



The Great Torchbearer by Arno Breker, 1939 – Photographed by Viborg, 1997, Courtyard, Breker-Museum Norvenich, originally from the courtyard of the New Reich Chancellery, Berlin.

I have seen the great ideologies of the masses grow and spread out before my eyes. Fascism in Italy, National Socialism in Germany, Bolshevism in Russia, and above all, that arch pestilence, nationalism, which poisoned our flourishing European culture.

— Stefan Zweig



Mussolini and Hitler, Berlin, 1937 – Ladislav Luppá, public domain, Wikimedia

***Bullies are always cowards at heart and may be credited
with a pretty safe instinct in scenting their prey.***

— Anna Julia Cooper



Einsatzgruppe execution in Kovno, Lithuania, 1942. The Kovno ghetto was sealed August 15, 1941 enclosing 29,000 Jews. Before the war, Lithuania had a Jewish population of 240,000. Ninety percent perished – Unknown author, sputniknews.com,images, Wikimedia

*Those who can make you believe absurdities,
can make you commit atrocities.*

— Voltaire

Yvonne

*Let us have a dagger between our teeth, a bomb in our hands,
and an infinite scorn in our hearts.*

— **Benito Mussolini**

It was a long time before Giovanni came back, his skin glistening from his run. He laid down on the blanket, his breath coming slow and deep. I dried him off with a towel and kissed his moist skin.

“You ran a great distance.”

“Not far,” Giovanni said, his breath coming slower now, ‘just around the canal a few times, maybe three kilometers. While I was running, I was thinking that before World War One, Jews and Arabs had lived peacefully together in Palestine for hundreds of years. What could’ve been done differently to preserve the peace of all those years?’”

“It appeared that there was a chance in the beginning when Emir Feisal and Chaim Weizmann signed in 1919 the Feisal–Weizmann Agreement for Arab-Jewish Cooperation in Palestine. In that moment, Feisal accepted the provisions of the Balfour Declaration with the deepest sympathy for the Zionist movement, saying ‘We will wish the Jews a most hearty welcome home.’ In the next few years the rapprochement collapsed. The increase in Jewish immigration pushed the Arab-Jewish conflict to a boiling point. Feisal petitioned the British to limit Jewish immigration and land purchases in Palestine. Lawrence’s former superior officer, General Clayton said it was essential that the Zionists understood that the total fulfillment of their aspirations cannot be attained immediately. ‘If they push too hard,’ he said, ‘it will only produce a counter reaction among the Arabs.’ Lord Balfour stated that the Allies were committed to Zionism and had no intention of honoring their promises to the Arabs. The strife in the Middle East was increased by Britain and France’s colonial policy. The different promises given by Britain at different moments to Arabs and Jews laid the foundation for years of warfare. British policy was unsuccessful in reconciling the zealots on either side.”

“What,” Giovanni asked “was the United States government’s view of the Jewish settlement of Palestine?”

“After World War Two,” I replied, “Truman and Secretary of State, George Marshall had serious doubts about the resettlement of Palestine. A Jeffersonian Democrat who believed in separation of church and state, Truman said people’s religious beliefs were their own affair. Religion had caused more wars than money. The president feared that a theocratic state of Israel imposed upon Arabs who had been in Palestine for over one thousand years would end in endless conflict. Truman favored the recommendation of the Anglo-American Committee which would allow the 100,000 survivors of the Shoah to immigrate to Palestine. But the president wasn’t in favor of making Palestine a Jewish state. Rather, Truman believed there should be a federated state of Palestine, neither Arab nor Jewish. Palestine should be a government of the people, irrespective of race, creed, or color.”



Immigration to Israel, 1947 – The Palmach Photo Gallery, public domain, Wikimedia

“What did Truman end up doing?”

“In dire need of funds to win an uphill battle for election, Truman ignored Secretary of State George Marshall’s warning of perpetual war and agreed to the plan which gave over 50 percent of the land to Jews who made up less than a third of the population. Under the 1948 resolution of the United Nation’s Assembly, David Ben-Gurion, founding father of Israel, declared the birth of a new nation, saying, ‘This is our native land: it is not as birds of passage that we return to it,’ The Zionists had at last realized Herzl’s dream.

“But the creation of Israel in Palestine confirmed the Arab’s belief that European colonialism was once again confiscating Arab land. The day after the declaration of the state of Israel, George Marshall’s prophecy of war in Palestine came true. Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, volunteers from the Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Pakistan, and Sudan declared war on Israel.”



Israel defense force Palmach M4 Sherman tank leading a convoy – Author, IDF , public domain Wikimedia



Syrian Renault R35 tank put out of action at kibbutz Dgania – Source, Hebrew Wikipedia, uploaded by שמתשמ י.ש, Wikimedia

“And the Arabs failed to win the war.

“The Palestinians were the big losers. Israel gained control of nearly sixty percent of the territory which had been allocated for the future Palestinian state. The Israelis call it ‘The War of Liberation.’ The Arabs call it *an-Nakba*, ‘The Catastrophe.’ No Arab-Palestinian state was created. Nearly three quarters of a million Palestinian Arabs were expelled from the enlarged Israel and the Arabs remain refugees today in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. It was a true catastrophe for the Palestinians.”



Arabs surrender to Israeli army in Ramla, 1948 – Unknown author, State of Israel Press Office, public domain, Wikimedia



Israel Defense Forces near Bayt Nattif, near Hebron, after it was captured, October 1948 – Author, Israeli GPO photographer, National Photo Collection of Israel, public domain, Wikimedia



Nakba, Palestinian Jaramana Refugee Camp, 1948, Damascus, Syria – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Being a new nation, how could Israel accomplish such a victory?”

“After years of military service with the British Army, many had gained a lot of fighting experience. The father of Zionist military power was Vladimir Jabotinsky, a Russian Jew born in Odessa, Ukraine. After Herzl died, Jabotinsky became the leader of the right-wing Zionists and established a Jewish self-defense Organization to resist the persecution of Russian Jews. A distinguished writer fluent in several languages and a brilliant orator, Jabotinsky began learning Hebrew and took on a nom de guerre, Ze’ev, ‘wolf,’ in Hebrew. Jabotinsky’s motto was, ‘Jews, learn to shoot!’ A believer in Jewish racial purity, he said Zionism was a colonizing adventure. It would stand or fall by the power of its armed forces.’ While it’s important to learn Hebrew, he said, ‘it’s more important to be able to shoot straight. Judea had fallen in blood and fire and in blood and fire, would rise again.’

“During World War One, Jabotinsky, with the help of Zionist activist, Joseph Trumpeldor, created the Zion Mule Corps, a force of Russian Jews exiled from the Ottoman Empire which fought against the Turks in the Battle of Gallipoli and with General Allenby in Palestine. By convincing the British during World War One to form the Jewish Legion to fight the Ottomans in Palestine, Jabotinsky established a military tradition which eventually resulted in the Israel Defense Force, one of the most proficient armies in the world. Jabotinsky believed that Arabs would never stand by peacefully and allow Jews to become a majority in Palestine. It was

necessary to build an ‘iron wall of military force to protect the Jewish settlers as they become the majority. The British have failed to protect the Jews. Therefore, we will protect ourselves.’”



Ze'ev Jabotinsky, a Russian Jew from Odessa, Ukraine, was the father of Zionist military power – Public Domain, Wikimedia



Ze'ev Jabotinsky, on the left, editorial staff of *Razsvet* in Saint Petersburg, 1912 – Central Zionist Archives, Wikimedia

“Then it was Jabotinsky who established the iron discipline that made Israel’s army one of the best trained in the world.”

“Jabotinsky, who’d lost his arm fighting for the Russians in the Russo-Japanese War, left the mainstream Zionist Party after World War I and formed his own political party. He denounced Churchill’s decision to remove Transjordan from the Jewish National Home and called for the establishment by force of arms of a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan River. With the rise of Nazism in Germany and anti-Semitism in Russia, Poland, and Hungary, 200,000 Jewish immigrants arrived during the 1930s, doubling the size of the Jewish population in the Mandate. Due to high taxes under the Ottomans, the Arab farmers had become increasingly impoverished, forcing many to sell their land to the new arrivals. After the influx of new settlers and the Jewish National Fund’s purchases of agricultural land in Upper Galilee, a great number of the Palestinian peasant farmers, the *fellahin*, were pushed off the land into shanty towns in Jaffa and Haifa.”

“How did the Arabs react to the arrival of thousands of European settlers?”



Market at Jaffa, painting by Gustav Bauernfeind, 1877 – Public Domain, Wikimedia

“With great anger. Arab hostility was driven by the arrival of Jewish immigrants in the 1920s. The violent uprising of 1929 was sparked by the Arab conflict with the Jews over Jerusalem’s Western Wall. Because the remains of the wall once enclosed the Second Temple, the Western Wall is the holiest of Jewish sites and the Jews had established the right to pray at the Wailing Wall. But the wall in Temple Mount, known to the Arabs as *al-Haram al-Sherif*, ‘Noble Sanctuary of Jerusalem,’ was controlled by Muslims who considered the wall to be part of al-Aqsa Mosque where Muhammad had ascended to heaven, the third holiest site in Islam after Mecca and Medina. After the Umayyad Caliphs conquered Jerusalem, the Muslims constructed on the site of the Holy Jewish Temple, the al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock, the oldest surviving Islamic shrine after the Ka’aba.”



Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Old City of Jerusalem – Andrew Shiva, Shutterstock 168388010

“With that kind of sacred history, it’s no wonder Palestinians and Israeli have never been at peace.”

“The uprising was sparked when the Arabs who controlled the Temple Mount, ruled that the Jews could no longer bring benches to the wall for their aged worshippers. Even before the uprising, Jewish worshippers had been stoned and a muezzin called Muslims to prayer at the very time Jews were conducting their prayers at the Wall.



Al-Aqsa Mosque – Andrew Shiva, Wikipedia. Built in the 7th century on the site of the first and second Jewish Temples, the Al-Aqsa Mosque is where the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have ascended to heaven, the third holiest site in Islam after Mecca and Medina. In 2000, Israeli leader Ariel Sharon entered the holy site with 1,000 Israeli police during the time that Prime Minister Ehud Barak was negotiating under U.S. auspices with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to determine how the two rivals could share Jerusalem. Fearing an Israeli occupation of the holy Islamic site, the dissenting Palestinians unleashed the Second Intifada that resulted in more than 3,000 Palestinian and 1,000 Israeli deaths.

“The militant Haganah held a meeting with thousands of Jews to protest the British decision that the Wall was Muslim property. The conflict escalated when a Zionist leader gave a speech demanding a Jewish state and the Mufti of Jerusalem responded by sending pamphlets to all the Arab countries proclaiming that the Jews were planning to take over al-Aqsa Mosque. Hundreds of Jewish nationalists under the Zionist flag marched to the Wall proclaiming ‘The Wall is ours.’ Inflamed by the rumors that Jews were attacking Arabs and cursing Muhammad, and after hearing a sheik’s inflammatory proclamation that Jews were going to attack al-Aqsa Mosque, the Arabs poured into the streets calling for rebellion, setting upon unsuspecting Jews, ransacking houses and desecrating a synagogue while a group of Jews responded by attacking a Jerusalem mosque. When the rumors of the uprising hit Hebron, the enraged Arabs began slaughtering Jews with axes, knives, and swords, shouting, ‘Death to the Jewish dogs!’ Synagogues and a Jewish hospital were devastated and Torah scrolls stolen. Hundreds of atrocities were committed.”

“Palestine was a British Mandate. In God’s name, why couldn’t the police stop the killing?”



Dome of the Rock – Virtutepetens, Wikimedia

“There was only one police officer in all of Hebron. Although he tried to save people, there was no way one man could hold back a flood of Arabs attacking Jewish homes. The fear of Jewish domination as implied in the British Mandate had forged Palestinian nationalism. Unaware of the depth of anger that had been seething in the Palestinian Arabs, the British authorities and the Zionist Organization were taken by surprise. In trying to balance the aspirations of the Jews and the commitment to protecting Arab rights, the British administration was paralyzed. The British had less than 100 soldiers and a few armored cars. The Palestine Police had over a thousand men but most were Arabs. The British soldiers hesitated to shoot into the masses of rioting Arabs, fearing that the mob would overwhelm them. The repressed rage which had been building for so many years erupted like a volcano. A pharmacist who all of his life had been friends of Jews and Arabs, was murdered, his wife’s hands cut off.



Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, 1935 – Wikimedia

“Some Jews fought back, killing an Imam. The Jews who survived were only those who were hidden in cellars by a score of Arab families, which saved 400 from the massacre. It is believed that the charismatic Islamic preacher Izz ad-Din al-Qassam’s terrorists took part in the killing. Over one hundred Jews and Arabs died in Jerusalem, sixty Jews died in Hebron, the ones who survived evacuated to Jerusalem. It was the end of the Jews in Hebron where they had lived from ancient times.”

“Who was this charismatic Islamic preacher?”

“Al-Qassam had fought against Italian colonialism in Libya and French colonialism in Syria. After he was defeated by the French in Syria, al-Qassam fled to Palestine where he organized agricultural collectives delivering sermons to poor laborers, following them into the brothels and hashish dens urging them with passionate rhetoric to drive the British and Jews into the sea. Using the Qur’an, he taught his followers how to read and write, encouraged them to carry the Qur’an with them at all times and grow beards as a symbol of their devotion to *jihad*. Al-Qassam message — the Arabs must rise up in an armed insurrection against the Jewish settlers. The Supreme Muslim Council originally didn’t support al-Qassam’s organization, The Black Hand. They favored a diplomatic solution which would preserve their power. The Palestinian rebels called for a general strike, refusing to pay taxes unless the British halted Jewish immigration and stopped the transfer of Arab land to the settlers. In a surge of Arab nationalism, the Palestinians set aside a day to celebrate the anniversary of Saladin, the Sultan of Egypt and Syria and founder of the Ayyubid dynasty who crushed the Crusader Knights in the Battle of the Horns of Hattin and conquered Jerusalem for Islam.”

“During the revolt of 1936, Palestinian insurgents attacked British forces, sabotaged railways, blew up the petroleum pipeline to Haifa, destroyed crops, and murdered Jewish settlers. Jabotinsky’s Irgun commandos began placing bombs in crowded Arab markets, killing and maiming and sowing terror among the Arabs. The British army and Palestine Police brutally suppressed the revolt, killing 5,000 *fellahin* fighters, forcing insurgents into concentration camps, exiling, and hanging the leaders.”

“The Irgun had developed commando battalions ten years before the War of Liberation?”

THE PALESTINE POLICE FORCE.

WANTED!

REWARDS WILL BE PAID BY THE PALESTINE GOVERNMENT TO ANY PERSON PROVIDING INFORMATION WHICH LEADS TO THE ARREST OF ANY OF THE PERSONS WHOSE NAMES AND PHOTOGRAPHS ARE SHOWN HERELUNDER

 <p>MENACHEM BEGIN Age: 36 years Height: 175 cms Build: Thin Complexion: Sallow Hair: Dark Eyes: Brown Nose: Long, hooked Facial features: Wears spectacles See looked, bad teeth Nationality: Polish Occupation: Clerk</p>	 <p>ARIEH BEN ELIEZER Age: 36 years Height: 175 cms Build: Stout Complexion: Sallow Hair: Dark, bald in front Eyes: Brown Nose: Normal Nationality: Palestinian, formerly Polish Occupation: Journalist</p>	 <p>LEIF BOYKO Age: 37 years Height: 170 cms Build: Medium Complexion: Fresh Hair: Brown wavy Eyes: Blue Nose: Small Facial features: Ears deformed Nationality: Undefined, probably Polish Occupation: Bookkeeper</p>	 <p>REUBEN FRANCO Age: 36 years Height: 170 cms Build: Stout Complexion: Sallow Hair: Brown, thin in front Eyes: Blue Nose: Small, flat Facial features: Short sighted, wears spectacles Nationality: Palestinian formerly Bulgarian Occupation: Journalist</p>	 <p>NASSE KARANE Age: 40 years Height: 165 cms Build: Stout Complexion: Sallow Hair: Grey, bald in patches Eyes: Grey Nose: Normal Facial features: Short sighted, wears spectacles, round chin Nationality: Polish Occupation: Advocate</p>
 <p>ITZHAK RUBINSTEIN Age: 30 years Height: 165 cms Build: Slender Complexion: Sallow Hair: Grey Eyes: Brown Nose: Large, wavy Facial features: Large mouth, thin upper teeth Nationality: Polish</p>	 <p>HAIM SACHS Age: 30 years Height: 165 cms Build: Medium Complexion: Sallow Hair: Brown Eyes: Brown Nose: Small Facial features: Thick lips, large ears Nationality: Undefined, probably Polish</p>	 <p>EMANUEL STRASBERG Age: 30 years Height: 165 cms Build: Medium Complexion: Fresh Hair: Fair Eyes: Blue Nose: Large, broad at base Facial features: Three gold teeth Nationality: Polish</p>	 <p>YACOV VINIARSKY Age: 36 years Height: 170 cms Build: Slender, fat Complexion: Fresh Hair: Dark Eyes: Green Nose: Normal Nationality: Polish Occupation: Bookkeeping contractor</p>	 <p>HAREL WARHAFTIG Age: 36 years Height: 165 cms Build: Thin Complexion: Sallow Hair: Brown Eyes: Brown Nose: Long Facial features: One eye right eye Nationality: Polish Occupation: Advocate</p>

Palestine Police Force wanted poster for Irgun and Lehi terrorists, Menachem Begin at top left – Jabotinsky.org, public domain, Wikimedia



The King David Hotel after the bombing by Irgun commandos, 22 July 1946 – Unknown author, *The Palestine Post*, public domain, Wikimedia. After the British Army raided the Jewish Agency and confiscated documents implicating the Haganah in the terrorist attacks against Britain, Irgun planned a bombing of the southern wing of the hotel to destroy the incriminating documents that were stored in the British military headquarters. Disguised as workmen and hotel waiters, the Irgun commandos planted a bomb in the basement of the hotel, killing 91 and wounding 46 of many nationalities.

