

What If Edvard Beneš Had Addressed The British Parliament In September 1938

What if Winston Churchill had managed to persuade other Members of Parliament to invite the President of Czechoslovakia, Edvard Beneš, to speak about Herr Hitler, and Germany, and what an agreement made with Hitler might be worth. What if *Edvard Beneš* had explained that Hitler had clearly set out his views in written form – not only in *Mein Kampf* but also in *Mein Kampf* – and in a steady stream of speeches, from 1933 on, speeches whose contents were easily available. What if he had explained the role of Konrad Heinlein, the leader of the Sudeten Germans, who was instructed to create incidents that would then lead to suppression by the Czech police and army, and that could be represented as the “brutal suppression of the Sudeteners and the denial of their right to self-determination.” Hitler spoke about self-determination for “the Sudeteners” often; the only others for whom he expressed a similar interest in their “self-determination” were “the Arabs of Palestine.” What if Edvard Beneš had explained that the Czech defenses were powerful, but they were also placed all along the Czech frontier, that is in the very Sudetenland that Hitler was demanding be given up, knowing that those powerful Czech defenses would then be under the control of ethnic Germans? Perhaps it would have had no effect, because of Chamberlain, who he was, what he had to be. But perhaps – it is possible – the lucidity of his exposition, the *Sachlichkeit* of his expression, would have made things clearer to some, as clear as they were to Winston Churchill. And the President of Czechoslovakia, the country most affected and mortally endangered by an agreement, being made over its head by the then-leader of Great Britain, with France the chief guarantor of Czechoslovakia’s security, certainly had not

only a right but a duty to explain the nature of the threat – which he had seen grow and grow, for the Czechs were paying close attention to Herr Hitler and his regime, far more than the British did between 1933 and 1938 – in order to try to save his country.

Is the analogy false? Is it exaggerated and even melodramatic? How?