sup>

Peace, Chamberlain stated, could not be achieved in a few days, and the last few years had only been the first steps towards lasting peace. Even then, worrying about the safety of the country was unnecessary, as the Government had been engaged in an intense rearmament campaign that was increasing the yield of war materials every day.<sup>46</sup> Prime Minister Chamberlain wrote in his diary entries for September 1938 that Britain was not yet militarily ready for war and even the military advisors believed so. He concluded, saying that avoiding the catastrophe of war called for appeasement, and hope for a lasting peace remained the driving force of British policy.<sup>47</sup> Despite this, even the Prime Minister recognized that public opinion

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<sup>44</sup> HC Deb 03 October 1938 vol. 339 cc40-162.

<sup>45</sup> Chamberlain, Neville. “Radio Speech to the British People (September 1938),” in *The Past Speaks*, vol. 2, Walter Arnstein. Cengage, 1993.

<sup>46</sup> Chamberlain, Neville. “In Defense of the Munich Agreement (October 1938),” *The Past Speaks*, vol. 2, Walter Arnstein. Cengage, 1993.

<sup>47</sup> Chamberlain, Neville. “Diary Entries (September 1938),” in *The Past Speaks*, vol. 2, Walter Arnstein. Cengage, 1993.

was calling for more action, and as the representatives of the people, it was the duty of Parliament to listen and respond to their concerns as the unified, “official voice” of Great Britain.

Still within Parliament, there were differing opinions of how to proceed towards appeasement. Different members of Parliament saw appeasement policy in different ways. One member, Lord Bayford, called for working more closely with Germany to form better agreements that would direct the two countries towards peace, while other members saw treaties as pointless and insisted on rearmament only to the strength to ensure that Britain would be a force not to be trifled with.<sup>48</sup> From the very beginning of the concessions and negotiations with Germany, Lord Stanley called for a tougher stance in the upholding of treaties. He insisted on their enforcement through force and the cooperation of the international community. Germany was stomping on treaties and using the British diplomacy as a way to get everything that she wanted. Standing beside him was Arthur Greenwood who called for the League of Nations to be enforcing treaties. These members of Parliament were mentioned the most in the *Times* as the voices that best questioned the decisions the government was making. Regardless of the differences in how to proceed with appeasement, the British government continued the path that the policy had laid. Nevertheless, these differences, combined with the public voice, began to change appeasement in the late 1930s towards more preparation for the defense of Great Britain and action in continental Europe: the fight for freedom and liberty.<sup>49</sup>

### Re-Convergence

From 1933-1936, in the beginning of Hitler’s rise to power and expansion of the German state, the British government was focused on revamping the economy, providing for her people, and establishing security for the homeland and commonwealth. In an article that summarized a

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<sup>48</sup> “Sanctity of Treaties.” 6 Apr. 1936: 14.

<sup>49</sup> “Sanctity of Treaties.” 6 Apr. 1936: 14.

speech given by Lord Halifax in March 1939, the fact that the government and the people of Great Britain had been a peaceful people in the years following the Great War is illustrated. This viewpoint of the public and Government explains the intensity of the connection between Parliament and the public in the beginning years of appeasement. Together, the public and Parliament of Great Britain strove to create positive relationships with the people and governments of all countries in Europe. No one wanted to be directly attacked or forced to defend themselves against a neighbor and partner in the world economy, but circumstances left Britain with no other choice. There were ideas and practices greater than peace that were worth the risk and worth fighting for: freedom, liberty, and life.<sup>50</sup> The public of Great Britain agreed with the policy of appeasement in the beginning; they were through suffering and did not want to enter into another war. Securing Great Britain would not only benefit the nation and her people, but the other nations and people in Europe.

As the 1930s progressed, and well into 1938 and 1939 especially, Germany became more of a threat, stomping on the liberties and freedoms of the people of Europe. Parliamentary and public opinion began to diverge, and by the time of the Munich Conference in October 1938, the chasm only widened. Eventually, the two sides began to converge as it became apparent that stopping Hitler was key to maintaining freedom in Europe. The year 1937 showed the rockiness of international relations and the strain that it would put on individual countries. No one country could remain isolationist, and while the government of Great Britain wanted to focus on domestic issues; they were forced into action due to the connections of all the countries.<sup>51</sup> Eventually it became clear that defense of Britain and the idea of freedom would bring the public and Parliament together. A review article produced at the beginning of each year stated in

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<sup>50</sup> "Lord Halifax on German Treaty-Breaking." 21 Mar. 1939: 8+.

