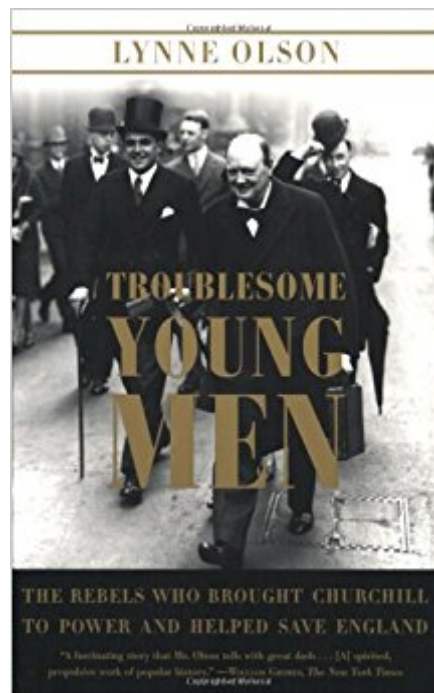


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# Troublesome Young Men: The Rebels Who Brought Churchill To Power And Helped Save England



## Synopsis

A riveting history of the daring politicians who challenged the disastrous policies of the British government on the eve of World War II. On May 7, 1940, the House of Commons began perhaps the most crucial debate in British parliamentary history. On its outcome hung the future of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's government and also of Britain—indeed, perhaps, the world. *Troublesome Young Men* is Lynne Olson's fascinating account of how a small group of rebellious Tory MPs defied the Chamberlain government's defeatist policies that aimed to appease Europe's tyrants and eventually forced the prime minister's resignation. Some historians dismiss the "phony war" that preceded this turning point—from September 1939, when Britain and France declared war on Germany, to May 1940, when Winston Churchill became prime minister—as a time of waiting and inaction, but Olson makes no such mistake, and describes in dramatic detail the public unrest that spread through Britain then, as people realized how poorly prepared the nation was to confront Hitler, how their basic civil liberties were being jeopardized, and also that there were intrepid politicians willing to risk political suicide to spearhead the opposition to Chamberlain—Harold Macmillan, Robert Boothby, Leo Amery, Ronald Cartland, and Lord Robert Cranborne among them. The political and personal dramas that played out in Parliament and in the nation as Britain faced the threat of fascism virtually on its own are extraordinary—and, in Olson's hands, downright inspiring.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In 1930s England, faced with the gathering menace of fascism, 30 or so junior

members of Parliament understood that Hitler would not be dissuaded by Prime Minister Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. Their rebellion against their leader and the "elderly mediocrities" of their own Conservative Party is the subject of Olson's absorbing book. The forces opposed to Chamberlain were initially inhibited by party loyalty and the ferocious reprisals threatened against anyone who challenged the prime minister. Olson traces how Hitler's continuing depredations (Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland) served to recruit more insurgents in the House of Commons and galvanize those shamed by England's inaction. Olson's story picks up energy as she reviews the events of 1940, when at long last Chamberlain was replaced by Churchill. Olson is interested in the moral imperatives driving her protagonists. The dominant figure in the narrative, of course, is Churchill, who despised Chamberlain's defeatism but served loyally in his cabinet until Chamberlain's forced resignation. Infused with the sense of urgency felt by the young Tories, Olson's vivid narrative of a critical generational clash leaves the reader wondering what might have happened had they prevailed earlier on. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Historians have attacked the problem of explaining Britain's appeasement policy of the late 1930s from every conceivable angle; Olson approaches it through the House of Commons. She integrates an expression of its parliamentary customs with a narrative of the political maneuvers of a small number of Tories who opposed placating Nazi Germany. Through biographical sketches of the antiappeasers, several of whom contemporary opinion tipped as future prime ministers (as three became in fact: Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, and Harold Macmillan), Olson develops at least one difficulty they faced in challenging Neville Chamberlain: to get along one had to go along, and the price of opposition could be political ruination. The instances of such retribution by Chamberlain's lieutenants illuminate a degree of caution in the antiappeasers' actions, which Olson plentifully details in their parliamentary speeches. Their calculations of when to strike animate her account, and her well-organized research into this crucial background to Churchill's elevation to the premiership in May 1940 should gain readers interested in this fateful period in history. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As always, Lynne Olsen has done an outstanding job of dissecting and analyzing British politics and events of the years before and during WWII. If you really thought that Churchill rose magically to

prime minister after the failure of Chamberlain's appeasement approach to Hitler, read this book and you will see that it was a lot messier politics than that!! However, you will also learn the stories of all the "troublesome young men" who finally brought down the very powerful Chamberlain and paved the way for Churchill's ultimate rise to the leadership. If you are not interested in the details and all the personalities, then look for another book! But Olsen writes so well that those details are presented in a most interesting and readable style. You cannot go wrong with Lynne Olsen, especially on this period.

