

Churchill, Winston

(Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill; 1874--1965), Prime Minister of Great Britain from May 1940 until the end of World War II.

During the 1930s, Churchill was one of the few British politicians who spoke out against then Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement of Adolf Hitler. He also called for an active buildup of the British army in the face of the threat of Nazi Germany. In addition, he supported Jewish immigration to Palestine, and opposed the White Paper of 1939, which limited Jewish immigration to Palestine and the purchase of land there by Jews.

When Britain declared war on Germany after the Nazis invaded Poland in September 1939, Churchill was invited to reprise his World War I position as the head of the British navy. After the fall of France in May 1940, the British parliament chose Churchill over Chamberlain as prime minister.

On several occasions during the war, Prime Minister Churchill announced his intentions of supporting the creation of an independent Jewish state in Palestine after Germany was defeated. A Cabinet Committee on Palestine was even formed, which recommended the partition of the mandate between Arabs and Jews. The British cabinet accepted this decision in January 1944.

However, Churchill's attitude of "after Germany is defeated" also colored his efforts to save European Jewry, of whose situation he was fully aware. He wanted to help, but felt that the best way to rescue the Jews would be to totally vanquish Nazi Germany. Helping the Jews would and could only come after this was achieved. In a letter dated February 1943, Churchill outlined the reasons why Britain would not actively take part in the rescue efforts: transportation of the refugees would present a major problem, as the escape routes would cross through military areas and thus interfere with the war effort; and it would not be possible to save Jewish refugees while deserting the other citizens of German-occupied areas. In July 1944 Churchill approved the Jewish Agency's pleas to bomb Auschwitz. This never happened, though, due to obstacles caused by the Allied military and bureaucracy. (see also Auschwitz, bombing of.)