“Quite right. Menachem Begin was one of the creators of that military tradition. Born in Brest-Litovsk in the Russian Empire, Begin studied law at the University of Warsaw where he learned the rhetorical skills which proved valuable in his rise to power. A follower of Vladimir Jabotinsky, Begin became a leader of the Betar paramilitary, but when the Nazis invaded Poland, he was forced to flee to Lithuania where he was arrested by the Soviet NKVD for being an agent of British imperialism. When released from the Russian gulag camp in the Arctic Circle, Begin joined the Polish Anders’s Army which was sent to fight in Palestine, but in the same year, joined the militant Irgun fighters that were revolting against the British Mandate. Believing that the Zionist leadership was guilty of compromising with British colonialism, Begin adopted an eye for an eye policy — for every Irgun fighter executed, a British soldier would be kidnapped and executed. Ignoring Ben-Gurion’s call to avoid mass killings, Begin’s commandos blew up the King David Hotel which housed the British administration, killing 90 people. After two settlements were destroyed by Arabs, Irgun commandos attacked the town of Deir Yassin in retaliation and massacred 250 men, women and children. The terror was so great that tens of thousands of Palestinians fled from Deir Yassin.”



Palestinian village of Deir Yassin near Jerusalem, 1942 – Survey of Palestine, public domain, Wikimedia

“On the opposing side, the al-Qassam’s terrorists were the mirror image of Menachem Begin’s Irgun commandos. Although all al-Qassam’s battles failed, Palestinians still treasure his name.”

“What happened to al-Qassam?”

“Chased by the British, al-Qassam fled to the hills of Nablus, moving from Palestinian village to village where he was shielded by the peasants. In the end, he was trapped with his men in a cave and surrounded by British forces. Al-Qassam died a martyr in the firefight.

“Loved by the poor for his simple manners and good humor, thousands mourned him at his funeral. Today, Arab insurgents call themselves *Qassamiyun*, followers of al-Qassam. His grave is a place of pilgrimage. In the Arab’s remembrance of Al-Qassam’s death, there is one thing that Catholics and Muslims hold in common.”

“What’s that?”

“A reverence for martyrdom.”

“I remember” Giovanni said, “the very first martyr of Christianity, Saint Stephen, a deacon in the church at Jerusalem. Accused of blasphemy, Stephen gave a speech denouncing the Jewish authorities who were judging him. After chastising them for their ancestors’ persecution of the prophets, the enraged crowd drug Stephen outside the city walls and stoned him to death. A Pharisee who witnessed the stoning of Saint Stephen, later became the apostle Paul. We have many martyrs.”



Stoning of St Stephen by Jacopo & Domenico Tintoretto, altarpiece of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, Italy – Public domain, Wikimedia

“Ben-Gurion,” I said “opposed the tactics of Begin’s commandos and denounced Irgun as an enemy of the Jewish People. When Begin came out of the underground to form the Herut ‘Freedom’ party and came to the U.S. to raise money, Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt, and a number of rabbis published a letter naming Begin’s Herut party as a chauvinist terrorist organization responsible for a reign of terror in Palestine.



Menachem Begin, Tel Aviv, 1948 – National Photo Collection of Israel, Wikimedia

“During my research on the American screenwriter Ben Hecht, I discovered that he was an avid supporter of Begin’s Irgun insurgency.

“Who’s Ben Hecht?”

“The most successful screenwriter in the history of Hollywood. He was credited solely or in collaboration for the stories and screenplays of over seventy films, including director William Wyler’s *Wuthering Heights* and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Spellbound* and *Notorious*. For writing the story of Josef von Sternberg’s 1927 gangster movie *Underworld*, Hechte was awarded an Academy Award for the Best Original Screenplay in the first Academy Awards at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel in 1929. You could say Hecht invented the Hollywood gangster films that became the rage during the Great Depression, writing *Scarface* for director Howard Hawks, with Paul Muni playing a gangster modeled on the infamous Chicago hoodlum Al Capone, the perpetrator of the Saint Valentine’s Day Massacre.

“Inspired by a leader in the Zionist movement, Hecht began writing about the suffering of Jews in Germany and was one of the chief organizers of *We Will Never Die*, a pageant to awaken Americans to Hitler’s mass murder of Jews. Dedicated to the millions of Jewish dead, the show was staged by the Broadway director Moss Hart and produced by lyricist Billy Rose and film director Ernst Lubitsch, with music composed by Kurt Weill. After it played before 40,000 at Madison Square Garden, it traveled to Boston, Washington, Philadelphia, Chicago, and the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles. Following the war, Hecht became a dedicated Zionist supporting Begin’s terrorists in Palestine, propagandizing and raising money for Irgun. Hecht brazenly wrote an open letter to the Irgun insurgents praising their violence — robbing British banks and blowing up British trains, his boldness resulting in Hecht being blacklisted in Britain.

“After the war, Hecht wrote *A Flag is Born*, a play that compared Irgun’s terrorism against the British in Palestine to the American Revolution against the British crown. Starring Marlon Brando and Paul Muni, *A Flag is Born* raised the money to buy a ship, renamed the SS *Hecht* that carried hundreds of Holocaust survivors to Palestine in 1947.

“I wonder if Hecht truly understood how savage the terrorism was in Palestine.”

“It was a violent time. The passions of Jews and Palestinians allowed for no mercy. There was a violent schism between Jews, the early days of Zionism often ending in violent brawls between right and left.



American League For A Free Palestine presents Ben Hecht’s *A Flag is Born* at the Alvin Theater, New York City, September 5, 1946 – Source, wymaninstitute.org, public domain, Wikimedia.



SS Ben Hecht – Unknown author, Source Clandestine Immigration and Naval Museum, Haifa, Israel, Wikimedia

“Begin’s Revisionist Zionism violently opposed Ben-Gurion’s negotiations for reparations from the German government, saying that the agreement would endorse a pardon of Nazi crimes against Jews. Begin’s Irgun agents sent a parcel bomb to assassinate Konrad Adenauer, the West German Chancellor that killed the bomb squad officers who were attempting to defuse the bomb.”

“Begin was a hard man.”

“And a politically shrewd one. Most of the Kurdish Jews who’d lived in Assyria and Babylonia for over a thousand years emigrated from Kurdistan to Israel in the mass Aliyah of the early 1950’s. Begin’s Herut party successfully appealed to the Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews who’d emigrated from Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa due to the Mizrahim resentment towards the Ashkenazi establishment that had controlled Israel since the founding of Israel in 1948. Begin believed in capitalism while Ben-Gurion believed in socialism. Revisionist Zionists attacked Ben-Gurion with stink bombs and bricks while Jabotinsky was stoned by a Labor Zionist mob. Jabotinsky called the Zionist Left ‘lackeys of Moscow.’ Ben-Gurion called Jabotinsky, ‘Vladimir Hitler.’”



A Yemenite family walking through the desert to a reception camp in Aden – National Photo Collection of Israel, public domain, Wikimedia

“I never realized,” Giovanni said, “the early Zionists were at each other’s throats.”

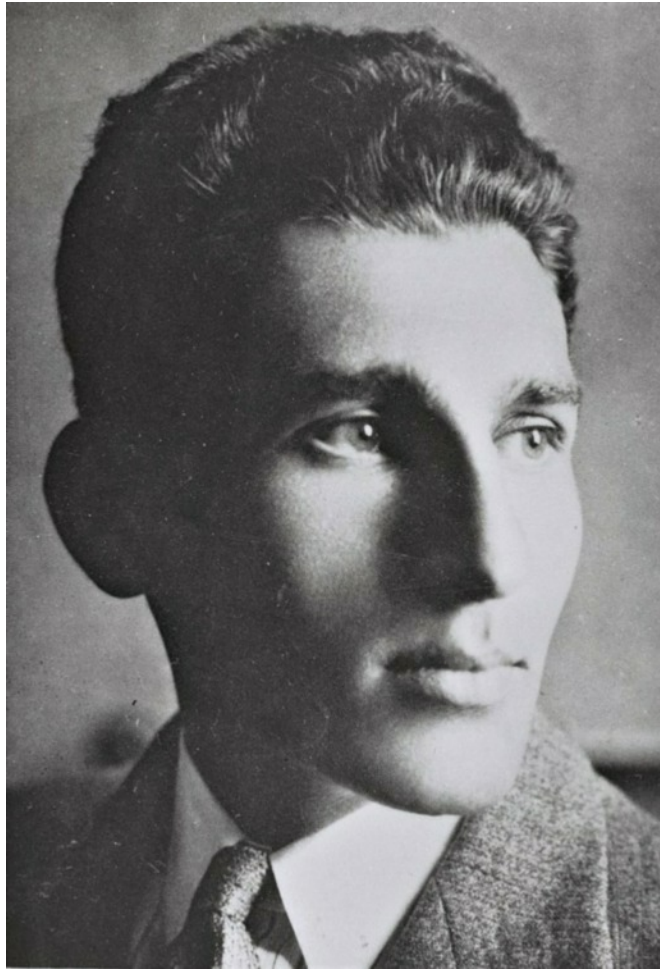
“The Stern Gang was even more radical than the Irgun commandos.”

“What was the Stern Gang?”

“Avraham Stern was the main man. In a reaction to Irgun’s suspension of attacks on the British during the war, Stern, formed Lehi, an acronym for *‘Lohamei Herut Yisrael,’* an underground terrorist group. A brilliant Polish intellectual who studied Greek and Latin at the Hebrew University, Stern adopted the *nomme de guerre*, ‘Yair,’ in tribute to Elazar Ben-Yair, the commander of the zealots of Masada. Stern declared, ‘Neither Jewish ethics nor Jewish tradition can disqualify terrorism as a means of combat.’ He said that it wasn’t the Arabs, but the British who were the real enemy of Israel. Convinced that Nazi Germany would win the war, which in 1940 looked certain, Stern believed that an alliance with Germany and Italy would help establish *Eretz Yisrael*, ‘The Land of Israel,’ which included Judea and Samaria, all of Greater Israel.”

“Incredible!” Giovanni said. Stern was considering an alliance with Germany and Italy? How bizarre.”

“While Stern was studying in Florence, he’d been impressed by Mussolini’s brand of fascism. Stern believed that a totalitarian state ruled from above was the efficient way of running a government. Before the Nazis had begun the gas chamber mass exterminations, Stern proposed to The Third Reich that Germany should help establish a totalitarian Jewish state in Palestine with conditions of unlimited immigration of Jews.



**Avraham Stern, alias Yair, founder of the Lehi terrorist group
– Source, Amirki, Government Press Office, Wikimedia**

“If Germany wanted to get rid of the Jews, here was a solution — create a totalitarian Jewish state in Palestine. At that time, Adolf Eichmann was allowing Jewish emigration from Nazi controlled areas, but Germany ignored Stern’s proposal. They had other plans.”

“I thought all Jews favored a democratic state.”

“Avraham Stern was an exception. Vladimir Jabotinsky opposed Stern’s Nazi collaboration. Jabotinsky wanted Britain to defeat the Nazis, even though he planned to eventually push Britain out of Palestine. After the British tracked Stern down after a Lehi bank robbery and killed him, his fellow terrorist, Yitzhak Shamir escaped from a British detention camp and reorganized the Stern Gang into a militia which became the curse of the British, blowing up government offices and killing military and police forces. Avraham Stern left a legacy which survives to this day. A gifted poet, he composed the song *Unknown Soldiers* which became the anthem of the Irgun and Lehi fighters. Stern had a fascination with death. He eroticized it: ‘And with my death I will bury my head in your lap. And you will live forever in my blood.’”

“A poet as terrorist,” Giovanni said. “I can imagine a young poet being drawn to terrorism. I remember Céline quoting Rimbaud, ‘The dawns are heartbreaking. Every moon is atrocious and every sun bitter.’ Poetic souls with dark visions are seduced by blood and martyrdom.”

“After Stern’s execution by the British,” I said, “Yitzhak Shamir transformed Lehi into the most effective terrorist force in Israel. Due to his admiration for Michael Collins, who during the Irish Civil war had created Sinn Fein assassination squads to kill British agents, Shamir took on the nickname of ‘Michael.’”



Palestine Police Force wanted poster for the capture of Stern Gang terrorists. Yitzhak Shamir is in the center – Author, עוֹדֵי וְנִיא, Palestineremembered.com, public domain, Wikimedia

“Séan O’Brien, an oboist who I used to jam with back in the Village, loved to talk about Michael Collins. After sessions at the Village Vanguard, Séan would polish off a pint of Irish whisky and tell stories about Michael Collins setting up squads to root out and kill the British spies who were infiltrating the Irish Republican Army. Séan said Collins, a wrestling champion when he was a kid, was a man who was totally assured of himself. The warmth of Collins’ Catholic family and the qualities of his self-denying mother, gave him the ability to appeal to people in the street. The Irishman had the same qualities I admire in Garibaldi — charisma, decency, and a sense of justice. Like Garibaldi, Collins possessed a deep love for the people and his love inspired people to join the IRA to fight for a home ruled Ireland. After the British killed Michael in an ambush, one half million people came to his funeral in Dublin’s Cathedral. I can see why Shamir admired Collins.”



Michael Collins addresses the people in Cork, Ireland on St. Patrick's Day, 1922 – Author, Underwood & Underwood, public domain, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia.



Michael Collins, leader of the Irish War of Independence – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Like Michael Collins, Shamir’s Lehi set up squads to assassinate the Brits. Shamir ruled there’d be no negotiations with the Arabs over territory. No land was to be ceded to the Arabs. Jews would settle in all of Palestine. After Lord Moyne, leader of the House of Lords, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and Resident Minister in Cairo, declared that Arabs shouldn’t be subjugated by force to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, Shamir was certain that Britain would continue to restrict Jewish emigration. Lord Moyne wanted to establish an Arab federation not a Jewish State. ‘Moyne was pro-Arab. Moyne was an anti-Semite. Moyne was against Aliyah. Moyne must be killed.’”



Walter Edward Guinness, Lord Moyne, 1929 – Public domain, UK National Portrait Gallery, Wikimedia

“What did Shamir think killing Lord Moyne would accomplish?”

“It set off a fire storm in Britain. Churchill was close to Lord Moyne. They’d developed a close friendship while working on colonial governance. Churchill was depressed and alienated by the death of his friend. He called upon the Jews, ‘every man, woman and child,’ to eliminate the terrorists who’d killed his friend. Churchill’s outrage over Moyne’s death was so great that the Haganah defense force began arresting Irgun and Lehi terrorists. Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann said that the assassination of Moyne affected him even more deeply than the loss of his son in the war. He feared that Moyne’s death could result in the Jews losing their chance for a national homeland. Many historians including diplomats like Abba Eban, believe that the Lehi assassination squads set back the Palestinian partition plan and prevented early statehood for Israel.”

“It was a case,” Giovanni said, “where terrorism resulted in alienating the very powers that had the power to help the Zionist cause.”

“World opinion was outraged when Yitzhak Shamir sent four Lehi assassins to murder Count Folke Bernadotte, the UN General Assembly mediator who’d arranged a 30-day ceasefire in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. A Swedish diplomat fluent in six languages, Bernadotte was renowned for his work as head of the Swedish Red Cross during World War Two when he negotiated with Heinrich Himmler to save thousands of Jews from concentration camps. Between 1943 and 1944, he arranged the release of 30,000 prisoners from German concentration camps, including Danish Jews from the Theresienstadt camp.



Folke Bernadotte negotiated a rescue operation for Swedes, Norwegians, Danes and other Europeans being held in German concentration camps, transporting them to Swedish hospitals on Danish Red Cross buses painted all in white except for the Red Cross emblem so that they would not be mistaken for military targets – Swedish Red Cross, public domain, Wikimedia

“After arranging the first cease fire in the 1948 War, Bernadotte concluded that the UN partition plan was unworkable and proposed a plan to unite the Israelis and Palestinians.”

“Count Bernadotte was certainly a radical idealist to think he could accomplish peace between the Jews and the Arabs.”

“Indeed he was,” I said, “and it cost him his life. Instead of establishing separate states, Bernadotte proposed that the Arabs and Jews form a union of a single state with Israel receiving Western Galilee and permission for unlimited Jewish immigration for two years. A quarter of a million Arab refugees were to be allowed to return to their homes and compensated for their losses. Bernadette said that the Palestinian refugees had fled because of the terrorism of the armed conflict between Arabs and Jews. Bernadette firmly believed that it would be an offence against justice if the Arabs were denied the right to return to their homes while at the same time Jews were allowed to immigrate to Palestine, in effect replacing the Arabs who had been rooted in Palestine for centuries. Bernadotte’s plan would cede control of Jerusalem and the Negev to the Arabs of Transjordan and guarantee protection of the Holy places, religious sites, and minority rights. But Bernadotte’s plan for Israel was an absolute threat to Lehi’s goal of Israeli independence on both sides of the River Jordan. Yitzhak Shamir’s Lehi sent four assassins to block Bernadotte’s convoy with an Israeli army jeep, the terrorists spraying his car with gun fire. The assassins killed the UN diplomat with six bullets — a man who had saved thousands of Jews from the Nazi Holocaust.”

