



Five Days in London, May 1940

By John Lukacs

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The period May 24-28 1940 altered the course of history as members of the British War Cabinet debated whether to negotiate with Hitler or to continue the war. These five days are the focus of Lukacs' book. Conveying their drama and importance he takes us into the unfolding events at 10 Downing Street while investigating the mood of the people.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In his six-volume history of World War II, Winston Churchill deemed the year 1942 as "the hinge of fate," the year in which the German and Japanese armies began to be turned back. John Lukacs suggests that the last days of May 1940 were more important still in turning the tide of war in democracy's favor, for it was in those few days that Churchill convinced his cabinet that Britain should fight on, alone, if need be, against Adolf Hitler's regime. Even as a quarter of a million British troops were being evacuated from Dunkirk, Churchill struggled to reverse the British government's policy of appeasement. In this, he faced opposition from several quarters, including prominent figures within his own Conservative Party. Writing with evident admiration for Churchill--who, he points out, was not well liked, and who had been prime minister for only two weeks when war broke out--Lukacs gives his readers a fly-on-the-wall view of the heated conferences between such well-known participants as Harold Nicholson, Lord Halifax, Neville Chamberlain, and Alexander Cadogan.

"Churchill understood something that not many people understand even now," Lukacs writes in the closing pages of his book. "The greatest threat to Western civilization was not Communism. It was National Socialism. The greatest and most dynamic power in the world was not Soviet Russia. It was the Third Reich of Germany. The greatest revolutionary of the twentieth century was not Lenin or Stalin. It was Hitler." By convincing his government that his view was correct, Churchill afforded Western civilization a slim chance at survival--no small achievement, and one well worth honoring with this fine study. --*Gregory McNamee*

From Publishers Weekly

Eminent historian Lukacs (*Thread of Years*, etc.) delivers the crown jewel to his long and distinguished career with this account of five days--May 24-28, 1940--"that could have changed the world." Lukacs posits that it was during those five days in London "that Western civilization, not to mention the Allied cause in WWII, was saved from Hitler's tyranny." A grand view, to be sure, but the consequences are not in dispute: "Had Britain stopped fighting in May 1940, Hitler would have won his war," writes Lukacs. "Thus he was never closer to victory than during those five days in May 1940." A quarter-million British troops were trapped by the Germans at Dunkirk. The British public, ill-informed about this reality, remained apathetic, and the War Cabinet was divided over what action to take. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union had yet entered the war, but Churchill resolved to fight "till Hitler is beat or we cease to be a state." Lukacs draws heavily on newspapers and public opinion research of the time to re-create the rapid series of events that turned the tide, swaying both the citizenry and the War Cabinet to rally behind Churchill. Though Churchill did not win the war in May 1940, as Lukacs puts it, he "did not lose it" then. Lukacs covered some of the same turf in *The Duel*, yet this new work focuses on these five days with a microscopic view. It is the work of a man who lives and breathes history, whose knowledge is limitless and tuned to a pitch that rings true. (Oct.)

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From Library Journal

By May 1940, just one year into World War II, Great Britain stood virtually alone against Hitler and the unstoppable German Army. Belgium and France were only days away from capitulation, and the British Expeditionary Force was being squeezed into the beachhead at Dunkirk. Things were not going at all well for Britain, and Churchill and his War Cabinet had some tough decisions to make. Lukacs, a history professor and prolific author (*The Hitler of History*) examines the dynamics of the five days, May 24-28, 1940, when Churchill and his War Cabinet actually debated whether to negotiate peace with Hitler. This

scholarly study reveals the drama, uncertainty, suspense, and courage of the men who would ultimately decide the fate of Britain. This is a marvelous example of the complex, behind-the-scenes diplomatic wrangling involved in seeking a national advantage in the deadly game of strategic move and countermove. Recommended for public and academic libraries. A William D. Bushnell, USMC (ret.), Brunswick, ME
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Users Review

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