

COULD HITLER HAVE BEEN STOPPED?

THE POLITICS OF APPEASEMENT



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There is a powerful argument made that appeasement in the 1930s gave Great Britain the time to rearm and to build the Spitfires that were going to win the Battle of Britain and eventually - with help from the Empire, the United States and Russia – to win the Second World War.

There is a counter argument that Chamberlain and his government of appeasement were in retrospect both deluded and cowardly. This is portrayed in histories of the period and exemplified in films like *The Darkest Hour*. The truths that Churchill and others saw at the time are regarded as self-evident.

But there is another perhaps more accurate narrative - that British politicians, under the influence of public opinion, the Press and the continuing trauma and the losses of the First World War, failed to understand the facts - that right up until Hitler's occupation of the Rhineland in 1936 that Hitler could be stopped both then - and indeed much earlier. This was confirmed at the Nuremberg trials of the German generals who invaded the Rhineland.

If Britain or France had acted individually or together, the Germans would have had to withdraw. But, as Stanley Baldwin wrote at the time, standing up to Hitler and Germany was completely against both public opinion and political opinion. Baldwin would have lost power if he went against them. He was locked in.

This new film explores the politics of appeasement, the influence of public opinion and the Press, and above all the failure of politicians and governed alike to understand the real threat that Hitler posed. Ironically it was British imperialists like Churchill who were prepared to fight. British political and public opinion had formed in being unprepared for war. The same thing had happened before the First World War.

From 1938 onwards the British were bravely prepared to fight. Intriguingly a bargain was made, particularly through the influence of Clement Attlee (deputy Prime Minister during the war) - and who won power at the end of the war - that the British needed a welfare state as the other side of the bargain.

Drawing upon expert contributors, contemporary accounts and powerful archive film, this new documentary goes beneath the political surface and sees that, just as in the present, the short-term interests of personal political ambition, democratic election realities and the sheer power of the legacy of the First World War led so few to see the threat that Hitler posed; that he was stoppable; and to misread the alliances that might have been made to stop what became an inexorable tide towards war – one that given the underestimated remaining power of the British Empire – could have been stopped.



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