“Then both sides,” Giovanni said, “were terrorists.”

“What Shamir didn’t know at the time of the assassination was that Bernadotte had changed his mind about Jerusalem. Instead of turning Jerusalem over to Jordan, it would be designated an ‘international city.’ However, considering the extreme views of Shamir, quite likely it wouldn’t have made a difference.



Count Folke Bernadotte talking to Australian prisoners of war in Sweden during a prisoners exchange, 1943 – Unknown author, redcross.int, Wikimedia

“Lehi celebrated the death of Bernadotte while the world mourned him. By making him a martyr, the assassination created sympathy for the Count’s plan. However, due to Israel’s great military power, the plan for a single state was as dead as Bernadotte. All of his life, Shamir defended his decision to kill the Swedish diplomat. Yitzhak Shamir was never tried for the crime and was later elected Prime Minister.”

“It sounds like,” Giovanni said, “that the Israelis were at war with themselves.”

“Ever since the third Aliya, it’s been that way. While both sides were dedicated to the creation of Israel, they had bitter differences on how to accomplish it. Convinced that a peaceful solution with the Arabs wasn’t going to happen, Ben-Gurion decided to begin acquiring arms, 65mm artillery, mortars, and tanks from France, thousands of machine guns, millions of rounds of ammunition, fighter planes from Czechoslovakia, transport planes and bombers from the U.S. Factories were built underground in the kibbutzs to make bullets, grenades, and Sten guns. Heavy armaments were acquired during the British withdrawal, including some Cromwell tanks.”



Private David Ben-Gurion, 1918, a volunteer in the Jewish Legion, World War One – Source, Martin Gilbert, *The Jews in the Twentieth Century*, public domain, Wikimedia

“Were there any Zionist leaders,” Giovanni asked, “who pursued peaceful coexistence with the Arabs?”

“Moshe Smilansky, a Haganah commander and member of the Jewish Legion during World War One, believed in peaceful coexistence. A member of the Five Zionists who met with Arab leaders, Smilansky opposed the violent Irgun campaign against the British and advocated the creation of an Arab-Jewish state with a proportionally elected council.”

“That sounds like the right way to go.”



Moshe Smilansky, Haganah commander, horticulturist, author – photograph by Hebrew Lexicon, fair use, he.wikipedia

“It was a good idea, but it didn’t have a ghost of a chance. Smilansky, who’d been born of farmers near Kiev, Ukraine, had a big success as an innovator in agriculture, reclaiming desert land in the Negev and developing vineyards and orchards of citrus and almonds. A brilliant writer of fiction and non-fiction, Smilansky’s articles published in Haaretz were philosophically similar to those of Chaim Weizmann who was the primary influence behind the Balfour Declaration.”

“You’ve talked about the Balfour Declaration a number of times. Did it actually say that the Palestinians were going to be deprived of their homeland?”

“No, it did not. The declaration was a public letter from the British Foreign Minister to the Jewish leader Baron Rothschild, declaring that the British government favored the establishment in Palestine of a ‘National Home for the Jewish people.’ However, Balfour also said that it was clear that nothing shall be done to limit the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish peoples of Palestine. Chaim Weizmann, who founded the World Zionist organization, was very influential in getting Lord Balfour to act. Although born in the Russian Empire, Weizmann’s biochemist background brought him to England where he taught biochemistry at the University of Manchester. Weizmann took out 100 patents and became famous for inventing a butanol-ethanol fermentation process to make acetone.”



Chaim Weizmann, 1915, bochemist, Zionist leader, First President of Israel – Unknown author, British Passport photo, University of Manchester, public domain, Wikimedia

“Acetone is important,” Giovanni said, “because it’s necessary for the manufacture of cordite, a replacement for gunpowder. Because cordite burns slowly, it produces gases powerful enough to propel a bullet or artillery shell while at the same time not over heating which could destroy a gun barrel. In World War One, cordite was absolutely necessary for naval guns and artillery. Denis said that the Little Boy bomb that destroyed Hiroshima and the Fat Man bomb that wiped out Nagasaki were detonated by cordite. With acetone being absolutely necessary to make cordite, I can see why Weizmann became so influential.”

“Cordite was a big hazard for women,” I said. “With the men at the front, women had to pack the artillery shells at the risk of getting blown up. The Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill and Minister of Munitions, David Lloyd George, were so delighted with Weizmann’s discovery they put him in charge of the Admiralty’s laboratories and began listening to his ideas regarding Zionism. Since some members of the British Cabinet opposed Zionism, Lord Balfour used the term ‘national home’ instead of ‘state,’ when referring to Palestine. However, Lord Curzon, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs who followed Balfour, declared that Palestine was one of the areas which Great Britain had promised should be Arab and independent.”

“Weren’t there any Jewish leaders,” Giovanni said, “who tried to come to terms with the Palestinians?”

“There is one man in the Israeli government who has a different approach to the dilemma, Abba Eban, a scholar in Arabic. Eban has noted that Winston Churchill sent a memorandum in 1944 to Chaim Weizmann saying that Lord Moyne had come around to support the Zionist position. Abba Eban believed that if weren’t for the terrorism of the Lehi and the assassination of Britain’s Lord Moyne, Israel would have become a state in 1944. As Vice President of the UN General Assembly, Eban’s knowledge of history and world affairs, his command of the English language, and the mellifluous flow of his voice, makes his speeches at the UN works of art. World leaders have said, that they’ve never met anyone who could match his command of the English language. His speeches in English at the UN have the same resonance as the words of the romantic poet, John Keats.”

“I’ve heard of Abba Eban, but know nothing about him.”

“After Israel’s declaration of independence and the 1948 Israel-Arab war, Israel applied for admission to the UN, but were turned down twice. Upon Israel’s third application for admission in the following year, Abba Eban spoke to the General Assembly and gave one of his most memorable speeches, speaking for over two hours to make the case for Israel’s admission. The Security Council voted 9-1 to admit Israel. The U.S. and the Soviet Union agreed, Britain abstained, and the General Assembly concurred admitting Israel to the United Nations. Eban became the first Israeli representative to the UN, the ambassador to the United States, and recently elected Vice President of the assembly. However, despite his strong advocacy for Israel on the international scene, it’s tragic that his ideas are not paid more attention in his own country.”

“Why is that?”

“There’re a couple of reasons, number one being his mastery of English, his Oxbridge accent, and Cambridge education. His British style sets him apart from many Israelis. Born to Lithuanian Jews in South Africa who moved to England, he became engrossed in intellectual pursuits when he was packed off to a boarding school at the age of 4 and buried his loneliness in his studies. At Queens College, Cambridge he took a triple first in Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian, eventually becoming fluent in 10 languages. When World War Two broke out, he began working for Chaim Weizmann at the World Zionist Organization, then served with the British Army in Egypt and as an intelligence officer in Jerusalem. Eban is known for speaking out against Israeli terrorism. When Menachem Begin admitted that Irgun had hung two young British officers and left their bodies booby-trapped with explosives, Eban said, ‘What other democracy has been headed by self-avowed terrorists and mass murders like Menachem Begin, Ariel Sharon, and Yitshak Rabin?’”



Abba Eban, Israeli diplomat and politician, member of the Knesset, Foreign Affairs Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Ambassador to the U.S., Vice President of the United Nations General Assembly, 1951 – Author, Israel Government, public domain, Wikimedia



Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion giving a Hannukkah Menorah to U.S. President Truman in the Oval Office. At right is Abba Eban, the Ambassador of Israel to the U.S., 1951 – U.S. National Archives, public domain, Wikimedia

“I can see why he infuriated the hard liners in Israel.”

“Besides his gift for oratory, Eban’s strength is a knowledge of Arab culture. He said that his study of Arabic literature prevented him from holding a common Zionist perspective which looks down on Arab culture. Eban recognizes what is beautiful in written Arabic. He was the Israeli minister who was best at communicating with the Arab. He opposed war except in extreme necessity, championed moderation, and opposed repression of the Arabs at a time when those advocating repression have become ever more dominant. If you disdain your adversary’s intelligence and culture,’ he said, ‘then little can be achieved diplomatically. Recent Sephardic immigrants and nationalists see him as someone who is more preoccupied with world opinion than Israeli opinion. When an Israeli politician heard Eban was considering running for Prime Minister, she said, ‘In which country?’

“The second reason,” I said “is endemic anti-intellectualism. Eban is viewed as an intellectual and an internationalist. Nationalists are deeply suspicious of that. The creator of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, was an intellectual, but during the settlement of Palestine, Zionism succeeded through a militarist program. The strong current of anti-intellectualism which ossified over time, drives Israeli policy to rely on military solutions rather than diplomatic solutions.

“On the other hand, Eban has criticized the Palestinians for refusing diplomacy. ‘The Arabs say they want their territory back,’ Eban said, ‘but they don’t want to talk to us, and they don’t want to negotiate with us, and they don’t want to recognize us. They want peace by immaculate conception.’”

Giovanni snapped his fingers and laughed, “Eban has a flair for words.”

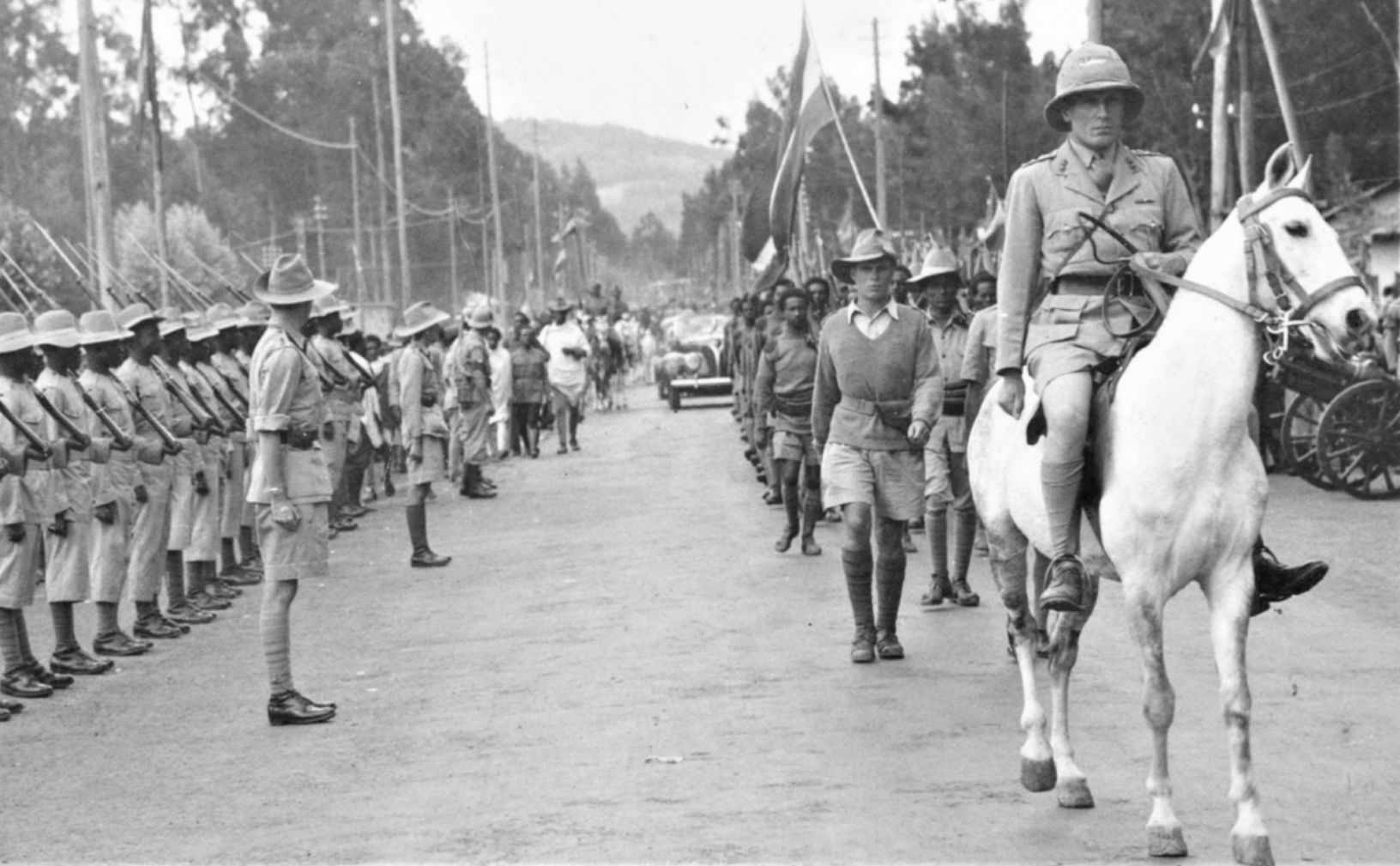
“It is a pity that Eban is not Prime Minister of Israel. He has the vision and the gift of language to break through the Gordian knot of Palestine. Perhaps it’s a limitation in drive or aggressiveness, but something holds Abba Eban back from taking control of Israeli policy.

“Another fascinating Israeli” Giovanni said, “is Moshe Dayan.”

“In contrast to Abba Eban, Dayan lacks nothing in aggressiveness. He’s charismatic, volatile, an esteemed warrior, and an accomplished philanderer, rather at the opposite end of the spectrum than diplomat Eban. Born to Ukrainian immigrants on the very first kibbutz established south of the Sea of Galilee, Dayan joined the Haganah, the Jewish defense force, at an early age but was imprisoned for two years when the British outlawed the Jewish paramilitary force. After his release Dayan joined the British service and learned guerilla fighting techniques under his mentor, intelligence officer Orde Charles Wingate.



Israeli officers of the IDF parachutist 890e battalion with Chief of Staff, Moshe Dayan, 1955 – Abraham Vered, Israel National Photo Collection, Wikimedia



Orde Charles Wingate enters Addis Ababa – Unknown author, IDF Archive, public domain, Wikimedia

“Who is Wingate?”

A devout Christian and one of the founders of modern guerrilla warfare, Wingate believed it was his duty to help the *Yishuv* create a Jewish state in Palestine. Wingate trained Special Night Squads, elite units of the Haganah paramilitary to ambush Arab saboteurs who were attacking oil pipelines of the Iraq Petroleum Company and raiding the border villages that served as insurgency bases, often imposing severe collective reprisals on the villagers, arousing much hatred in the Arabs. The night operations of the Haganah commandos were so effective in combating the Arab uprisings that Wingate became a hero to the Jewish community. Moshe Dayan said that Wingate taught him everything he knew about combat. When the Allied command began preparing an invasion of Syria and Lebanon during World War II, Dayan carried out reconnaissance against the French Vichy forces in Lebanon, losing his eye during an assault on a Vichy Police station, consequently wearing a black eye patch which became Moshe’s signature feature. After Dayan’s troops halted the Syrian advance at the Sea of Galilee in the War of 1948, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion appointed his protégé Dayan as commander of the Jerusalem forces.

“After Folke Bernadotte was assassinated, his deputy, American diplomat Ralph Bunche took over the work of the UN peace negotiations. With the aid of Dayan’s negotiations with King Abdullah of Jordan, Bunche was successful in getting the combatants to sign the 1949 Armistice Agreement for which Bunche received the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize.



Dr. Ralph Bunche, 1963 Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C. – Author, U.S. Information Agency, Source, David Shapinsky, U.S. National Archives, Wikimedia. For his successful diplomacy in achieving the 1949 Armistice Agreement between Israel and the Arabs, Bunche was awarded the 1950 Peace Prize, the first African American to be honored for the prize. In recognition of Bunche’s support for many UN peacekeeping operations, President John f. Kennedy awarded Bunche the Presidential Medal of Freedom

“Dayan is an interesting leader. I hope he understands that in order to make peace, you must talk with your enemies. When all is said and done, will Dayan turn out to be a man of war or a man of peace?

“After the overwhelming defeat of the Arabs, 750,000 Palestinians fled Palestine. They have never been allowed to return. While Israel has proven to be a miracle of economic and cultural rebirth in the desert, the banishment of the Palestinians from their ancestral homes has created a festering wound that may never



Moshe Dayan and Abdullah el Tell reach cease fire agreement, Jerusalem, 30 November 1948 – Author, Moshe Dayan, *Story of My Life*, public domain, Wikimedia

“Considering the military expertise of the Israel commandos,” Giovanni said, “wouldn’t the Arabs have been wiser if they had taken their case before the United Nations using diplomacy and persuasion rather than going to war?”

“That’s well said, my darling. The heart of the matter was that Israel was prepared for war and the Arabs were not. The leaders of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt each harbored plans to annex territories in Palestine, a rivalry which led to a disastrous lack of coordination between the Arab armies. When you are unprepared and don’t have a carefully prepared strategy, it doesn’t pay to start an offensive war. The losses of territory and the deaths of civilians and soldiers, far outweighs what might have been gained in victory.”

