

The Nuremberg Trial

A HISTORY OF NAZI GERMANY AS REVEALED
THROUGH THE TESTIMONY AT NUREMBERG

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FOREWORD

This book is an attempt to make the material of the Nuremberg Trial available to a wider public in a comprehensible form. The verbatim reports of the court proceedings alone run to forty-two volumes; in addition, there are tens of thousands of written and printed pages of further documents, which at the time of the Trial were not yet written or were not yet available, but which today must be taken into consideration if an objective picture of events is to be obtained. Finally, the authors have attempted to re-create for the reader the atmosphere of the immediate postwar period and a picture of the general circumstances of the time, as well as to describe the developments leading up to the Trial.

On the other hand, the authors have decided—and this decision was forced on them by the wealth of material—to leave many aspects untouched; for example, the ramifications of the “indicted organizations,” such as the Nazi government, the Corps of Political Leaders, the SS, SD, Gestapo, SA, the General Staff, and the Supreme Command of the Army. However, the actions laid at the door of these organizations have made their appearance under other headings during the Trial.

Furthermore, everything relating to the problems of jurisdiction and international law has been intentionally omitted, although they touch upon some extremely interesting points made during the lengthy pleadings and arguments of the prosecution and defense. In concentrating almost completely on the factual contents of the Trial, the authors have attempted to present the history of the Trial itself in all its aspects, based on documents, depositions, records, and historical facts. They have left nothing to speculation or imagination; they have strictly avoided all romantic embellishments and additions. Thus everything in this book is historically accurate, every action and reaction of the protag-

onists is vouched for by eyewitnesses, every event provable, every quoted word was actually spoken.

To achieve this accuracy and documentary fidelity, the authors, besides studying the material of the Trial and the relevant literature, made many journeys in Germany and beyond to the far-scattered sources and archives; they have sought out those who took part in the Trial—officials, witnesses, court and prison staff—to find out details; they have played over old recordings of voices from the Trial; and they have disinterred many hitherto unpublished accounts of examinations for their work. One of the authors, Mr. Heydecker, also drew on his personal experiences and knowledge of the milieu, since he was present for the whole ten months of the Trial in the courtroom as a newspaper and radio reporter.

The Trial of the International Military Tribunal now belongs to history. And yet it affects the present and the future. A passage from the opening speech by Mr. Jackson, the Chief Prosecutor, is characteristic of the ideas that inspired the proceedings:

“Modern civilization puts limitless weapons of destruction into the hands of mankind. . . . Every recourse to war, to any kind of war, is recourse to measures which by their very nature are criminal. War is inevitably a web of killing, invasion, loss of freedom, and destruction of property. . . . Human reason demands that the law should not be considered adequate if it punishes only petty crimes of which lesser people are guilty. The law must also reach the men who seize great power and deliberately combine to make use of it to commit an evil which affects every home in the world. The last step in preventing the periodic outbreak of war, which is unavoidable with international lawlessness, is to make statesmen responsible before the law.”

GOERING: Yes, I had him in mind—if there was another hand in the game. So far as Ernst is concerned, I believe that anything was possible. I would like to know what interest Ernst could have had in it. Supposing that he said to himself, "Let us set fire to the Reichstag and say that it was the Communists." Perhaps the SA expected then to be able to play a bigger part in the government.

This explanation tallies with the statement made by another witness at Nuremberg, the former Gestapo official, Hans Bernd Gisevius. On April 25, 1946, Gisevius said in Nuremberg under oath: It was Goebbels who first thought of setting the Reichstag on fire. Goebbels discussed this with the commander of the Berlin SA brigade, Karl Ernst, and he suggested in detail how it should be done. A certain chemical known to every maker of fireworks was chosen. After spraying it, it ignites after a certain time—hours or minutes. In order to get inside the Reichstag, one had to go through the corridor leading from the palace of the Reichstag President to the Reichstag itself. Ten reliable SA men were provided and Goering was informed of all the details of the plan. Goering—and he gave assurances that he would do so—was to put the police on wrong trails in the first confusion. From the very beginning it was intended that the Communists should be accused of this crime.

JACKSON: What became of the ten SA men who carried out the Reichstag fire?

GISEVIUS: So far as we are aware, none of them are still alive. Most of them were murdered on June 30 under the pretext of the Röhm revolt. Only one, a certain Heini Gewehr, was taken over by the police as a police officer, and we tracked him down as well. He was killed in the war, while a police officer on the Eastern Front.

Thus, all those who had been in the know, and all who had unconsciously come upon the facts of the fire, had lost their lives. Fire Chief Gempp was strangled soon after his dismissal from his post. A right-wing member of the Reichstag, Ernst Oberfohren of the National Party, who was said to have written

a report on the true facts about the fire, was found shot at his desk. Erik Hanussen, a clairvoyant who said at a séance two days before the fire that he saw "a large house in flames," was murdered a short while later in the Gruenwald. Hanussen's presumable informant, the engineer Georg Bell, who had his information from the highest Nazi circles, escaped to Austria, but before leaving he gave some secret Nazi papers to a Munich newspaper editor, Fritz Michael Gerlich. But his office was likely to be searched, and so those papers had to disappear as quickly as possible. The last to see them was the former State President of Württemberg, Eugen Anton Bolz. Gerlich's secretary, Miss Breit, clearly remembered the contents of the documents. They contained: detailed facts about the Reichstag fire; an agreement between the Nazi Party and the British oil millionaire, Deterding, concerning the secret backing of the SA in return for preferential treatment of his German interests; a list of witnesses to the fact that Hitler had murdered his niece Geli Raubal; plans for discrediting the Church; plans of SA Chief of Staff Roehm for getting rid of Hitler after the Nazis' seizure of power.

The men who had seen these dangerous documents had to die. Bell was ferreted out by SA unit commander Uhl in Austria and was there dispatched with six pistol shots. Uhl himself was murdered on June 30, 1934, in Ingolstadt. On the same day, Gerlich was killed. State President Bolz was executed shortly before the end of the war in connection with the plot of July 20, 1944. Another man, Paul Waschinsky, who seems to have recruited van der Lubbe for the arson plot, was likewise killed in 1934. Captain Roehrbein, who boasted in some prison to have been one of the SA men involved in the fire, was shot. SA chief Ernst, who led the troops through the underground passage, committed the folly of writing a letter to his superior officer Edmund Heines, which began with the words: "I hereby give an account of the Reichstag fire, in which I took part." Ernst was murdered.

There was still one more accomplice, the ex-convict and SA man Rall. He was naive enough to make a statement about his complicity before a local court. The report was sent to the higher court in Leipzig, but was intercepted by the Gestapo who had