



How dark was the darkest hour?

The new film *Darkest Hour*, with an Oscar-winning performance by Gary Oldman, is the story of the dilemma Winston Churchill faced in 1940 when the threat from Nazi Germany was at its height. Most countries in Europe had been invaded and crushed by either Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia. A handful remained neutral. The United Kingdom had to take its decision alone.

It was an intensely dramatic time. Historians and eyewitnesses agree on that. Films, however, are always films, and in this case too at times the drama is overstated by the director Joe Wright. It's understandable. A film, after all, as a work of art is an interpretation of characters and events.

In general, this version stays very close to actual events and feelings. However, there is one episode in particular that almost certainly did not take place. It is when Winston Churchill takes the underground and talks to some ordinary people, who tell him that he must fight on and that they are with him every step of the way. It is a scene that is designed to be dramatic for cinematic reasons. However, it seems that, although the British did indeed back up Churchill, they did so in a much quieter way. Their support was less charged with pathos. People faced the conflict with a philosophical sense of the inevitable. But unexciting people are not the stuff of exciting films!

'The darkest hour is just before dawn', goes a line from a 1960s song. It is the time when we are mentally at our lowest. How often do we wake up at that time and start thinking of our problems? Then little ones become big and big ones unbearable. Yet, when daylight comes, we can often put these problems into some kind of perspective. So it is in *Darkest Hour*. Once the decision has been made to fight on, the sun starts to shine.