“The Palestinians, Giovanni said, “don’t have much of a chance to establish their own state. The desire for a state is so strong among the Arabs and so opposed by the Israelis, I don’t see any solution. What do you think is the best way forward?”

“I believe that the best way to establish the state of Palestine economically integrated with Israel, would be to push for change non-violently. When one side is more powerful militarily than the other, violence can succeed. But when one side is less powerful militarily, violence leads to disastrous consequences.



Palestinian women protest in Jerusalem against the British Mandate, 1 January 1930 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia. The sign in Arabic reads, “No dialogue, no negotiations until termination of the Mandate.”



Palestinian refugees fleeing Galilee, October-November 1948 – Author, Fred Csznik, public domain, Wikimedia

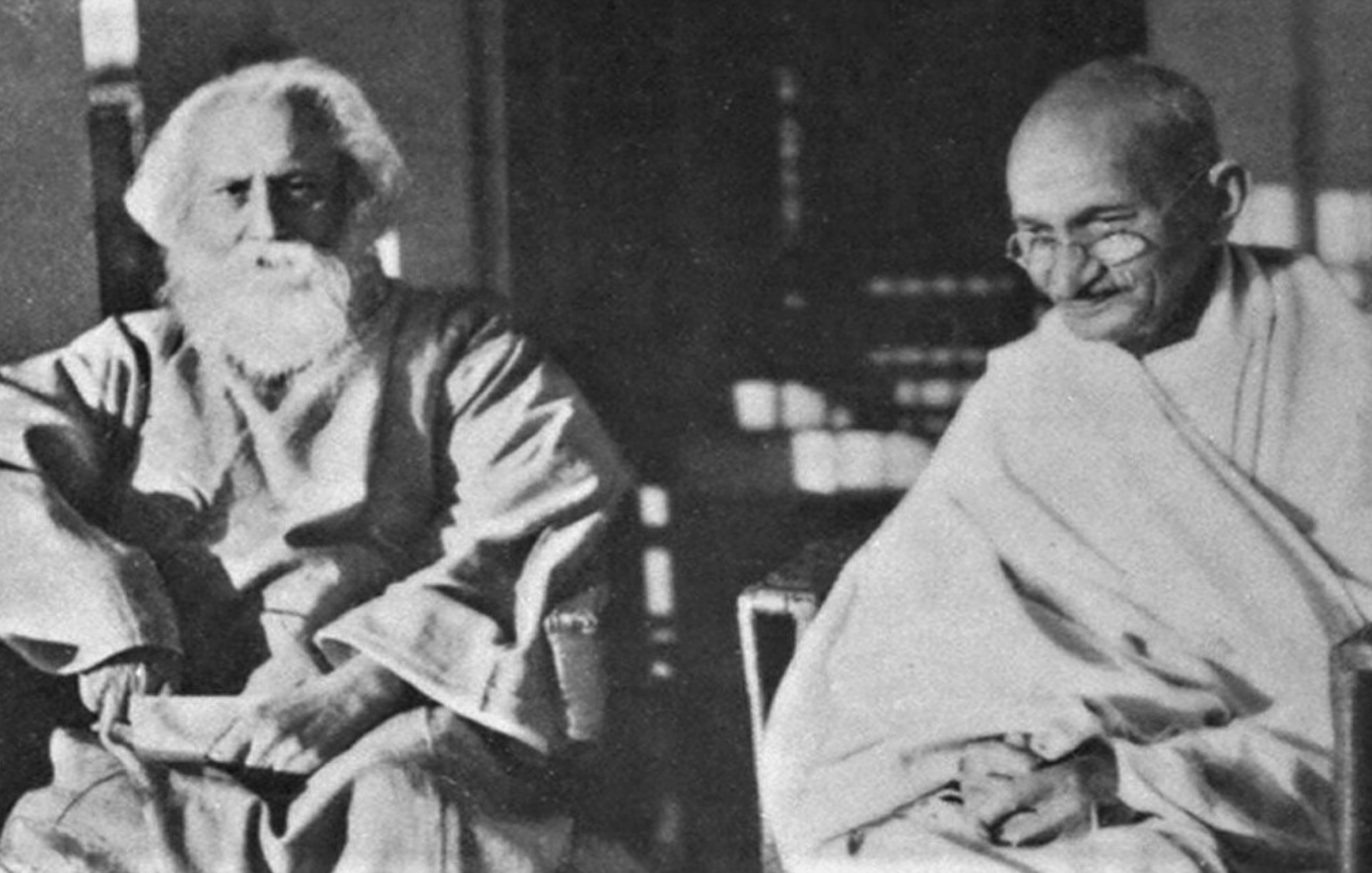


Moshe Dayan and Avrahma Yoffe, commanding officers of IDF's 9th Brigade at Sharm el-Sheikh, Sinai Campaign, 6 November 1956 – Author, Avraham Yoffe, IDF, public domain, Wikimedia

“If the Palestinians could discover a leader who had the spiritual presence of Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King, a man or a woman who could bring hundreds of thousands of Palestinians into the streets of Israel and the West Bank to demand equality and the right to form their own state, it would ultimately put world pressure on the Israeli government. It might take several years of continuous demonstrations, but with one half million people in the street demanding freedom, I believe that opinions would gradually shift to create the conditions for statehood. Gandhi’s crusade in India ultimately brought freedom to the Indians. Non-violence is the key. With violence as their only tool, I believe the Palestinians will never establish their own state.”



Indian workers on strike in support of Mahatma Gandhi, leader for Indian Independence, 1930 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia



Mahatma Gandhi with poet Rabindranath Tagore, 1940 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“On my run, I was thinking of what you’ve said about the human race and zealotry — about mankind and the competition for territory. Will we ever be able to rise above it?”

“Leaders have discovered that nationalism plays well with the masses. It’s true whether in a democratic or a totalitarian state. Extreme patriotism is effective as an instrument of control. Leaders play upon nationalist and tribal prejudices because it allows them to consolidate power. Driven by xenophobia and vanity, those who hold power fail to grasp the long term futility of their aggrandizement. When a leader decides upon a path, it’s important to consider all the possible results far into the future. That takes vision. Just as the extreme punishment of children turns them into monsters, extreme repression of our opponents, turns them into beasts of retribution. Nationalist leaders fail to understand the long term psychological damage. That is the lesson we can take from World War One — the victors didn’t consider the countervailing possibilities. And that failure of vision brings me back to the Versailles Treaty.”

“I’ve waited very patiently for the Versailles Treaty.”

“You’ve been soooo patient my love and I’m going to reward your magical hands with a good story. During World War I, the German army destroyed much of the infrastructure of Eastern France and sabotaged the coal mines which were the primary energy source of France. With the destruction of the towns, cities, and farms of France and 1.4 million French soldiers dead, Prime Minister Clémenceau insisted on severe punishment for the German nation. At the Paris Peace Conference, Clémenceau argued against the moderation of Lloyd George and Woodrow Wilson. Clémenceau reasoned that since the Germans had destroyed vast areas of France, it was necessary to render Germany impotent so that it could never arise again to threaten France. During the conference, an anarchist ran up to Clémenceau’s Rolls Royce and shot the minister in the back for being a strike breaker. While still in his hospital bed Clémenceau said, ‘We’ve just won the most terrible war in history, yet here is a Frenchman who misses his target six out of seven times at point-blank range. He must be punished for the careless use of a dangerous weapon and for poor marksmanship. I suggest that he be locked up for eight years with intensive training on a shooting range.’ The bullet was so close to Clémenceau’s heart they couldn’t operate. The assassin’s bullet remained next to his heart the rest of his life.”

“If Clémenceau had a reputation of being a radical of the left who supported the working class, why would an anarchist want to kill him?”



1099 miners died in the catastrophe of the Courrières mine disaster, 1906 – Compagnie des mines de Courrières, public domain, Wikimedia

“At this point, he was no longer a Radical. Clémenceau was many things, anti-clerical, antisocialist, and anti-monarchist. He followed the principles that his father had instilled in him — a respect for Voltaire, a respect for the Revolution, a respect for justice. Whatever Clémenceau did, he followed his principles. And those principles evolved over time. When he was Minister of the Interior in 1906, an explosion of coal dust in the mines of Courrières killed 1,100 people, including many workers who were still young boys. There was much exploitation of children workers in those times. Many miners used lamps with naked flames which ignited leaking methane gas, setting off a catastrophe which killed more miners than in any other mine disaster in Europe. Many were killed by collapsing rock, others by fire and suffocation due to lack of oxygen, even the workers outside the mine dying because of the colossal explosion. In their descent to rescue the miners, forty men died when their shaft collapsed. Although many miners were still alive in the tunnels, the company stopped their rescue efforts after three days to save the remaining veins of coal. They walled off tunnels of the mine even though they knew there were miners still alive in the tunnels.”

“What did Clémenceau do?”

“His portfolio was to keep order in France. The people of northern France were outraged at the poor rescue response especially after it was discovered that fires had been burning in the mine even before the explosion and yet the company hadn’t closed the mine but continued to send thousands of miners into the mine. After the mass burials of the workers, the rage of the people erupted, strikes breaking out in Courrières with 100,000 strikers joining them all over France. As the Minister of the Interior, Clémenceau was responsible to restore social order. Due to his nature to act decisively, he flooded the mining regions with army troops, arrested 700 union leaders and alienated not only the anarchists but the Socialist Party, which at one time he’d supported.

“A warrior with a battle ax for a tongue, Clémenceau, *Le Tigre*, was a great aficionado of women. He adored them. He was notorious for loving the dancers at the Paris Opéra. He pursued women until his death. There’s a story that at the age of eighty, Clémenceau was strolling down the boulevard with a friend when a beautiful young woman passed by. “Oh!” he cried. “She makes me wish I were seventy again.”

“At eighty years old,” Giovanni said, “Clémenceau was upholding the reputation of old warriors.”

“Well, the old libertine treated his wife miserably. When he was teaching French and equestrian skills in a private girls school in Connecticut right after the American Civil war, he married Mary Plummer, one of his students.”



Ballet Rehearsal, oil on canvas by Edgar Degas, 1873 – Fogg Museum, public domain, Wikimedia

“Clémenceau lived in America?”

“He’d served time in prison for publishing a Republican newspaper which incited demonstrations against Napoleon III. Fearing another arrest and imprisonment on Devil’s Island he fled to New York City.”

“Like Garibaldi.”

“Garibaldi and Clémenceau were like thousands of other Europeans fleeing repression. Although bigotry flourished in the United States, in comparison to Europe, it offered a fresh start for those who’d been persecuted. At the beginning of the Civil War, the number of Jews in America had increased from a few thousand at the turn of the century to 150,000. When General Ulysses S. Grant, suspected Jews of smuggling cotton during the war, he issued an order barring all Jews from the territories under his control. Abraham Lincoln immediately rescinded Grant’s order, saying, ‘I do not like to hear a class or nationality condemned on account of a few sinners.’ The guarantee of protection from persecution was the reason the French gave America the Statue of Liberty.

“Clémenceau was struck by the freedom of discussion and expression in America. Although he admired social philosophers like Auguste Comte, Charles Darwin, and the British champion of women’s rights, John Stuart Mill, Clémenceau was not a democrat when it came to women. When his neglected wife Mary took the tutor of their children as a lover, Clémenceau had his wife sentenced to 15 days in Saint Lazare Prison for adultery, although he’d committed adultery dozens of times.”

“How could he do that?”

“Clémenceau, like most French men, reflected the prevalent French misogyny of the 19th century. On the other side, Clémenceau was a man of great warmth and passion. Upon hearing Germany had agreed to sign an Armistice, he broke down in tears. When he died, it was in the arms of his best friend, Claude Monet.

“I will praise Clémenceau though, for having the foresight to oppose Prime Minister Jules Ferry’s policy of exploitation of the colonies. When Jules Ferry addressed the Chamber of Deputies, he said, ‘We have a duty to civilize the inferior races.’ Under Ferry’s administration, France set up a protectorate in Tunisia, occupied Madagascar, explored the Congo and Niger, and conquered Indochina.



Palace of the Governor-General of French Indochina Saigon, 1896 – Author, André Salles, public domain, Wikimedia

“Clémenceau passionately believed that France should rather focus on regaining Alsace Lorraine which they’d lost to the Germans in the 1870 war. The loss of Alsace Lorraine was uppermost in Clémenceau’s mind at the Treaty of Paris conference—‘Punish the Germans!’ But John Maynard Keynes said in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, that severe punishment would lead to a disaster later on. The economist struggled to convince the Allied negotiators to soften the vindictiveness of the Versailles Treaty. Keynes called the Versailles Treaty a ‘Carthaginian Peace.’”

“A Carthaginian Peace?”

“It means to impose brutal conditions which totally crush an enemy defeated in war. It refers to the outcome of the Punic Wars between the empires of Rome and Carthage in the second century BC. In the Second Punic War, all of Carthage’s colonies were confiscated, forced to demilitarize and to pay perpetual tribute to Rome. In the Third Punic War, Rome laid siege to Carthage, killed most of the people, sold the rest into slavery, and demolished the city. Keynes called the Treaty of Versailles a Carthaginian Peace saying, ‘The policy of reducing Germany to servitude for a generation, of degrading the lives of millions of human beings, and of depriving a whole nation of happiness should be abhorrent and detestable.’ Keynes correctly predicted that if England, France, and the United States forced Germany to pay the amount of reparations as stated in the treaty, it would ‘eventually lead to an even more horrific war.’”



Ruins of Carthage. The Third Punic War was one of the earliest recorded genocides, resulting in the death of a 250,000 civilians, 50,000 sold into slavery, the city burned for seventeen days and was totally destroyed – Author, Christian Manhart, UNESCO, Wikimedia

“Although gifted in mathematics when he was at Cambridge, Keynes was drawn to philosophy. One of the founders of economics, Alfred Marshall, author of *The Principles of Economics*, persuaded Keynes to become an economist instead of a philosopher. With his profound gift of seeing into the future, Keynes became a mathematician, economist, and philosopher. Bertrand Russell said, ‘Every time I argued with Keynes, I seldom emerged without feeling something of a fool.’”

“Papa was a follower of John Maynard Keynes,” Giovanni said. “He said Keynes had unusual interests for an economist. He’s even married a Russian ballerina.”

“Although Keynes was romantically linked with men while at King’s College Cambridge, he developed a love of opera and dance and supported the royal Opera House at Covent Garden and the Sadler’s Wells Ballet. That’s how he ended up falling in love with Lydia Lopoka, a leading ballerina with Sergei Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes*.



John Maynard Keynes, 1st Baron Keynes of Tilton, and Ballets Russes ballerina Lydia Lopokova – Author, Walter Benington, public domain, Wikimedia

“A bit of a bohemian and patron of the arts, Keynes was one of the Bloomsbury Group along with writers E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf.

“The Bloomsbury Group?”

“The Bloomsbury Group was an influential group of English writers, philosophers, and painters who rebelled against conventional Victorian era morality. The philosophy of the Bloomsbury Group was influenced by Bertrand Russell and the author of *Principia Ethica*, G E. Moore, who believed that one’s prime interest in life should be love, the appreciation of aesthetics, and the pursuit of knowledge.”

“You wouldn’t think,” Giovanni said, “that Keynes’ *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, would be something somebody would read to his family after dinner, but that’s the kind of man he was. He must have read it a dozen times until it was coming apart at the seams. Papa was furious with the way the financial oligarchs of Italy disregarded the concerns of the workers. Classical economists during Papa’s day believed that free markets would invariably flourish as long as workers worked for low salaries. If this was true, why have there been bank crises and economic crashes in the last century about every ten years? Keynes said that the ability for the people to buy products and services determines the health of the economy. When workers were without jobs, they couldn’t buy things and that increased the downward spiral of the economy and prolonged unemployment. Keynes said that during a market crash when a worker loses his job and has no money to spend, then everyone who he buys from, the grocer, the blacksmith, and the farmer has less income to spend. When the suppliers lose their customers, they have to lay off workers. Soon everyone has less income to purchase from others, setting up a spiraling descent where no one has money to buy anything and the crash gets deeper and deeper. To replace the disappearing income, Keynes said the government has to inject money into the economy to pull the country out of the slump. To smooth out boom and bust cycles of capitalism, government intervention is necessary, something that Franklin Delano Roosevelt understood. During a recession, deflation must be avoided at all costs. Infrastructure projects must be undertaken to produce jobs and worker’s income which in turn will go right back into the economy and produce more jobs. Papa said that instead of injecting more money into the economy as Keynes advised, the British government did the opposite. They enacted an austerity program right in the middle of the depression.”

“Keynes had an uncanny ability to see into the future. That is so apparent in his prediction regarding the harsh terms of the Versailles Treaty. Clémenceau refused to listen to Keynes call for moderation. In just a little over 30 years, France had been devastated by Germany twice, Consequently, Clémenceau had a deep fear that militarism would arise in Germany once again. The hero of the war, Marshal Ferdinand Foch wanted France to annex and occupy the Rhineland on a permanent basis, or at least for thirty years, but Prime Minister Lloyd George and President Wilson would only agree to an Allied military occupation for fifteen years. Believing the Versailles Treaty to be a capitulation to the Germans, Marshal Foch declared ‘This is not a peace. It is an armistice for twenty years,’ a prediction which came true with an eerie precision. Twenty years later, Hitler invaded Poland.

