



Lindsay W. Michie. *Portrait of an Appeaser: Robert Hadow, First Secretary in the British Foreign Office, 1931-1939*. Westport, Conn. and London: Praeger, 1996. xiv + 166 pp. \$57.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-95369-0.

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## An Incomplete Look at Appeasement

In *Portrait of an Appeaser*, Lindsay Michie offers readers a study of her grandfather, Robert Henry Hadow, a British diplomat who served in Vienna, Prague, and London in the 1930s. As the title suggests, Hadow was unflinching in his support of appeasement of Germany. As Michie writes, “[Hadow] shared the majority of the characteristics associated with appeasement and remained loyal to this policy through the outbreak of war in 1939 ..., to the point of indiscretion and risk to his position and career” (pp. 1-2).

Michie attributes Hadow’s support for appeasement to his fear of war, distrust of the French, his emotional attachment to the British Empire, and his hostility to Communism. Like so many British civil servants of the 1930s, he had served in the First World War, seeing action in France and the Middle East, watching friends die and himself suffering a gunshot wound to the lung. He was determined that the next generation of Britons be spared the horrors which he saw.

While posted to Austria (1931-34) he displayed a marked hostility to the French, whom he blamed for Austria’s economic woes. He viewed the rise of Nazism in Germany with some concern, but saw it as an understandable reaction to that country’s diplomatic ostracism, economic depression, and the threat of Communism. Moreover, he downplayed the risk of Austrian absorption into Germany, claiming that “conservative, nationalist and particularly Christian-Social political opinion” in Austria reacted negatively to “attempts to dictate

Austrian policy from Berlin” (pp. 18-19).

In 1934 Hadow was transferred to Czechoslovakia, where he quickly distinguished himself as a strong critic of the Benes government (blaming Benes for creating a “war neurosis” among the Czechs, p. 49) and a supporter of the aspirations of the Sudeten Germans. While he was clearly not endeared to the idea of a German annexation of the *Sudetenland*, Hadow had tremendous respect for the Sudeten German leader Konrad Henlein (calling him “a moderate and a *Sudeten* not a *Gross Deutsche*,” p. 47) and warned that if his legitimate grievances were not addressed “Hitler would march in to put the matter straight” (p. 46).

By the time of his 1937 transfer to the Foreign Office in London, Hadow was a full-fledged champion of appeasement, and soon became a loyal supporter of Neville Chamberlain. He consistently defended Germany throughout the Czech crisis of 1938 (claiming that “[t]he German Government has never entertained the idea of invading Czechoslovakia,” p. 94) and denounced what he saw as “blind support given to Prague by London and Paris” (ibid.). He later opposed making any commitment to Poland, particularly if it involved the Soviet Union, and as late as the summer of 1939 he was more concerned about the Russian threat to the Baltic states than he was about German pressure on Poland.

Michie’s account of the events of the 1930s, as seen through Hadow’s eyes, is interesting, well-written, and even at times compelling. Her discussion of Hadow’s

intrigues in the Foreign Office paints a vivid picture of the state of that bureau from 1937 to 1939. And while she is scrupulously fair to her subject, she does not engage in the sort of apologia that one might suspect from a book written about the author's grandfather. Michie clearly counts herself among appeasement's critics, although she displays considerable sympathy for Hadow's motives in promoting it.

Indeed, had Michie given Hadow's early life and later career more attention, the result might have been a competent intellectual biography of an interesting, though admittedly minor player in the pivotal events of the 1930s. However, a biography, intellectual or otherwise, is not the author's goal. She seeks rather to provide the reader with a greater understanding of the phenomenon of appeasement, but unfortunately the book fails to deliver on this promise. For one, Michie never really shows convincingly how Hadow, who by her own admission "did not hold a high position in the diplomatic service" (p. 1), managed to influence British policy. Certainly, she never gives the impression that anything would have happened differently had Hadow been assigned to posts of less importance during this period.

Nor does the book succeed in "explaining" appeasement. The factors which drove men like Hadow, Chamberlain, Halifax and Neville Henderson, she writes, were fear of war, distrust of France, concern for the Empire's safety, and an abhorrence of Communism engendered by an upper-class upbringing. This is certainly a valid (if not terribly original) conclusion. But it does not explain very much, given that the same characteristics are readily identifiable among such prominent *opponents* of appeasement as Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden. There is

obviously more to the story, but the reader does not find it here.

Even more disturbing is the fact that Michie approaches the diplomatic history of the events of the 1930s as if they had occurred in the 1730s. Almost no mention is made of any influences on foreign policy coming from outside the Foreign Office. There are a couple of references to public opinion being generally supportive of appeasement, but Michie never elaborates on this theme. For instance, the reader finds nothing about the resolution of the Oxford Union not to fight "for King and Country." There is very little discussion of the national press; no mention of the overextension and vulnerability of the British Empire; and nothing about the attitude of the Left, which preached the merits of popular front with the Soviets while opposing government spending on armaments. Yet surely all of these factors had significant impact on British policy. If this were simply a biography of Hadow their omission might be overlooked, but the reader expects more of a work that purports to explain such a complex issue as appeasement.

In the end, Michie offers the reader an interesting story about a minor figure in British history, but little beyond that. Her account may provide some valuable source material for some as-yet-unwritten (but much-needed) comprehensive account of appeasement, but readers seeking more substantive understanding of the subject will want to look elsewhere.

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