The term "appeasement" was used by British foreign affairs officials during the Thirties to describe their policy toward the rising continental dictators. Initially the expression was not one of opprobrium. It simply defined the primary goal of the government's grand strategy toward Fascism: let's keep the peace, for as long as possible, and at whatever price. All interwar Prime Ministers shared this vision, regardless of party. England must not provoke Hitler, Mussolini, or Franco by deed or even word. Hence, little or no verbal criticism emanated from Whitehall, or even from the pro-appeasement popular press/BBC. The hope was that if the government let Hitler have his way on the continent, at least as far as was reasonably possible, then he will leave Britain and her empire alone. Eventually, so the theory went, the Dictators will have drunk their fill, and the European order would return to normal. It was only later, when this policy was proven to be an utter failure that "appeasement" became a derisive expression meaning a dishonorable and cowardly retreat from a nation's moral and legal obligations. (It should be noted that England was not the only nation which attempted to appease Hitler and Mussolini. France, too, was willing to do whatever it took to avoid a return to the trenches. Both democracies shuddered at the prospect of yet another world war, which this time could well end in a German victory.) Britons feared that if war against Germany came, London would be destroyed in the first weeks of the war. Anything was preferable to that dismal outcome.

Consequently, the British (and French) did nothing when Hitler embarked on his expansionist journey. In March 1936 Germany broke the Versailles Treaty terms by re-militarizing the Rhineland, while the Western allies looked on in trepidation, wrung their hands, and did nothing. (The great irony of this particular act of appeasement was that the Wehrmacht was under orders to retreat back to the German borders if Britain and France resisted the occupation. Hitler's generals felt they were not yet ready for war, and could not yet stand up to the combined might of the French and British armies. But of course, the allies did not know this,

and consequently they missed a golden opportunity to check the Reich's expansion.) Similarly, when Hitler seized Austria—an independent, sovereign nation—early in 1938, again England and France did nothing more than protest lamely. The most shameful act of appeasement came later that year when Hitler demanded the largely German-speaking Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia—and the British/French alliance meekly complied with der Fuhrer's decision. The allies also refused to take decisive actions against the Nazi regime when horrible anti-Semitic pogroms erupted. British government officials, as well as the London newspapers, felt that the German crackdown on Jews was lamentable, but there was simply nothing to be done for the victims. Any official protest coming from Whitehall, it was believed, would merely rile up the German leadership and lead to even more brutalities against Jews.

Why did the British government, as well as the French, adopt such a passive attitude toward the menacing evil lurking just a few hundred miles to the east? This supine policy seemed to be at odds with England's martial tradition. Had not Albion stood by "Brave Little Belgium" in August 1914? Had not the British people poured out their blood and treasure without stint during the four year holocaust of the Great War? Yes, but that was then, and this was now. The prevailing thinking in Great Britain during the Thirties was that the nation had barely survived the first round against Germany—and we had *won* in 1918. What if we *lose* this time around? Or, for that matter, what if we win again, but come out of the fight worse off than we are now? No, another bloodbath with Germany was unthinkable. However craven it might seem to history, better to throw Austria, the Czechs, the Poles, and the German Jews under the bus rather than face Hitler's wrath. Besides, British generals argued, even if we wanted to defend Europe's small nations against the Dictators, we couldn't get enough help to them in time to save them. It is lamentable, but only realistic to let the wolves devour the sheep when a Quixotic effort would surely fail, and leave Britain more vulnerable than ever.

The English leadership's fear or Communist revolution also discouraged a robust stance against aggression. "Better Hitler than Stalin," went the saying. If the Nazis could act as a bulwark against the Red Tide, then more power to them. It is unfortunate that innocents must suffer in this great power game, but that is the way history works.

Finally, and this is the most disgraceful aspect of all the follies which drove appeasement, there were many pro-Germans in the British government who felt Hitler was *right*. The cabinet and foreign service included a number of anti-Semites and Germanophiles who were utterly unconcerned about the persecution of Jews and other minorities, and who felt that the Nazis had every right to incorporate all German speaking peoples in Europe into the Third Reich. Many also felt that Czechs and Poles were not worth fighting for—after all, most Englishmen could not pronounce their funny sounding names, nor could English school children find these tiny countries on the map. If Hitler wants to take these distant and irrelevant lands, let him. They are of no concern to Britain.

Only Winston Churchill and a tiny band of his followers tried to replace appeasement with a firm, clear response to Fascist expansionism. But until late 1938, and even into 1939, such a position was anathema within British ruling circles. When the country did finally wake up in 1939, it was almost too late.