“Blinded by his anger and deep distrust of Germany, Clémenceau failed to create an enduring peace settlement. *Le Père de la Victoire* was prescient in realizing that the bourgeoisie, like the aristocracy before them in the ancien régime, had failed as a ruling class; it was now the turn of the working class to rule. But counterpoised to Clémenceau’s prediction about the working class was the effect of severe reparations on defeated Germany. The intransigence of the French resulted in the unintended consequences of creating a great bitterness in the German people. After the crisis of hyperinflation making the German Mark worthless, which I’ve talked about before, the Nazis would exploit the despised Versailles Treaty on the road to World War Two.”



5,000,000,000,000 marks, Stuttgart. By November 1923, the U.S. dollar was worth 4,210,500,000,000 German marks – Deutsche Reichsbahn, public domain, Wikimedia



French Chasseurs occupy the Ruhr region of Germany, 1923 – German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“What,” Giovanni asked, “were the reparations?”

“The industrialized region of northeastern France had been ravaged by the war. The labor force was decimated, millions of men dead or crippled. France was deeply in debt to the U.S. and Britain for materials to fight the war. Great Britain was even more heavily in debt to the U.S, debts that it couldn’t pay unless it collected from France. France was broke. The only way it could pay was to demand reparations from Germany which had no means to pay. Although President Wilson was concerned about Germany’s political stability if it were required to pay enormous reparations to France and Belgium, his concern was meaningless since the U.S. was demanding Britain and France to pay their debts in full. In an attempt to collect the debt, France occupied the Ruhr, the primary industrial center of Germany handing Hitler another opportunity to demonize France.

“The world depression of 1920 to 1921 decimated the economy of the U.S. Germany couldn’t recover unless it could export to the world’s greatest consumer market. After the American depression of 1920, the public had less money to buy German products. To make things worse, the Americans raised tariffs in 1921 and 1923 making it nearly impossible for the Germans to export to the U.S. Instead the Germans were forced to borrow from the U.S. to pay the French and Belgians who then in turn paid their British and American debts.



French troops occupy the Ehrenbreitstein Fortress, Rhineland-Palatinate, east bank of the Rhine at the confluence of the Moselle, Koblenz, Germany, 1929 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“The American’s refusal to ease up on their demands for payments from Germany drove the struggling nation deeper and deeper into debt. The flow of payments was self-defeating. It was a vicious circle, with no way out, culminating in the collapse of the German Mark in 1923 that wiped out the savings of the German people.”

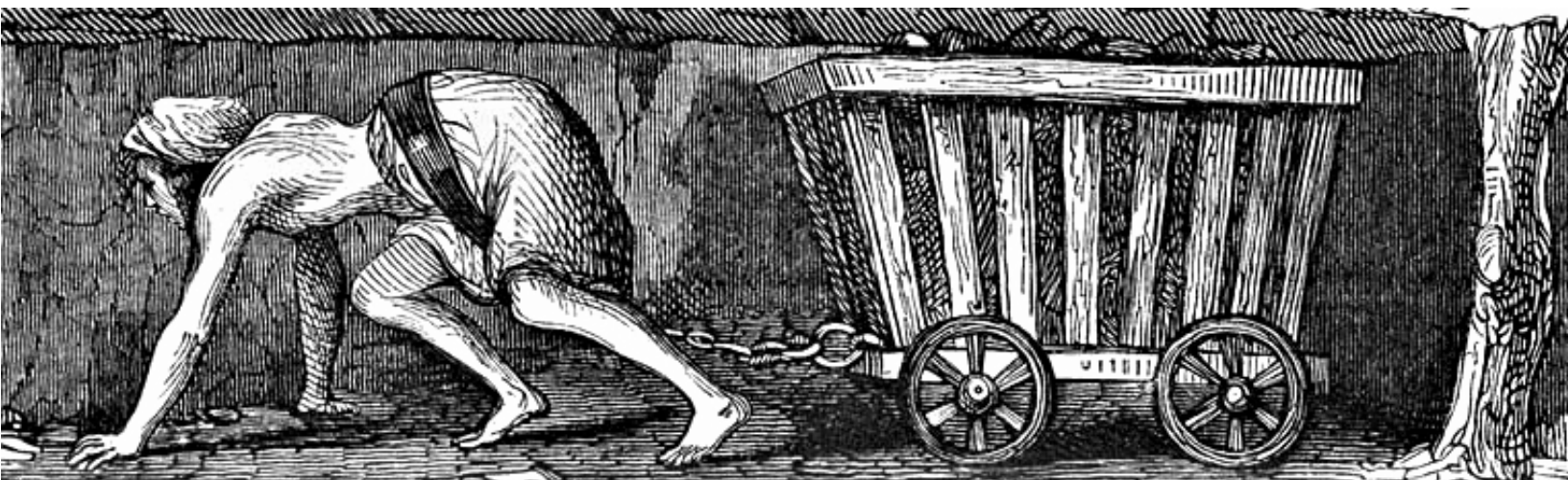
“No wonder the Weimar Republic fell.”

“Besides, the billions of gold marks Germany had to pay, the Versailles treaty had many Draconian provisions. Germany had to provide France, Belgium, and Italy with millions of tons of coal for 10 years. That left no coal for the Germans themselves. In *The Economic Consequences of Peace*, Keynes said, ‘The German Empire has been built more truly on coal and iron than on blood and iron.’ In addition to the millions of tons of coal that German was forced to give to France, Germany was to lose the major coal producing areas of Saar and Upper Silesia. The surrender of Germany’s coal would destroy German industry. Payments of coal to France was only the beginning of the debacle. The economies of Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, and Austria which relied upon German coal would be devastated. From the 18th to the 20th century, industrialization was



Children miners worked in the 19th century coal mines – Public domain. Wikimedia

dependent on coal and was one of the factors leading to World War One. This was a time when children were used as breaker boys, some as young as ten, whose job was to separate the impurities in coal by hand, a practice that didn't end until after the Great War. Children were left uneducated, branded for life.



A young girl pulling a coal cart in a shaft too small for adult colliers – Public Domain



Coal Breakers, 1912 – Lewis Hines, Wikimedia. Breaker boys whose job was to separate impurities by hand, were often as young as ten years old. The use of children in mines became common in the mid-1860s and did not end until the 1920s. The 1900 U.S. census revealed that 2 million children were working in agricultural fields, mills, coal mines, and factories. The photographs of Lewis Hine revealed the conditions of children working 60 and 70 hours a week in filthy and dangerous conditions. Oklahoma’s first senator, Robert Owens of Cherokee descent, pushed through the Senate, the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act that was signed into law by Woodrow Wilson in 1916. Within the year, the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court case *Hammer v Dagenhart* on the grounds that only the states had the right to regulate child labor. A constitutional amendment was proposed to give Congress the right to regulate child labor, but business groups defeated it on the principle of states’ rights and propaganda that it was a communist plot to subvert the Constitution. It was only a quarter of a century before the Supreme Court’s ruling against the Child Labor Act was overturned in 1941, citing Oliver Wendell Holmes dissent 25 years earlier as the classic affirmation of children’s rights.

“Under the Versailles Treaty, Keynes said, the industrial future of Europe was black. The treaty was vindictive. It smelled of revenge and punishment. It made revolution quite likely for it would degrade the lives of the common people in all of Europe. The severity of the Versailles Treaty would lead to a war which in comparison, ‘the horrors of the late German war will fade into nothing.’ Unfortunately, Clémenceau and none of the other great powers listened to Keynes.”

“Keynes was the voice of reason,” Giovanni said. “But the politicians were not representing reason but xenophobic emotions of the people. It appears to me that one of the weaknesses of a democracy is that when something is popular, whether or not it is good for the country in the long run, politicians jump on it because it allows them to win their election.”

“Since no Allied force had entered Germany and because the Kaiser’s armies had retreated from the battlefield in good order, it allowed Field Marshal Ludendorff to declare that their armies hadn’t been defeated.

Ludendorff promoted the legend of a Germany stabbed in the back by Jews, Socialists, and Bolsheviks. He spent the rest of his life promoting the stab-in-the-back legend, declaring that Germany's defeat was not because of the army's failure to continue the fight, but because of a failure of German patriotism. Germany had been betrayed by the sabotage of Jews, Socialists, and Bolsheviks. Ludendorff's *My War Memoires, 1914 – 1918* blamed Germany's fall on the Weimar Republic, the civilian government which replaced Kaiser Wilhelm II after he was forced to abdicate the throne. Ludendorff said, 'In twenty years' time, the German people will curse the parties who now boast of having made the Revolution.'"

"It seems," Giovanni said, "that Ludendorff's vision for Germany preceded that of Hitler."

"Ludendorff published *Der Totale Krieg*, advocating Total War, a book that became Hitler's plan for Germany. The state would be militarized. The entire physical and moral forces of the nation mobilized for war. A worshiper of the Nordic god Wotan, Ludendorff detested Christianity for being a philosophy of weakness rather than strength. Ludendorff advocated the Germanization of Eastern Europe. He planned to remove the native population and create an empire which would allow Germany to defeat Great Britain, France, and United States in a great war."



Erich Ludendorff with Adolf Hitler and SA leader Ernst Röhm, at right, 1 April 1924
– Author, Heinrich Hoffmann, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“Hitler,” Giovanni said, “took Ludendorff’s idea of conquering Eastern Europe and made it a reality.”

“The idea of extending Prussia into Poland was held by many intellectuals in Germany before Hitler. At one time, Prussia had nearly as many Poles as Germans. During the First World War, Historian Friedrich Meinecke, author of *Cosmopolitanism and the National State*, spoke of the bestiality of the Slavs and advocated the expulsion of millions of Poles and Jews from the Eastern Prussian provinces so that the Germans could settle the new territories.

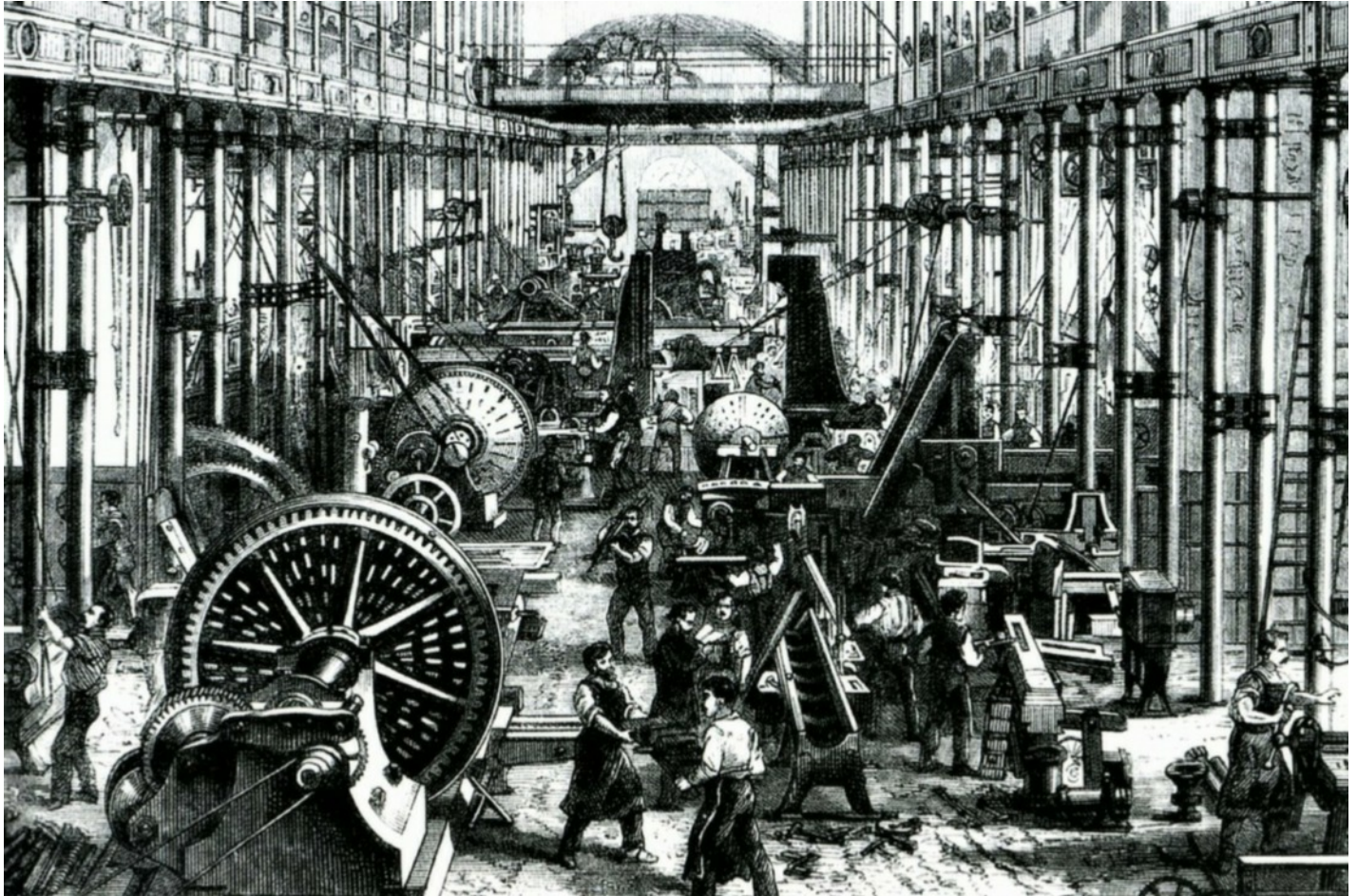


Friedrich Meinecke, historian – Unknown author, Kingdom of Prussia, orden pour le mérite, public domain, Wikimedia

“The other side of the equation was that America had become a great power due to its vast territory, resources, and industry. The American economy by the outbreak of World War One, had become double that of Imperial Germany. By the beginning of World War II, American output was three times greater than the Third Reich. Hitler believed that if Germany accepted the status of a second rate power, it would be a capitulation to the ‘World Jewish conspiracy.’”

“Hitler,” Giovanni said, “wanted to overtake America.”

“His passion was to make Germany into the world’s greatest power. To match his American rival, it meant that Germany had to conquer Poland, the Ukraine, the Baltic nations, and Russia. Like Ludendorff and Meinecke before him, Hitler dreamed of populating the new territories with German citizens. As the vast American West had enriched the U.S., the new territories would serve as Germany’s engine of growth. By conquest and repopulation, Hitler envisioned Germany becoming the greatest power on earth. With an audacious roll of the dice, he intended to conquer Europe even though he commanded far fewer resources than America.

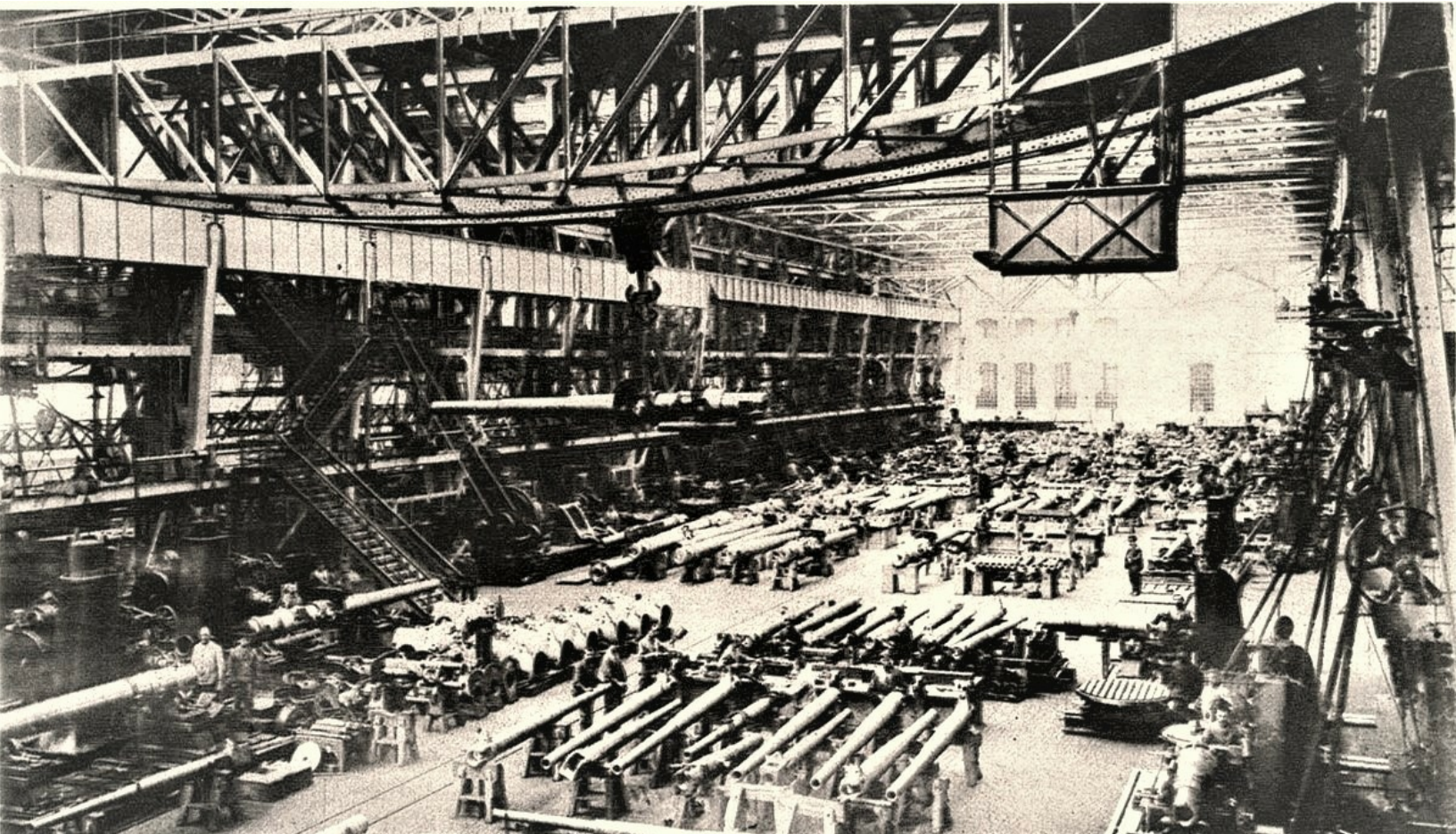


Machine works of Richard Hartman, Chemnitz, Kingdom of Saxony, 1868 – Public Domain, Wikimedia

“His gamble was to finance a world conquest by forcing conquered people to work and to plunder wheat, meat, coal, iron, and oil from occupied territories. What he didn’t figure in his calculations was that the U.S. economy had become well integrated over a long time. It had taken the U.S. over half a century to attain its dominance. In the thrall of his own fantasies, Hitler failed to calculate that conquered territories with resisting people would take time to organize into efficient producers. Pillage was not an efficient base for an industrial economy. Hitler’s prime enemy was time. He didn’t count on the partisans and the patriots.



