

The Causes of WW2

Hitler's Aims:

- rearm Germany and recover its lost territories
- unite all German-speaking people
- expand in the East to gain lebensraum (living space) for the Germans.

Steps to war:

1. **German rearmament:** Hitler withdrew Germany from the **World Disarmament Conference** (1933)- he said that no other countries were disarming.
Also withdrew Germany from the League of Nations.
In 1934 he signed a **non-aggression pact with Poland** promising not to attack each other for the next 10 years.
1935–introduced conscription to build up the army. This was **against the Treaty but nobody stopped him.**
Britain even signed a **naval agreement** (1935) allowing Germans to build a fleet as long as it was no bigger than 35% of the British fleet.
2. **The Saar Plebiscite, 1935:** This industrial area was taken from Germany and put under the control of the League of Nations. After 15 years, a plebiscite would be held to decide whether the Saar should be returned to Germany.
In 1935 90% of the people voted to return to Germany. Nazis celebrated this as a great victory.
3. **The remilitarisation of the Rhineland, 1936:** Rhineland was still part of Germany but no troops or weapons allowed there.
7 March 1936, Hitler ordered troops to march in. Clearly against Treaty of Versailles but neither Britain nor France tried to stop him. This encouraged Hitler to continue with his actions.
British thought Hitler was just '**marching into his own backyard**'. More concerned about Mussolini invading Abyssinia.
Hitler saw League of Nations reluctant to act against Mussolini so guessed they would not stop him either.
4. **Anschluss, 14 March 1938:** Hitler wanted to unite **Austria** (German speaking) and Germany even though that was against the Treaty of Versailles.
First tried in 1934 when Austrian Nazis murdered Austrian Chancellor. They tried to take over but Mussolini (Italy) opposed them and forced Nazis to back down. Spanish Civil War in 1936 brought Italy and Germany together though and they signed the **Rome-Berlin Axis.**
1938 – Hitler ordered Austrian Nazis to begin riots. Austrian Chancellor, Schuschnigg, tried to arrange a vote on the union with Germany but Hitler moved German troops to the border to prevent the vote. Schuschnigg resigned and Seyss-Inquart (a Nazi) invited German troops in to restore order. In plebiscite 99.75% agreed with the Anschluss. Big success for Hitler – no other countries interfered, many Austrians supported the union.

Appeasement: British and French policy of finding out what Hitler wanted and showing him that if it was reasonable then it could be discussed.

Arguments for appeasement? People wanted to avoid another war like WW1; public opinion in 1938 was against war so appeasement was a sensible policy; Britain had not prepared itself by rearming so appeasement gave them time to prepare their army; feared the communist Soviet Union and saw a strong Germany as a good barrier.

Arguments against appeasement? Hitler became more aggressive as he felt GB would not take action; Germany had time to strengthen army; when GB and France didn't stand up to Hitler, Stalin became worried about German power – and started thinking about deals with Hitler; Hitler had made his plans to conquer eastern Europe quite clear.

5. **Czechoslovakia (Sudetenland), 1938:** Hitler wanted Czechoslovakia as part of his **lebensraum**. Many German-speakers lived in the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia-this gave Hitler the excuse he needed to invade. Henlein (leader of Czech Nazis) pressured Czech Government by asking for more and more concessions for Sudeten Germans. April 1938 German troops gathered on border, Benes (Czech President) got his troops ready too. France and Britain persuaded Benes to make more concessions to avoid war. Sudeten Germans started riots but were crushed. Chamberlain (British PM) persuaded Czechs to give German parts of Sudetenland to Germany but Hitler said he wanted the whole of Sudetenland **or war!** Britain began preparing for war.
6. **The Munich Conference, 1938:** 4 leaders attended-Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain, Daladier (France). USSR and Czechoslovakia NOT invited. Result? Sudetenland to become part of Germany immediately. No war. Chamberlain returned to Britain a hero.
7. **Czechoslovakia, 1939:** Czechoslovakia lost important defences when lost Sudetenland. Plus, other nationalities in Czechoslovakia making demands e.g. Slovaks. Hacha (new Czech President) asked Hitler for help and invited the Germans in. **Not opposed by Britain and France** as Hitler had been invited in but this was the END of appeasement. Why? Not German-speaking, not righting a wrong from Treaty of Versailles – **just aggressive**. Britain brought in conscription. Everyone expected Hitler to attack Poland next so in April 1939 Britain and France promised to help Poland if it was attacked by Germany.
8. **Nazi-Soviet Pact, 1939:** 23rd August Germany and USSR agreed not to attack each other and instead to attack Poland together and divide it between them. Germany invaded Poland 1st September. Britain tried to get them to withdraw but when this failed Britain declared war on Germany on 3rd September.