

EASTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: CAMPS

A reply from the Foreign Secretary to a request by an MP to take part in a plan to evacuate Jews from Nazi territories, February 1943

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"His Majesty's Government are not prepared to take the initiative in making representations to the Nazi Government in the sense suggested by the honourable Member, which would mean that that Government would allow to depart only those whom it was in ~~its~~ interests to get rid of. Moreover, it must be remembered that there are other victims of Nazi oppression besides the Jews who are equally anxious to escape from the clutches of their oppressors.

As regards the rest of the Question, I regret that I am not at present in a position to add anything to the statement made by the Deputy Prime Minister on the 19th January and to the replies given by me on the 10th February

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What is this source?

This is a response to a question by one MP, Mr. W. Brown that the Foreign Secretary would have read out in the House of Commons.

The basic request was to negotiate with the German government for the release of Jews. Similar questions had also been asked by other MPs earlier in 1943.

What's the background to this source?

In 1942 Hitler's armies had carved out a huge empire in Eastern Europe. During their invasions German forces had taken a large number of European Jews prisoner. At first they were forced into ghettos, used in slave labour or simply shot.

There were many demands for the government to take action on the Jewish issue. Some called for an evacuation programme. Others wanted the RAF to bomb the camps (see the starter source to this investigation).

It's worth knowing that...

The decision not to bomb the camps proved highly controversial then and now. There were major difficulties. The location of the camps meant that bombers would have to fly long distances across well-defended German territory. Losses among bomber crews were very high and this mission would probably have resulted in high casualty rates. Another problem was the difficulty of locating the camps and actually hitting them. Wartime bombing was extremely difficult and bombs were often many miles off target.

How will you use this source?

1. What arguments are put forward in this source?
2. Do these arguments seem reasonable to you?
3. Would it be an unfair judgement to say that this source shows that the British government did not care about what was happening to the Jews?
4. Can you use this source to support any part of your presentation?