Krupp-Werke, Essen – Author, Simon Müller, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Krupp-Werke, production of heavy guns, 1915 – Author, Brown Bros. Source, *New York Times*, public domain, Wikimedia

“To fuel his dream, Hitler seized on Ludendorff’s legend of a Germany stabbed in the back by Jews, Socialists, and Bolsheviks, a legend that over time had created a national zeitgeist in the minds of the German people. Psychiatrist Carl Jung said that Hitler’s success was his effectiveness in telling the Germans what they unconsciously were thinking about Germany since their defeat in the First World War. His hypnotic rhetoric in the big arena worked a spell on the Germans. I suspect that Hitler rehearsed his arm and hand flourishes in the mirror. He chose movements that demonstrated energy and power, working on his voice until he’d mastered a harsh guttural operatic resonance that personified apoplectic rage. One historian said that after hearing Hitler speak, he was seized with a nationalistic pride that was nearly hysterical, for minutes on end shouting until he was hoarse, *Sieg Heil, Seig Heil!* From that moment on he belonged to Adolf Hitler, body and soul. While Hitler used ideas of the nationalists and anti-Semites who came before him, his gift to the German nation was staging theatrical extravaganzas in the surreal Theatre of Nuremberg. His power came from his ability to inspire people to hysteria. Hitler offered the Germans a great struggle — danger and death.”



Adolf Hitler rehearsing, September 1930 – Author, Heinrich Hoffmann, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“What do you mean by zeitgeist?”

“Zeitgeist is of German origin meaning the spirit of the era. Georg Hegel, the 19th century German philosopher, pointed out that ideas and art are determined by the culture of the time. An individual artist springs from the culture of his time. Hegel believed that no man can go beyond his own time for his spirit has been created by his own time. The zeitgeist of the Romantic period is quite different from the zeitgeist of the Renaissance. The zeitgeist of 1920’s capitalist America is radically different that the zeitgeist of 1920’s communist Soviet Russia. Zeitgeist has a mystical sense for it speaks of the essence of something. It expresses a *weltanschauung* which pervades a country at a moment in time.”

“For heaven’s sake, what is *weltanschauung*?”

“It is one’s philosophy, a world view, a conception of the universe and of life. When applied to civilizations it can vary greatly from one culture to another and from one era to another, or one minority to another. It could also be called the climate of opinion of a people in a specific place and time. After losing World War One, you can imagine the *weltanschauung* of the German people and how changed it was from their *weltanschauung* before the war. Behind the growth of the myth of internal betrayal was a sense of *communal shame*. The belief in Prussia and Germany as a powerful military based state had been shaken to the very foundations. The German nation grieved for this sense of failure.”

“You mean they were ashamed for invading France and Russia and causing millions of deaths?”

“You’ve got it wrong. The Germans weren’t ashamed for beginning the war. They were ashamed for *losing it*. Von Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and Hitler’s National Socialist Party exploited the shame of losing as a way to bring down the struggling Weimar democracy. Without coal, the people were freezing. John Maynard Keynes had foreseen the consequence of Germany’s misery, but the great powers did not. France’s zeal to punish the enemy and America’s economic intransience led to the German hyperinflation of 1923. The worthless German paper mark was replaced by the Rentenmark which was worth one billion or maybe it was one trillion Papiermark. The financial crisis caused the weakening of the democratic Weimar Republic and gave Hitler the chance to exploit the communal shame festering in the German’s psyche.

At the very beginning of his quest for power, he said, “It cannot be that two million Germans should have fallen in vain. No, we do not pardon, we demand — vengeance!” Before a cheering crowd at the Nuremburg Rally, Hitler decried the Treaty of Versailles as a stain of honor on the German nation and abrogated the despised treaty.”

“Before Hitler took power, Germany was a democracy. How could they elect a dictator?”

“Hitler had an uncanny political acumen in consolidating his control. In the grip of the Great Depression, with their standard of living falling every year, the middle class hated the banks and the bankers. Hitler’s mesmerizing speeches convinced the middle class that the unions, immigrants, and Jews were responsible for their economic suffering. Hitler’s popularity generated millions of contributions from small businessmen and workers who formed the major support of Hitler.”

“From the very beginning,” Giovanni said, “wasn’t Goebbels anti-Jewish propaganda a major force driving Hitler’s rise to power?”

“In the early days of the Nazi quest for power, it was Julius Streicher who began publishing the Nazi tabloid *Der Stürmer* in 1923, ten years before Goebbels’s Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. Aimed at the less educated and unemployed, *Der Stürmer*, blamed the Jews for the ruinous high inflation and high unemployment. The Jews, *Der Stürmer* declared, were white-slavers who controlled 90% of the prostitutes. *Der Stürmer* filled their readers with the fear of *rassenschande*, Jewish men having sex with German women — violating the innocent of pure Aryan blood. The tabloid reported that German women were killing their mixed-race children because they didn’t want to bring a ‘Jewish bastard into the world.’ Unsolved cases of murders of women were committed by ‘Jewish ritual murderers.’ With 500,000 readers ‘20s, *Der Stürmer* was having a powerful impact on public opinion by the late 1920’s.”

“Now I remember,” Giovanni said, “you once told me that the motto of *Der Stürmer* was from the philosopher Heinrich von Treitschke, ‘The Jews are our misfortune.’”

“I wish my students’ memory was as good as yours.”

Giovanni touched his cheek to mine, his breath fluttering against my skin, “There’s a reason,” he murmured. “Your students aren’t in love with you the way I am.”

“I kissed him. He kissed me and then again, his fingers sliding slowly down my arms, my skin tingling from his caress.

Giovanni sighed and looked up at the sky, his face filled with sadness. “Why,” he said, do people believe outrageous things in the press — the blatant lies. Conspiracy schemes have caused so much damage century after century. Why are humans so prone to believe anything they hear? Is it deeply burned into our psyche?

Der Stürmer

Deutsches Wochenblatt zum Kampfe um die Wahrheit

HERAUSGEBER: JULIUS STREICHER

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14. Jahr
1936

Das Lügenmanöver

Hinter den Kulissen des Moskauer Prozesses

Unerfättlich

Vor kurzem fand in Moskau ein mehrere Tage dauernder politischer Prozeß statt, über den die gesamte Weltpresse mit großer Wichtigkeit Bericht erstattete. Es war der Prozeß gegen die sogenannten „Trotski-Opportunisten“. Sechzehn Beschuldigte saßen auf der Anklagebank. Die Hauptpersonen waren die bekannten Bolschewiki-Söhne Sinowjew, Kamenew, Zwiagin, Nebogod u. a. Die Gerichtsverhandlung war öffentlich. Die Presse, auch die Auslandspresse, war zugelassen. Die Angeklagten waren selbstverständlich ganz ruhig. Sie hörten wohlgerichtet und langsam zu. Sie lebten mit Poise und theatralischen Gesten und legten offenfundigen Wert darauf, daß ihre Reden aufgeschrieben und veröffentlicht wurden.

Diese Art einer Prozeßführung gegen angebliche bössische „Rebellen“ im Lande der Sowjetunion ist sonderbar. Bisher sind die jüdischen Gewalttäter dort anders verfahren. In öffentlichen Verhandlungen gegen „Kontre-revolutionäre“ ließen sie es gar nicht kommen. Sie machten kurzen Prozeß, schloßen die Angeklagten und schossen sie schließlich zusammen. Das geschah immer hinter verschlossenen Türen. Hier aber wurden sechzehn Angeklagte, die noch dazu „überführt“ und „schuldig“ waren, vor ein öffentliches Gericht gebracht. Die Weltpresse wurde auf diesen „interessanten Prozeß“ aufmerksam gemacht und freundlich eingeladen zu erscheinen. Vollständig süßen denn auch die weiß jüdischen Berichterstatter an. Die Verhandlung ging los, Akten wurden gezeigt, „Zeugen“ wurden vernommen. Es wurde den Angeklagten „nachgewiesen“, daß sie „im Auftrag Trotskis den Bolschewismus gefährdet hätten“. Die „Angeklagten“ leugneten nicht.



Ein Volk zu knechten liegt dem Juden fern
Er hat die ganze Welt zum Fressen gern

Aus dem Inhalt

Die Sand Judas liegt schwer auf Finckern
Jüdische Devillenkrieger in Italien
Kassenshänder und Mordtäter
Was das Volk nicht verstehen kann
Julius Gottlar
Der Jude und der Arbeiter

Die Juden sind unser Unglück!

“Is it a trait we cannot remove? Papa saved old newspapers from the time of Mussolini’s dictatorship for me to read when I was older. When I was sixteen, I read the fabrications. ‘People believed those lies,’ Papa said. They believed it heart and soul.”



Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, 11 November 1938. Mussolini’s fascist regime declares Racial Laws – Author, *Corriere della Sera*, public domain. Wikimedia. Italian racial laws enacted by Mussolini’s Fascist regime in 1938 denied Italian citizenship to Jews, banned them from government, banking, and education, confiscated their property, and outlawed Italians to have sexual relations with Jews or Africans.

Giovanni was quiet for a moment, then went on, “When the people are besieged by a constant mantra of hatred, it was inevitable that the Germans would gradually come to believe *Der Stürmer’s* smears.”

“Like many Nazis, Julius Streicher was a true believer. When he first heard Hitler speak for three hours, he said, ‘Everyone could feel it, this man speaks as a messenger sent from heaven at a time when hell had opened to devour everything.’”

“When Streicher,” Giovanni said, “began publishing smears against the Jews, didn’t they fight back?”

“He was sued for defamation by prominent Jews a number of times. While the accusations printed in *Der Stürmer* were proven in court to be outrageous lies, Streicher was merely fined and went on printing accusations like the Jews were guilty of ‘blood libel.’ His strategy was not aimed at winning a legal victory, but to use the courtroom as a means of manipulating the press into repeating ad infinitum, false accusations against the Jews.

“What’s blood libel?”

“A false accusation inherited from medieval times — Jews kidnap and murder Christian children to use their blood to make their matzo. A special edition in 1934 of *Der Stürmer* published on the front page an anti-Semitic caricature of Jews with distorted facial features and misshapen bodies extracting blood from Christian children for use in religious rituals. When charged with attacking a religion, Streicher countered that he was attacking a race, not a religion. Convicted and sentenced to two months in prison, on the day of his release, hundreds of followers were awaiting outside the prison to cheer his defiant stand. Streicher was a hero and Nazi membership was growing by leaps and bounds. Streicher’s strategy, ‘No matter how outrageous the lie — something always sticks.’”

“Streicher was cunning,” Giovanni said. “He’d devised a way to use the press as a publicity machine.”



Martyrdom of Simon von Trent. Blood Libel accused Jews of kidnapping and murdering the children of Christians by draining their blood – Woodcut by Michel Wolgemut, Nürnberg 1493, Source, Hartmann Schedels Weltchronnik, public domain, Wikimedia



German Chancellor Adolf Hitler, 1938 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

***Discussion is impossible with someone who claims not
to see the truth, but already to possess it.***

— Romain Rolland



Anti-Semitic fliers distributed in Kiev, Ukraine, 1910 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia. “Christians, take care of your children!!! It will be Jewish Passover on 17 March.”



Germans reading *Der Stürmer*, 1935. Sign reads “With the *Stürmer* Against Judea.” – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“*Der Stürmer* was a big success, even distributed to South American and the United States. Hitler loved it and ordered *Stürmerkasten*, glass display cases set up in many cities to be read on the street corners displaying sheets of *Der Stürmer* for people who couldn’t afford to buy the paper. Anti-Semitism was the strongest weapon in Hitler’s propaganda machine and he encouraged Streicher in every way. *Der Stürmer* was the one periodical that Hitler read with great enthusiasm from cover to cover. Streicher set up a ‘Letter Box’ where readers could send in accusations of Jewish crimes, a public forum to give false testimony, an idea that the Gestapo later used to locate their victims. After Streicher was appointed Gauleiter of Franconia in Bavaria which included Nuremberg, he wielded enormous power. He was untouchable. During Kristallnacht in 1938, Streicher ordered the burning of the Great Synagogue of Nuremberg.”

“There were so many demons in the Third Reich,” Giovanni reflected, “it’s hard to keep track. While Hitler was picking up support from the common people, what about the power elite?”

“That was a different story. “In the 1920s, the corporate leaders and landowners typically supported the Catholic Center Party or the German National People’s Party. Many opposed Hitler — thought he was a populist agitator, a demagogue. One businessman said Hitler was the ranting clown outside the circus who bangs his drum to draw people in.”

“If the business class was strongly against Hitler, how could he change their minds?”

“While the Nazi Party had increased their percentage of the vote in the Reichstag, from 7% to 14%, Hitler realized he couldn’t win a majority without the support of the German business class. To win the next election he needed their money. One of the industrialists who financed Hitler early on was Frederick ‘Fritz’ Thyssen who’d inherited his father’s empire in the 1920’s and formed the giant steel trust Vereinigte Stahlwerke which controlled 75% of Germany’s iron ore and 50% of coal mine production, 33,000 acres of mines and factories, a 1,000 mile railway system, a dozen shipping ports, 200 power stations, and housing for the families of 60,000 employees that during the war increased to 200,000. Like other industrialists, Thyssen, a conservative nationalist, supported the German National People’s Party.”

“The Communist Party,” Giovanni said, “was growing leaps and bounds. That’s what the conservatives and monarchists feared — the communists would rise up against the weak Weimar government.”



Save the East, A DNVP, German Nationalist People's Party poster with a Tuetonic knight being attacked by a Pole and a socialist – Unknown author, source, Michael Burleigh, public domain, Wikimedia



The DNVP, German Nationalist People's Party, campaigns for Paul von Hindenburg in the March 1925 election – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“The Communist Party,” Giovanni said, “was growing leaps and bounds. That’s what the conservatives and monarchists feared — the communists would rise up against the weak Weimar government.”

“Right. After the Bolshevik revolution, *Revolutionsfurcht*, fear of revolution swept over Germany, the upper class and the industrialists feared that it was possible the communists workers could overthrow the government in a Soviet-style revolution. When the French occupied the Ruhr industrial zone in 1921 and began delivering edicts to the German corporations, Thyssen became a radical nationalist overnight and refused to recognize the legality of the occupying French power. He was arrested and fined by the French military court, instantly making him a hero with the Germans. Thyssen despised the oppressive Versailles Treaty which was sapping German’s strength. His hatred led him to contribute as much as 1 million marks to the Nazi Party. Believing that Hitler was a bulwark against the growing Communist Party, Thyssen began asking other industrialists to give to the Nazi Party.”

“But you said that the businessmen saw Hitler as a demagogue.”

