

Weizsacker, Ernst von

(1882--1951), Secretary of State in the German Foreign Office from 1938--1943 and German ambassador to the Vatican from 1943--1945.

Weizsacker was extremely ambivalent regarding his government's actions. He hated Nazi extremism, yet he never expressed his opposition strongly or impressively. He opposed Germany's invasion of Poland, but he never spoke up or resigned his post in protest. He wanted to get rid of Adolf Hitler, but he wanted Germany to win the war and thus supported the *Fuehrer's* aggression. He was quite aware of the persecution of European Jewry, having received reports about the *Einsatzgruppen* and the Wannsee Conference, and probably regretted the annihilation, but he failed to object to the deportation of Jews to their deaths in extermination camps. Apparently, Weizsacker wanted to serve both his country and his moral code, but could not satisfy both at the same time.

After the war, Weizsacker was convicted of crimes against peace and Crimes against Humanity. He appealed the first conviction and won, but was sentenced to seven years for the second conviction. He served only 18 months in prison. Thirty years later, his son Richard was elected president of Germany. Richard consistently condemned Nazi atrocities committed during the Holocaust, and spoke of the obligation to "never forget."