<sup>51</sup> "British Foreign Policy." 13 Jan. 1937: 14.

regards to 1937, "On one main issue the country was united; it must rearm and the means and the money for rearmament must be found."<sup>52</sup> The re-convergence of the British public and Parliament began the uptake in war preparation and increase in the British rearmament program. Britain would be ready for war in the event that appeasement did not work out.

Parliament noticed the growing public interest in international affairs through the increasing amount of media output through radio and newspaper articles, and began discussing the best course of action to take in Europe. The entire continent was in conflict and divided amongst many fronts. The Belgians and French were readying for war; Germany and Italy had signed pacts and agreements with Japan; Austria and Czechoslovakia were absorbed into the German state; and talks between the Soviet Union and Germany loomed above the heads of the Great Powers. Pleas from the public led the government to reconvening negotiations and strategy discussions with France,<sup>53</sup> and the government appealed to the people to mobilize and prepare for war. Industrial activity increased, volunteers were called to arms, cities prepared for bombing raids, and the people were asked to remain patient while strategies were devised and new plans implemented. Defense efforts redoubled in 1938, the Treaty of Versailles was declared "dead" by Lord Kenilworth in Parliament, and while Czechoslovakia was seen as "out of the scope" of the British government, some of the blame for its annexation fell on British shoulders.<sup>54</sup> With all this building up, Parliament began planning for action while Prime Minister Chamberlain continued to appeal to Hitler for a lasting peace.

In a speech to the people in March 1939, Prime Minister Chamberlain called attention to the changes in public opinion. He stressed that only until recently the public had supported his

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<sup>52</sup> "Review Of The Year 1937." 1 Jan. 1938: 25+.

<sup>53</sup> "United For Peace." 30 Apr. 1938: 13.

<sup>54</sup> "Steps To A Lasting Peace." 6 Oct. 1938: 6.



decision-making. Now, the government would be turning to the commonwealth and France for discussions on how to proceed with the German problem. Parliament and the public were back on the same page. While fear and the prioritizing of domestic life and the wellbeing of Great Britain had taken precedent in government decision-making, the fight for Freedom was more important than securing peace.<sup>55</sup> As the great power of democracy and freedom, Britain was the one everyone would turn to. As the voice of the public, Allen of Hurtwood wrote in a *Times* article, "The issue of peace and war is the political topic most nearly related to the fireside of every British home, and yet each decision upon it must take into account the fears, hopes, and susceptibilities of over 60 nations both great and small."<sup>56</sup> The people cared about the decisions their government was making and showed concern for how these decisions affected the world. Any decision made by Britain would affect the world. The situation in Europe permeated every household. Appeasement had allowed the country to buy time to get ready for war; it brought the government and the public together, broke them apart, and then unified them once again.

### Conclusion

There were multiple factors that influenced the policy of Appeasement. Both domestic and foreign concerns affected the decisions made by Parliament, but also foreign concerns. Norrin Ripsman, Jack Levy, and James Levy all hold that appeasement is more complicated than traditionalists and even revisionists write. These "new revisionism" historians called for a broader definition and pointed out the gap in appeasement scholarship. The divergence in public and parliamentary opinion, then convergence prior to the war beginning, show the complicated relationship between the parliamentary decision to implement the policy of appeasement and the

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<sup>55</sup> Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. *Miscellaneous No. 9 (1939). Documents Concerning German-Polish Relations and the Outbreak of Hostilities between Great Britain and Germany on September 3, 1939*. Cambridge: ProQuest LLC, 2007. 224.

<sup>56</sup> Allen of Hurtwood. "Parliament And Diplomacy." 30 Nov. 1937: 15.

reactions and beliefs of the British public. The “official mind” in Britain and public opinion did not always agree but they evolved together in the key years of 1936-1939. Even as the two parties evolved in their beliefs, there was an overall web of beliefs that shifted over the years. The fear of another great war, the belief that Britain was the director of international collective security, and the many domestic issues such as unemployment and homelessness, are just a few of the factors that led to this evolution between 1936-1939. Appeasement is often seen in hindsight, and it is important to look at it from the perspective of the policy makers and people of the time rather than through the fact that it did not prevent another war.

The Great Slump brought the importance of the economy to the minds of the public and Parliament. German self-determination and the rights of the people of Europe allowed some concessions in the name of peace. Hitler went too far in his demands for a greater Germany and not only the British people, but also the countries of Europe, were calling on the British government. The time to focus on domestic concerns was over. Britain could no longer remain an isolationist, internally focused power mediating the conflict and suggesting peace that was delaying the inevitable. Rearmament began and increased, as war grew more likely. The year 1938 showed the most public attention to the ideas of rearmament with the Munich Conference in October and the following Czech Crisis. These important incidents brought the public and Parliament back to their united front.