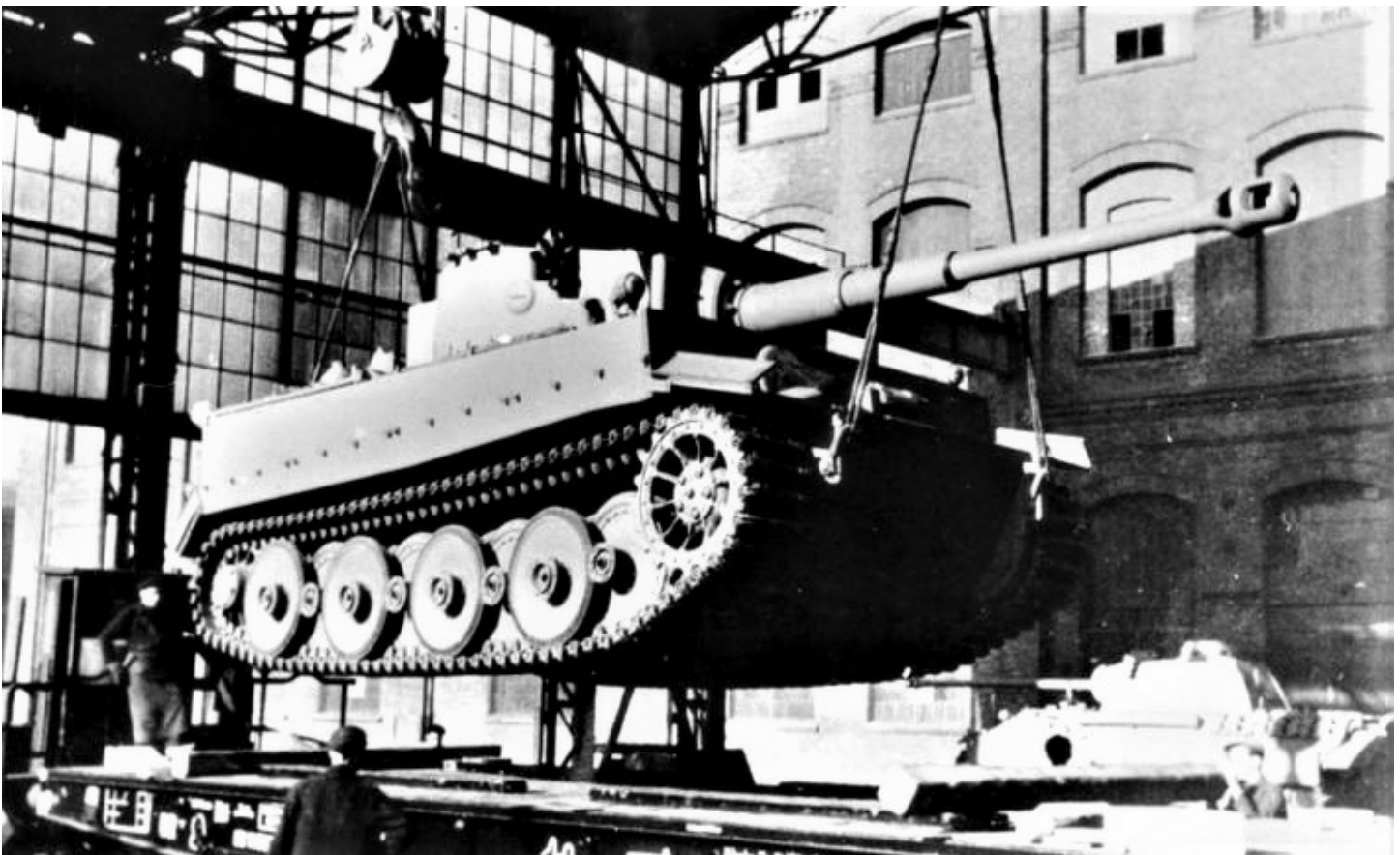
“While that was true, at the same time, the industrialists believed that with their enormous financial power they’d be able to control him.”

“Lord, were they wrong.”

“Hitler sold German businessmen on the idea that he was going to weaken trade unions, and make Germany great again by clandestinely putting the economy on a wartime footing. Even before the 1933 election, several financiers and industrialists began in the 1920’s to transfer money to Hitler through hidden accounts in various banks. In the early 1920’s, Alfried Krupp, and several other business leaders had decided Hitler would stimulate business and began secretly giving substantial sums to the Nazis which were laundered by the Delbrück Schickler Bank through an account administered by Hitler’s agent, Rudolf Hess.”

“Krupp,” Giovanni said, “was one of the largest firms in all of Europe.”

“Krupp was a symbol of Germany’s industrial strength. Based at Essen, the Krupp conglomerate of industries produced the devastating 420mm Big Bertha guns in World War One and the Panzer tanks in



Panzer IV Tiger I at the Krupp Henschel plant being loaded onto a special rail car – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Krupp production of Panzer Tiger I tanks powered by 700 hp at 3,000 rpm, turret armor of 4 inches – German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

World War Two. Krupp industries exported to America the steel that built the railroads of America and formed the steel of the Manhattan skyscrapers including the stainless steel stock called Enduro KA-2 for New York City's magnificent Art Deco Chrysler skyscraper erected in 1929, the tallest building in the world of the time. Fritz Thyssen persuaded the Association of German Industrialists to donate 3 million Reichsmarks to the Nazi Party. Hitler and his financial representative Rudolf Hess began having a series of meetings in the early 1930s with German industrialists to promote his plan of achieving a resurgent economy and full employment. He told them he was planning to begin a secret program to build the strongest armed forces in the world.”

“Which was forbidden,” Giovanni said, “by the Versailles Treaty.”

“Militarization was Hitler's ace. The steel, coal, and fabricating industries were salivating over the possibilities. One of his earliest industrial supporters was Emil Kirdorf who, right after the Franco-Prussian War, began his climb to become the chief operating officer of GBAG, the largest mining consortium in Europe. Kirdorf despised the Weimar Republic, the communists, and the trade unions. After being introduced to Hitler in 1927, the industrialist was so impressed with the Nazi Party's vow to destroy both the despised communists



Shell-Haus in the Tiergarten district of Berlin built in 1930-31, a masterpiece by German architect Emil Fahrenkamp has been designated a historical monument – Jörg Zägel, Wikimedia. After Nazi forces annexed Austria, Sir Henri Deterding’s Royal Dutch Shell’s subsidiary Rhenania-Ossag was given control of petroleum distribution. In partnership with Standard Oil and IG Farben, Shell exported airplane fuel to Nazi Germany during Hitler’s 1930s armament expansion.

and the trade unions, he began funding Hitler’s NSDAP. The story is told that when Hitler told him that he had so many debts, he once considered shooting himself, Kirdorf gave him 100,000 marks on the spot.

“Another entrepreneur who began funneling funds to Hitler was Anglo-Dutch businessman, Sir Henri Deterding, chairman of Royal Dutch Shell who had been knighted by the Queen for supplying petroleum to the Allies during World War One. In the 1930’s Deterding became an ardent supporter of the Nazis. Called the ‘Napoleon of Oil,’ Deterding purchased the Rothschild family’s Azerbaijan oil fields. A brilliant trader, Deterding was eager for Hitler to attack Russia for that would make it possible to take control of the Baku oil fields. Dutch cartoons of the era show Deterding handing bags of money to the Nazis. During the annexation of Austria in the Anschluss, German forces entered Vienna and Deterding’s German Shell subsidiary Rhenania-Ossag was given control over operating companies in Austria and Czechoslovakia where many of its directors were Nazis officers involved in war planning.”

“What we don’t know,” Giovanni said, “about the interlocking webs of international finance.”

“There’s one extraordinary fact that Americans aren’t aware of.”

“What’s that?”

“The support of American corporations for Hitler. Many of the German industrialists financing Hitler were predominantly directors of cartels associated with American capitalists. Subsidiaries of these firms operated in both the U.S. and Germany. Hitler’s backers were not primarily firms of solely German origin. Except for Thyssen and Siemens, in most cases they were multi-national firms like IG Farben which had been built up by American loans in the 20’s and 30’s, firms with American directors and financial participation. Averell and Roland Harriman were major investors in the Thyssen controlled Union Banking Corporation in New York. Wall Street had financial participation in all sides of the political spectrum — Soviet socialism and Nazi corporate socialism. Perhaps the most tragic case of corporate engagement with the Nazi regime was International Business Machines.”

“IBM?”

“Historians have always wondered about the speed and precision with which the Nazis were able to identify and locate European Jewry. Recently, a researcher in Germany discovered a Hollerith machine and log books from Auschwitz-Birkenau. It documented that IBM’s Hollerith data processing machine was used to control data on prisoners.”

“What is a Hollerith machine?”

“IBM developed their data processing machines based on American inventor Herman Hollerith’s 1889 patent for a machine designed to record and sort data. Hollerith’s doctoral thesis at Columbia University, ‘An Electric Tabulating System,’ described a method of recording datum on card stock by punching holes in specific locations, then sorting the cards by an electro-mechanical machine. Hollerith’s invention that won the competition for a counting system for the 1890 U.S. census made obsolete the laborious hand written and manually compiled system of recording data that had been used for centuries. Founded on the idea that datum could be recorded by the occurrence or absence of a punched hole at a specific location to indicate a person’s address, age, sex, ethnic origin, profession, and marital status, Hollerith’s invention became the standard in census taking not only in America but in most of the countries of Europe. Shortly before World War One, Hollerith’s Tabulating Machine Company merged with other computing companies and in the 1920’s was renamed International Business Machines.”



Census worker with Hollerith pantograph punching machine, 1940 – Unknown author, U.S. National Archives, public domain, Wikimedia

“Are you going to tell me,” Giovanni said, “that the Nazis used IBM machines to record Jewish census data?”

“You guessed correctly. Before they could exterminate all the Jews in Germany, they first had to be identified, not only those who were religiously observant or lived in ghettos, but those who were assimilated, even those who had converted to Christianity. To research generations of communal, church, and governmental records was a monumental task and the only computing system existing in the 1930’s was the IBM Hollerith D-11 card sorting machine. For the systematic Germans, IBM machines were ideal to not only document the Jews, but to run the trains of the Reichsbahn, German rail system, and enable Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler and Adolf Eichmann to track slave labor and those marked for extermination. IBM’s German subsidiary, DEHOMAG, an acronym for Deutsche Hollerith-Maschinen Gesellschaft, installed

1	1	3	0	2	4	10	On	S	A	C	E	a	c	e	g			EB	SB	Ch	Sy	U	Sh	Hk	Br	Rm
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3	0	0	0	0	W	20			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
A	1	1	1	1	0	25	A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
B	2	2	2	2	5	30	B	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
C	3	3	3	3	0	3	C	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
D	4	4	4	4	1	4	D	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
E	5	5	5	5	2	C	E	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
F	6	6	6	6	A	D	F	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
G	7	7	7	7	B	E	G	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
H	8	8	8	8	a	F	H	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
I	9	9	9	9	b	c	I	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9

Punched card of Hollerith machine, 1895 – U.S. Library of Congress, public domain

thousands of IBM machines in the rail stations and death camps, many machines housed in concrete bunkers to protect against aerial bombardment.”

“Did IBM really know what their machines were going to be used for?”

“IBM didn’t sell the Hollerith machines outright. They leased and maintained them. There were thousands of tabulating machines all over Germany and later Poland, the Netherlands, and Vichy France, used to track Jews. IBM engineers individually designed cards for each specific purpose and trained the SS to operate the machines.”

“IBM,” Giovanni said, waving his hands. “IBM had to know the reality.”

“Without a doubt. You can’t maintain machines in a concentration camp and not know it’s a concentration camp. They have a distinct odor. IBM engineers created codes for the concentration and factory camps. In each camp, IBM set up a Hollerith Department to process the cards, creating punch-card codes to identify each prisoner.”

“What did the codes record?”

“Many things — location, first of all. Auschwitz was 001, Buchenwald was 002, Dachau was 003, the numbers going higher as they added later camps, like Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia. They described the category of the prisoner — Homosexual was 3, Anti-social 9, Jew was 8, Gypsy was 12. The cards documented the form of death. Natural causes was 3, Execution was 4, Suicide was 5, Gas chamber was 6. A euphemism was used for the gas chamber — ‘special treatment.’”

“Why in the world would the Nazis want to meticulously record such infamy?”



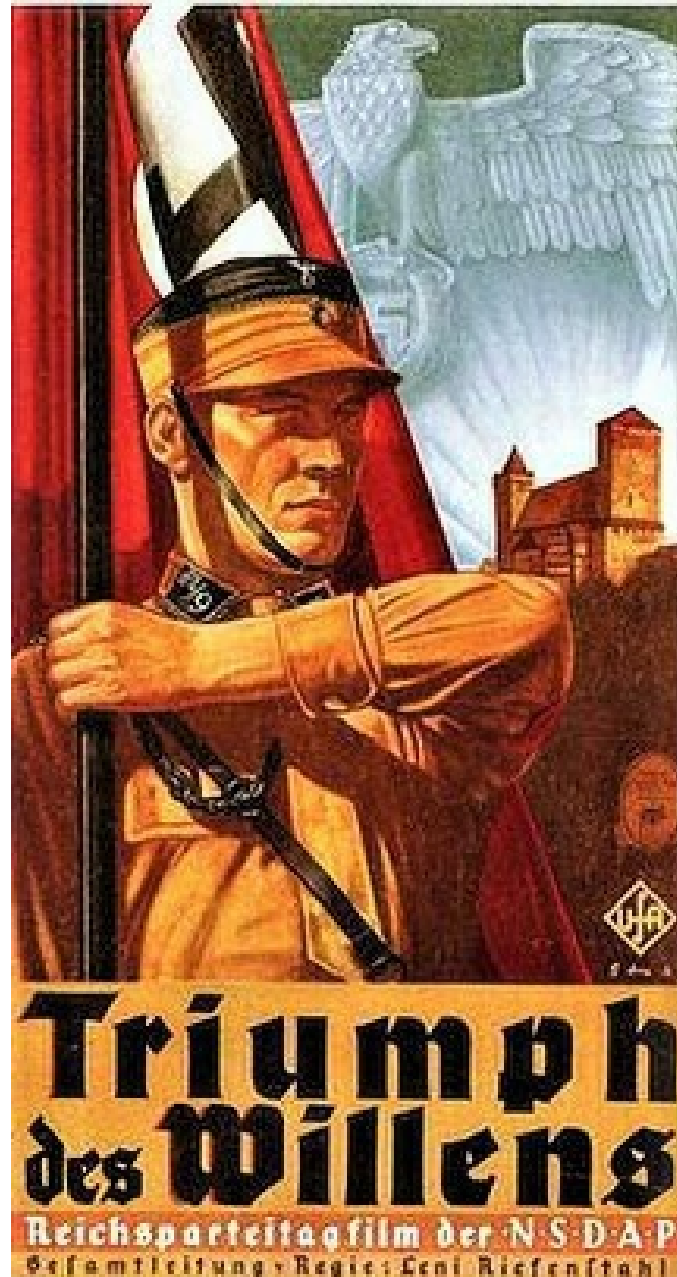
Nazi Death Camp, Auschwitz, Poland – AAR Studio, Shutterstock, 190409756

“That’s a good question. Why didn’t they destroy it? They tried at the very end, but when all was crumbling, it proved impossible to hide everything. It had to be meticulous, just to track the various kinds of prisoners and the work force, just like any modern corporation would. From Himmler and Heydrich down the ranks, the SS men were proud of the operation’s efficiency. When one is a true believer, you are proud of your work — proud of your infamy. Every time I ask myself how people could allow themselves to do such things, I imagine Franz Kafka’s story *In the Penal Colony* — the true believer who operates the killing machine, dies by the very device that he had commanded.”

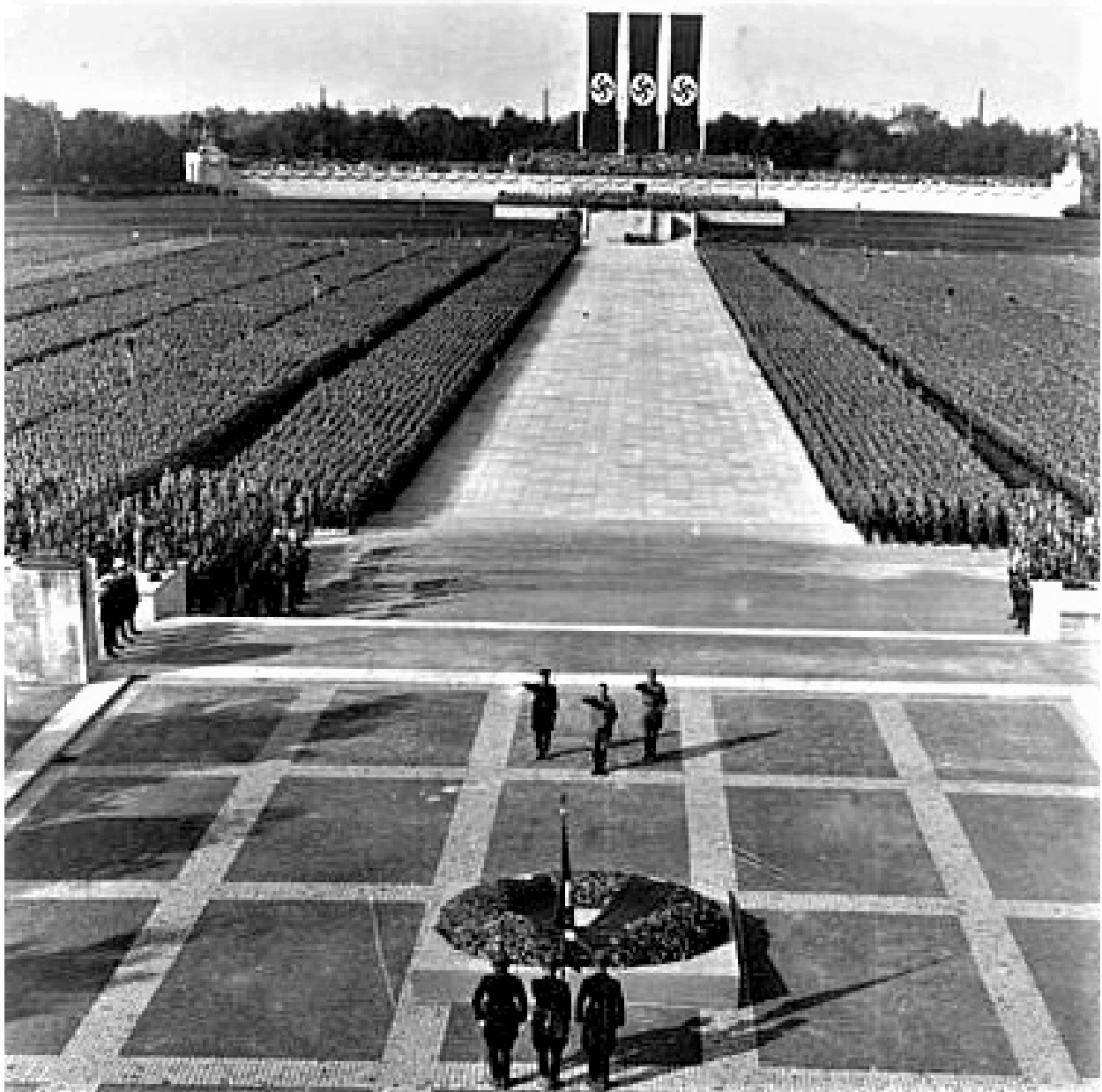
“America corporations,” Giovanni mused, “are more complicated than I thought.”