This is a great book which details all the scheming and plotting to get Churchill to replace Chamberlain. It is however more than just that. It is also a commentary on the English society, its mores and its abhorrence of war until the very last minute. It is also a portrayal of Churchill as a very brilliant but seriously flawed individual, one whose only purpose on earth was to see the country safely through the war. What is also striking is his misplaced loyalty in Chamberlain and his cabal before and after he became Prime Minister. One wonders whether that prolonged the war unnecessarily. Perhaps this was inevitable given the English Harrow/Eaton culture which put a heavy premium on loyalty at the time. Leo Amery comes out as a far superior individual both for his steadfastness resistance to Churchill when required but also his acceptance of Churchill as THE man to lead the country through the war. The book also reinforces the historical understanding of Europe at the time that communism was a bigger bogey than fascism. Although this was known to be the case in Spain, Vichy France and Italy the book points out that it was just as virulent in Britain including the King George. If one is familiar with the players and the general history of the time this is a fast read. Highly recommended.

I have read a number of books on World War II, but had not read about Britain and the years just prior. This book filled in a lot of gaps for me and reminded me that what seems so obvious looking back is often not at all obvious at the time of the event. The more history I read the more I understand the phrase that history repeats itself. The players change but the circumstances and the response to those circumstances change very little.

Lynn Olson, a former Baltimore Sun White House correspondent, has written a fine book "Troublesome Young Men" about the rebellious member of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's Conservative Party who vehemently stood against appeasement with the Nazi government during the 1930s. If you want a more detailed and scholarly book on this dangerous period of European

history I suggest Brendon Piers' "The Dark Valley." If you want a readable, personal and upclose look at the players in the deadly serious game of parliamentary combat the Olson book will satisfy your curiosity. During the 1930's the British, who had lost 700,000 dead and many more wounded during the Great War, were peaceloving. Defense budgets were cut and the military were deprived of the needed training, weapons and strategy needed to face the rise of Hitler's Nazi party in Germany and the Italian Fascists under Mussolini. The government was run by the Conservative party of Neville Chamberlain. Chamberlain was dictatorial, petty, egocentric with no concept of preparing a modern democracy to face down dictators. He was bamboozled by Hitler at Munich leaving Czechoslovakia to the tender mercies of the Nazi blitzkrieg. He failed to lend real military aid to Poland when war was declared on September 1, 1939. The policies of the Tory government were inimical to the "troublesome young men" (using the phrase coined by Harold Macmillan) who at last were able to oust Chamberlain and raise Winston Churchill to his wartime leadership position as British Prime Minister. The troublesome young politicians had much in common:

1. Most were graduates of Harrow, Eton, Cambridge or Oxford. They were well educated; taught to abide by the rules of society and told by their parents and peers to conform to society and the political party they supported.
2. Most came from the wealthy and clubby British aristocracy.
3. Most were parliamentary backbenchers who were not in the government.
4. Most had been disillusioned by their service in the military during World War I.

Among the troublesome young men were:

- Harold Macmillan-He was a strong supporter of Winston Churchill's rise to power. Macmillan was a hero of World War I and carried war injuries to his death. He married Lady Dorothy in 1920. She had a decades long affair with Macmillan's fellow troublesome young man Bob Boothby a fellow liberal conservative.
- Leo Amery-A classmate and rival of Winston Churchill at Harrow he gave an electrifying speech in the House of Commons demanding that the Chamberlain government give way to a more bellicose prime minister and aggressive policy against the Germans. Amery supported Churchill's rise to power.
- Ronald Cartland-The wealthy brother of romantic novelist Barbara Cartland he was an opponent of appeasement who died in combat during the retreat to Dunkirk.
- Anthony Eden-He resigned as foreign secretary in the Chamberlain government due to his insistence that appeasement was a tragic mistake. He later served in the Churchill wartime government and became prime minister only to be shouted out of office following the Suez Crisis of the 1950s. Eden was handsome, rich, smart but comes across in Olson's portrait of him as somewhat weak and vacillating.
- Lady Violet Bonham Carter and the Duchess of Atholl were two feminine voices demanding that Britain face up to the facts in facing Germany.

Winston Churchill is the most famous person chronicled by Olson. He served in the Chamberlain government being but thought

appeasement abhorrent to the fighting and freedom loving British people. He saved England as her great wartime prime minister through his fiery oratory, strong leadership and refusal to compromise with evil. The book reads like a political thriller as 30-40 young British politicians staked their careers on a belief that England must fight and not meekly surrender or compromise with Hitler. Olson is always a joy to read. An excellent tale of courage by people who believed their government was making terrible decisions and sought to correct the course of policy. Recommended!

Ms Olson has delivered a tour de force. It's long and detailed but is an absolutely compelling narrative of the catastrophic British Appeasement policy. It brings the reader into the inner circles of policy, personality, intrigue, and arrogance that led Britain --and western civilization to the very brink. It is a riveting read with great insight into the brutal politics of a most fraught and pivotal epoch.

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