

Benes & Masaryk: Czechoslovakia (Makers of the Modern World)

By Peter Neville



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Of even greater importance for Hungary's future were the activities of the champions of an independent state of Czechs and Slovaks. Tomáš Masaryk, a Czech professor of philosophy and a future leader of his people, was hard at work within a month of the outbreak of war lobbying in Paris and London for an independent Bohemia, still a major component of the Austrian Empire within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which would incorporate the predominantly Slovak regions of northern Hungary. Masaryk, who was assisted in his efforts by Eduard Beneš, a bitter enemy of the Habsburgs. Thus the new state was effectively shaped before the Paris Peace Conference. But the Conference laid down the seeds of Czechoslovakia's later destruction. Only nine million Czechoslovaks lived in the state out of a population of fourteen million. A large discontented Hungarian minority lived in Slovakia, and the Polish majority area of Teschen poisoned Czech-Polish relations. Yet the greatest challenge came from the rise of the Nazis in Germany in 1930s: Masaryk always claimed that he did not want three and half million ethnic Germans, but he and Beneš accepted them nonetheless. Masaryk died in 1937, and Britain and France would not support the Czechs over the Sudetenland, the infamous deal struck in Munich by Neville Chamberlain and Adolf Hitler.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Dr Peter Neville is a Research Fellow at Kingston University. He was previously Senior Lecturer in 20th-century European history and war studies at Wolverhampton University, and Tutor in history and international studies at Birkbeck College. His publications include Hitler and Appeasement: The British Attempts to Prevent Second World War (2006), Appeasing Hitler: The Diplomacy of Sir Neville Henderson 1937-9 (2000), studies of Churchill and Mussolini, and Russia: A Complete History (2003).

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