Even during the 1930s, between scholars and timely historians, there was no single take on appeasement. There were no concrete effects, results, or reflections. Appeasement, eighty years into the future, is still as complicated a topic, peppered with debate, vague definitions, and perception based analyses. The debate between the British public and Parliament, and the evolution of the policy of appeasement in the later 1930s is only a small section of the overall

scholarship of appeasement. To meet the call of scholars such as Ripsman and Levy, an even deeper analysis into the debates within Parliament itself could help fill the gaps and differences in the scholarship. By looking at the different debates over the British policy of appeasement, we can more fully understand the period, the difficulty that comes with being a Great Power whose decisions affect countries throughout the world, the relationship between people and their government, and the relationship and workings within government, especially in times of crisis.

Winston Churchill became the Prime Minister of Great Britain on 10 May 1940. He quickly assumed power and established a Defense Committee under which war preparations would be made. During his time as Prime Minister and Churchill's time as the First Lord of the Admiralty, Chamberlain and Churchill often butted heads on the issue of appeasement. In one House of Commons sitting on 31 July 1939, Churchill and Chamberlain argued on whether or not France was included in peace treaty agreements with Germany and Great Britain. Churchill proceeded to blame Chamberlain for his part in "delaying" the acceptance and passage of agreements with France.<sup>57</sup> It was clear that the two men did not get along, especially when it came to appeasement policy. Following the war, Churchill wrote a history of the period, *The Second World War*.<sup>58</sup> The Churchill Papers describe Neville Chamberlain as a weak man with no morals, scared to enter into war and therefore willing to do whatever it took to stay out of it. This relationship, and the history of the war written by Winston Churchill himself, illustrate just how complicated the topic of appeasement. It shows that even the leaders of the country disagreed mightily on the policy of appeasement and how to best protect Great Britain and her territories.

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<sup>57</sup> HC Deb 31 July 1939 vol. 350 cc1917-2122

<sup>58</sup> "Oxford Companion to World War II," edited by I.C.B. Dear (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 235-242.

