

The Speech delivered by Schindler to his Jewish workers in Brunnlitz, May 1945, upon the proclamation of the German surrender

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The non-conditional surrender of the German armed forces has just been announced.

As hundreds of thousands of privates of a broken army flood back along country roads into their homeland, after millions of victims have died in six years of mass murder, and as Europe attempts to return to peace and order, I would like to turn to all of you, those of you who have been with me throughout these many difficult years and have feared that this day would never come, to all of you, who in a few days will return to your destroyed, plundered homesteads, searching for survivors from your families – I appeal to all of you to strictly maintain order and discipline. This will minimize panic, the consequences of which would be unpredictable.

In his proclamation today, Montgomery has declared that we must deal with the defeated in a humane manner. We must differentiate between guilt and duty. The soldier on the front, like the common man, who does his duty everywhere, should not be held responsible for the actions of a few who also called themselves Germans. The fact that millions of you, your parents, children and brothers, have been murdered, was not acceptable to thousands of Germans, and even today, there are millions of Germans who do not know the extent of these atrocities. The documents and records found in Dachau, Buchenwald and the other camps are the first pieces of evidence pointing to this monstrous destruction. Nevertheless, I ask you to behave in a humane and just manner. Leave the prosecutions and revenge to those who have been assigned to these matters. If you have accusations to levy at anyone, do so with the proper authorities, because in the new Europe, there will be judges – incorruptible judges – who will hear your pleas.

Many of you know the persecutions, harassment and obstacles that I had to overcome in order to keep my workers during these terrible years. Although it was already difficult to protect the limited rights of a Polish worker, to help him keep his business, protect him from being deported into the Reich, protect his property and preserve his modest belongings and assets – the difficulties of protecting Jewish laborers often seemed insurmountable. Those of you who have worked with me from the beginning, through all these years, know how I made innumerable personal interventions after the closure of the ghetto, how I worked with the camp administration on your behalf in order to save you from deportation and liquidation, or how I managed to reverse orders that had already been given. How many worries it caused me, how threatening the danger was, to think that I might lose my Jewish laborers, when you were kept away from the factory under various pretenses for days, in some cases even for weeks. Very few of the workers who were sent to me actually had experience as skilled laborers before the war, the kind of workers that I was looking for to do this work, and it is a miracle that we were able, thanks to your positive attitude, to overcome the greatest difficulties.

I have demanded some productive output from you, which must have seemed rather senseless to most of you, since you were shielded from seeing the overall situation, but it was always my will to demonstrate and defend humanity, to conduct my affairs humanely, the principle that guided all of my decisions. Continue to maintain your discipline and order. When, after a few days spent here, the gates of freedom are opened to you, think about what many of the people who live around this factory have done for you in terms of providing additional food and clothing.

I have tried and risked everything to acquire additional food for you in the past, and I pledge to continue putting everything on the line to protect you and provide you with your daily bread. I will

continue to work around the clock to do everything for you that is within my power. Do not go into the houses around here to forage and steal. Show yourselves to be worthy of the sacrifice of millions from your ranks, avoid every act of revenge and terrorism. The Schindler Jews were off-limits in Brännlitz. I charge all of the capos and overseers to continue to uphold order and enforce good conduct. Tell this to all of your people, because it is in the interest of their security. Thank the Daubek Mill, whose energetic support improved your nutrition, often beyond the realm of the possible. I wish to express sincere thanks to Director Drabek on your behalf, who personally did everything I requested in order to get food for you.

Do not thank me for your survival, thank your own people, who worked day and night to save you from annihilation. Thank the dauntless Stern, Pemper and those others who, in the course of their duty, above all in Krakow, looked death in the eye at every moment, thought of everyone and cared for everyone.

This solemn hour reminds us of our obligation to remain alert and maintain order; as long as we remain here together, I ask you all, among yourselves, to decide upon courses of action that are humane and just. I thank my personal staff for their restless sacrifice for my work. To the SS guards and the marines who are assembled here, who were assigned to this duty without their consent, I thank you also; as heads of families themselves, they have long realized the capricious and senseless nature of their orders. They have behaved in an extraordinarily humane and proper manner. In conclusion, I ask all of you for three minutes of silence, to remember the innumerable victims who have fallen from your ranks in these terrible times.

Oskar Schindler.