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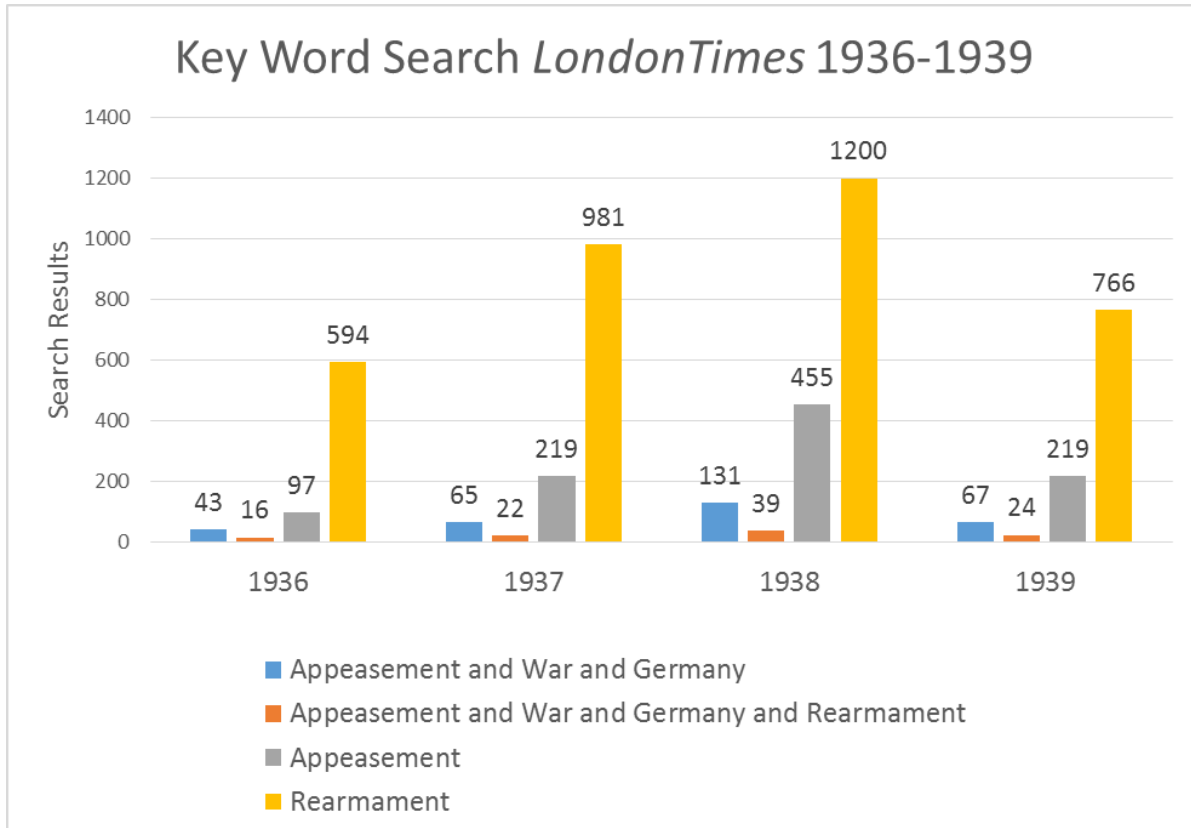
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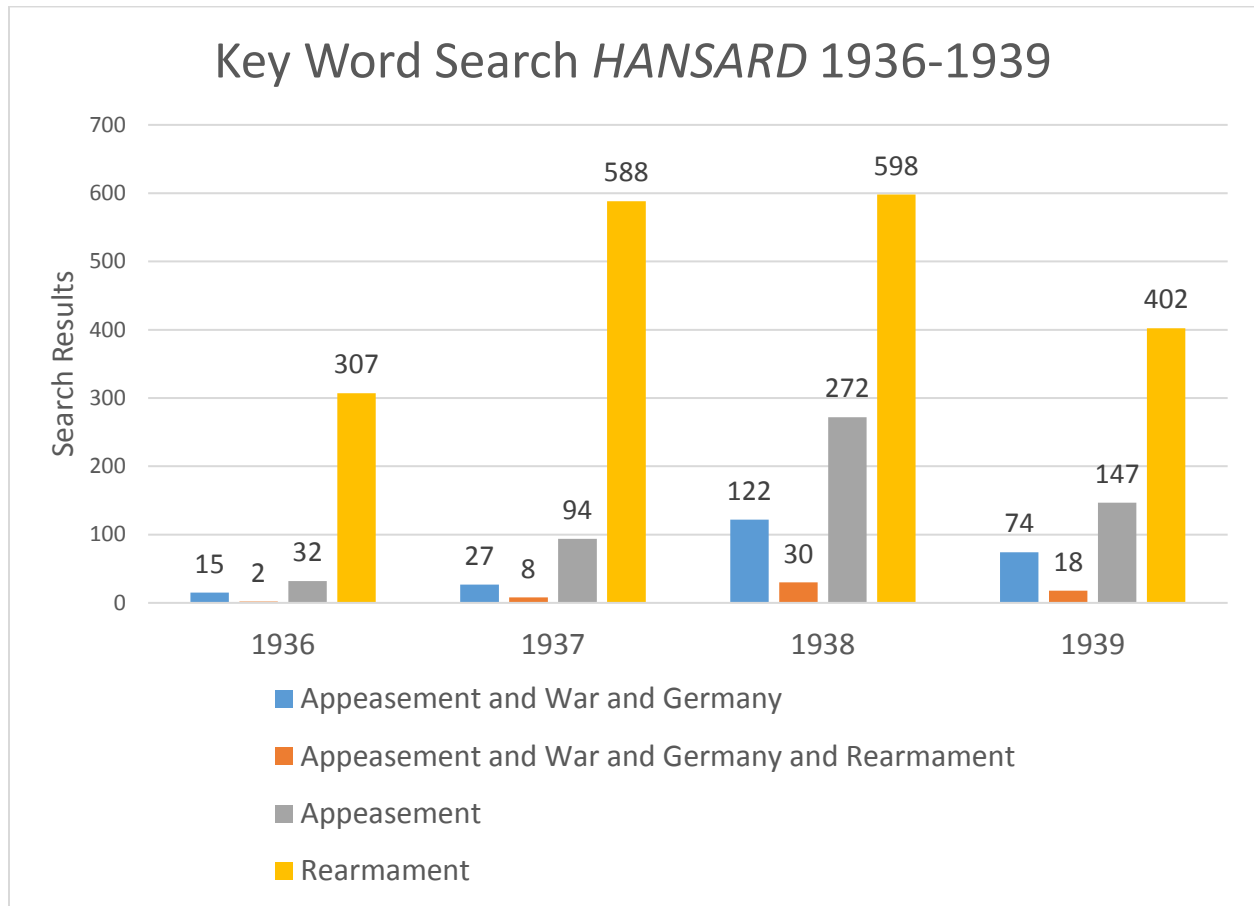
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## Appendix A



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## Appendix B



UK Parliamentary Papers 1936-1939. *HANSARD*.