“Multi-national corporations are driven foremost by profits, not love of country. While a corporation’s main goal is to maximize profit, British philosopher John Locke said that a government’s purpose is to insure that all people achieve equal rights and to defend all citizens equally. A government’s focus is to work for the benefit of all the people, while a corporation’s goal is to work for the benefit of the stockholders, investing wherever the greatest profits are to be made. If that means moving manufacturing plants overseas, then that’s what the corporations are going to do.

“During the ‘World Peace through World Trade’ conference in Berlin, 1937, Hitler awarded IBM president Thomas J. Watson, the Order of the German Eagle with Star, specially created to honor a foreigner who’d done so much for the Third Reich. Watson’s award was bestowed three years after the 1934 Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg, a ceremony of unsurpassed grandeur since Caesar’s Roman Legions. At Nuremberg a million Germans worshipped the Führer and the sacred German State — a sea of voices rising in the night, a torrent of transcendent passion in a Mesopotamian religious rite. Leni Riefenstahl made a film of the 1934 Nuremberg Rally, *Triumph of the Will*, have you seen it?



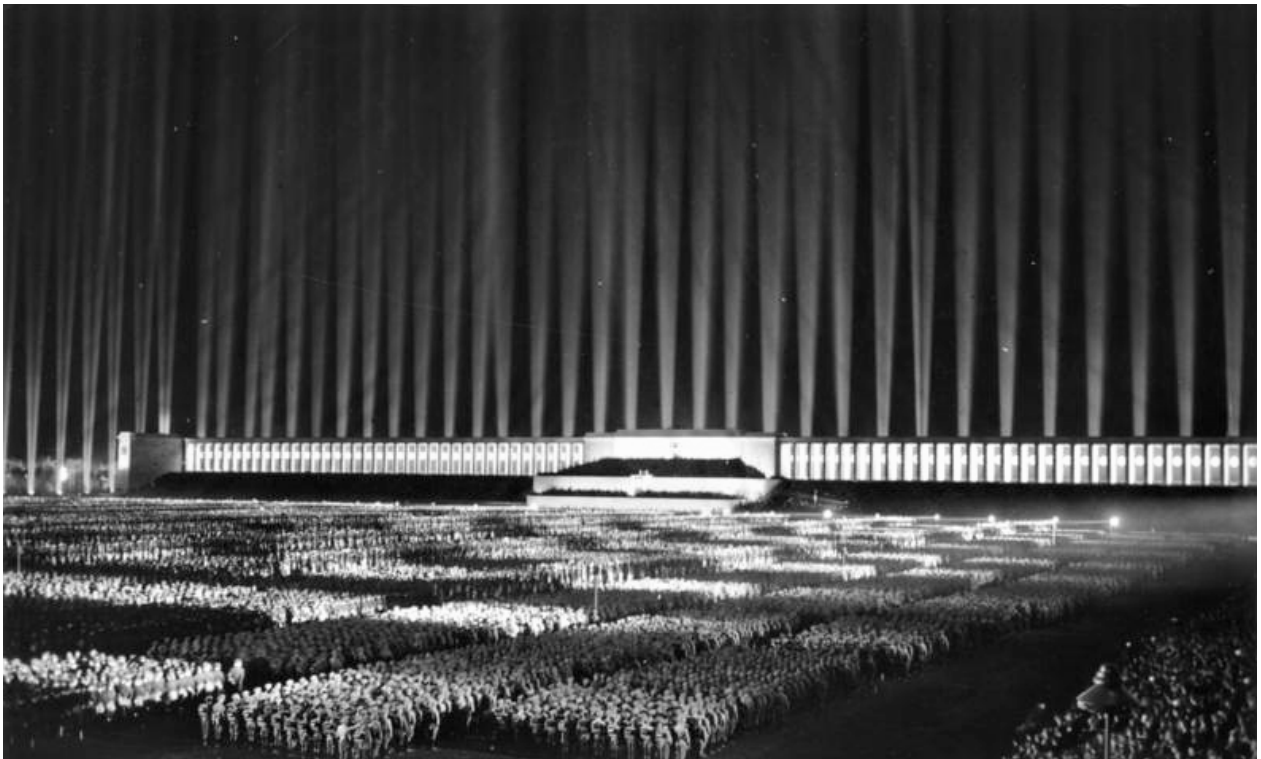
Poster for Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 propaganda film *Triumph des Willens*. Authorized by Adolf Hitler, the film proclaimed Germany's return as a global power. Led by Hitler, Germany would achieve greatness again – Author, Universum Film AG, Fair use, Wikimedia



Honoring of the Dead at the 1934 Nuremberg Rally filmed for *Triumph of the Will* – Author, George Pahl, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia. Standing in the foreground of the Hall of Honor, giving the Nazi salute, left to right, SS leader Heinrich Himmler, Chancellor Adolf Hitler, SA leader Viktor Lutze, from left to right, before the Hall of Honor. The Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg, 1934 was attended by 700,000 with 160,000 Nazis in uniform.

“I’ve not even heard of it.”

“Mussolini probably suppressed it in Italy — quite likely didn’t want to be outshined by a rival dictator. It’s no wonder you didn’t see the film. It came out in 1934 when you were only three. Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* knocked the socks off the Germans. The succession of images, the rhythmic flow mesmerized them. Martial, massive, and militant, it immortalized the Nazi State. Despite the hypnotic and histrionic magnificence, its worship of the state makes me want to throw up. Despite its cinematic artistry, I find it abominable. It stirs a loathing in me that knows no bounds.



Albert Speer's Cathedral of Light, 1936 Nuremberg rally. 152 anti-aircraft searchlights cast vertical beams into the sky around Zeppelin Field – Unknown author, Federal German Archives. Albert Speer, Hitler's architect for the Reich Chancellery and the reconstruction of Berlin, was appointed Reich Minister of Armaments and War Production by Hitler in 1934. William L. Shirer, American journalist for the Hearst Company reporting on the Nuremberg Rally, wrote, "I was a little shocked at the faces when Hitler finally appeared on the balcony for a moment. They reminded me of the crazed expressions I once saw in the back country of Louisiana on the faces of some Holy Rollers . . . they looked up at him as if he were a Messiah, their faces transformed into something positively inhuman."



Leni Riefenstahl and her film crew filming beside Hitler who is saluting the troops during a parade in the medieval city of Nuremberg, September 1934 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“Memories of the occupation are still fresh. As a girl of seventeen, I learned how beauty disguises evil. The world was never the same after the war. When we lost Papa, Mama died and our family disintegrated.”

“I can imagine,” Giovanni said, “how the artistic skill of her film enrages you. Riefenstahl’s cinematic images prepared the way for Germany’s invasion of France.”

“And the destruction of millions of people. “Whatever one thinks of the film, the splendor of the 1934 Nuremberg Rally made it clear — Hitler was hell bent on aggression. In the outside world beyond Germany, people put blindfolds over their eyes, refused to see what they could not face. They couldn’t summon up the courage to stop a mad man in his tracks.”

“Other than IBM, what other American companies helped the Nazi?”

“The auto manufacturers were extremely important. The Führer’s dream was to motorize Germany the way Ford and General Motors had put the U.S. on wheels. At the 1933 Berlin Motor Show, Hitler announced two programs, one to manufacture an affordable people’s car on a massive scale and secondly, to sponsor an official state motor racing program and develop a high speed German automotive industry. To achieve a motorized nation, Hitler required the help of the two companies which had put America on wheels — Fordwerke and the General Motors subsidiary Adam Opel AG. When Alfred P. Sloan became leader of General Motors after the severe recession of 1920-21, he revolutionized the company. Under Sloan’s management, by long range planning, multiplicity of models, planned obsolescence and sheer drive, GM overtook Ford, transforming GM into the largest corporation in the world. An engineer educated at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Sloan despised President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal. Sloan believed that Roosevelt’s Social Security program, his regulation of corporations, and support for labor unions was destroying the American way of life by putting politicians and bureaucrats in charge of decision-making, men who were unqualified to run the country. America, Sloan declared, had been made great by corporations ruled by corporate leaders. GM was bigger than mere governments. Corporations should create their own foreign policy. ‘Industry,’ Sloan said, ‘must assume the role of enlightened industrial statesmanship.’ In contrast to the liberalism of Roosevelt, Sloan admired the strength, irrepressible determination, and sheer enormity of Hitler's vision for a great nation.”

“How strange,” Giovanni said, “for the head of an American business, to praise the authoritarian leader of a hostile nation.”



Opel Blitz LKW Wehrmacht truck, Italy, 1944 – Source, Foto Funke cropped from German Federal Archives, Wikimedia. At the beginning of the war, General Motors German subsidiary Opel AG was Germany's largest truck producer. Albert Speer ordered the construction of the Opelwerk Brandenburg factory where until 1944, more than 130,000 Blitz trucks were manufactured. The modern 1937 overhead valve engine was so like Chevrolet engines that disabled three-ton Blitzes abandoned by the retreating Wehrmacht were quickly restored to operation by the Allies using Chevy-GMC parts.

“Germany was preparing for war and GM was helping to mobilize the Third Reich, while the U.S. was doing little to prepare for war. The mobile warfare pioneered by Heinz Guderian whose Panzer tanks would later break the French at Sedan in 1940, replaced the horse drawn caissons, artillery, and ammunition wagons of World War One with rapid motorized vehicles. GM’s German subsidiary Adam Opel AG began building the ‘Blitz,’ the three-ton truck which would become the workhorse of Hitler’s Blitzkrieg. Germany was lacking the new technology of tetraethyl lead gasoline which boosted the octane for more powerful performance. They got the technology from GM and Standard Oil which partnered with the IG Farben conglomerate to construct plants to produce high octane ethyl gasoline that drove the Nazi war machine through Poland, Russia, and France. While helping Hitler build an industrial powerhouse, at the same time, GM was discouraging American cities from building an alternative transportation, an electric mass transit. The automobile remained king, preserving America’s addiction to oil.”

“Did Opel,” Giovanni said, “buy into Hitler’s demonic control of Germany?”

“Sloan’s subsidiary knew that to succeed they’d do nothing to cross Hitler. Opel contributed thousands of Reichsmarks to the Nazi Party paramilitaries, loaning without charge cars and trucks to Storm Troopers engaged in intimidation and extortion of funds. Opel’s publication became a tool of Goebbels plan to brainwash workers. SS officers worked as internal security and Hitler’s fanatical tirades were broadcast over speakers in the factories to inspire the workers. Car dealers with Jewish blood were terminated. Shortly after the German annexation of Austria, Hitler awarded Germany’s highest honor for civilians, the German Eagle with Cross, to the head of GM operations James D. Mooney, ‘for service to the Reich.’ It was only a few weeks before the looting and massacre of Jews during Kristallnacht in November 1938.”

“I’d think that American stockholders of GM would be outraged by Sloan’s support of Hitler’s economy.”

“Sloan responded to his critics by saying that GM was in business to make a profit. GM must not alienate Germany by involving itself in political decisions. How the Nazi ran the country, Sloan said, was ‘not the concern of General Motors.’ GM’s workforce in Germany expanded from 17,000 in 1934 to 27,000 in 1938, GM’s Opel growing to three times the size of Daimler-Benz. Sloan agreed with the German industrialists — Hitler was good for business. Once Hitler’s Blitzkrieg was unleashed, GM’s Opel’s Brandenburg factory stopped making autos and retooled to produce the engines for the Luftwaffe’s JU-88 bombers which devastated London during the Battle of Britain.”



Junkers Ju 88 A-1 bomber and crew, 1940 – Author, Pilz, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Ju 88s over Astypalaia, Greece, 1943 – Author, Bauer, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia. Designed in the mid-1930s, the Ju 88 was planned to be too fast for fighters to intercept. The assembly line continued from 1936 to 1945, producing more than 16,000 Ju 88s, the most versatile combat two engine aircraft of the war, serving as a night fighter, bomber, dive bomber, torpedo bomber, and reconnaissance aircraft. In 1943, the *Mistel*, German for mistletoe, was developed as a *Huckepack*, "Piggyback, composite aircraft comprised of a piloted fighter aircraft joined by struts to a Ju 88 bomber below loaded with heavy explosives, the combination craft flown to its target by the fighter pilot who released the unmanned Ju 88 bomber to strike its target while the fighter returned to base. The 4,000-pound shaped charge warhead of the *Mistel* could penetrate several meters of reinforced concrete.



Ju 88 Assembly line, 1941 – Author, Seiler, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“What a crazy contradiction of national loyalties!” Giovanni exclaimed smacking his thigh. “GM was building armaments for both sides.”

“It’s true that GM had simultaneous contracts with the U.S. and Germany. GM Opel churned out the great majority of the trucks for Hitler’s Blitzkrieg invasion of Poland and Russia. Opel manufactured land mines for the Wehrmacht and detonators for the torpedoes that sunk American ships. After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and Germany declared war on the United States, Gen. Lucius Clay, chief of war materiel contracts, ordered weapons from GM, guaranteeing cost-plus contracts, subsidies, and tax right offs. GM was making hay off of both war powers. Secretary of War Henry Stimson said, ‘you have to let business make money or business won’t work.’”

”I’ve heard Hitler was an admirer of Henry Ford.”

“Hitler was inspired by Ford. He admired Ford’s anti-Semitism and the mass production techniques he’d perfected. However the Ford brand invoked an American identity and that wasn’t good in Germany. Ford Motors tried to ingratiate itself with the Third Reich by setting racial restrictions on employment, but due to the size of GM’s factories being greater, Ford was given fewer contracts. Nevertheless, Ford became the second largest producer of trucks for the Wehrmacht. When the U.S. Army liberated the Fordwerke’s plants in Cologne and Berlin, they discovered starving prisoners of war and slave workers from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union confined behind barbed wire.”



Forced concentration camp labor at U-boat pens in Bremen, Germany, 1944 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Forced labor building Kriegsmarine Valentin U-Boat bunker at Bremen, German 1944 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“Incredible,” Giovanni said. “How heart breaking. I’ve seen the photographs. How could they work in that pitiful condition? They were skeletons. What was Volkswagen involvement? Did they use slave labor too?”

“All large corporations did it. I don’t think there were any exceptions. There just wasn’t enough manpower to fight the battle that Hitler had taken on. Volkswagen, the ‘People’s Car,’ became Hitler’s pet project. While GM and Ford were churning out big trucks, Volkswagen was to make an affordable auto for the masses. The Volkswagen was to Germany what Ford’s Model A had been to America — the common man’s car. Hitler chose to erect a state-owned factory to build the Volkswagen using a pioneering design by Ferdinand Porsche, propelled by an air-cooled, flat-four, rear-mounted engine. The Volkswagen prototypes of 1938 were called the KdF-Wagen. In German, KdF for, *Kraft durch Freude* meaning ‘Strength through Joy,’”

“The Nazi’s name for Volkswagen,” Giovanni said, “‘Strength through Joy,’ sounds like something the Soviet Union would call a car.”



KdF-Wagen W30, 1937 - Public domain, Mercedes Benz-Archives



Autobahn mit zwei KdF-Wagen, Volkswagens on the German autobahn, January 1943 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Porsche 356S 1500 GS Carrera. 1956 – Massimo Campanari, Shutterstock

“Porsche,” I said, “was ahead of his contemporaries in automobile design. He tested the Volkswagen’s body in a wind-tunnel to lower the drag coefficient allowing greater speed with less power.”

“Drag coefficient?”

“Drag coefficient is a measurement used in aerodynamics. It’s especially critical in the design of aircraft and racing cars. Drag is the measured resistance of an automobile passing through the airstream. The more aerodynamic the body design, the lower the drag coefficient. Ferdinand Porsche’s sports cars have a low coefficient of drag and amazing road handling ability. While working for Daimler, Porsche became famous overnight for the design of the fabulous Mercedes-Benz SSK which dominated racing in the 1920’s.”

“I admire,” Giovanni said with a big grin, “the streamlined design of the Porsche 550 RS racing spyder. It’s built so low to the ground that a Formula One race driver drove the 550 under a closed railroad crossing gate in the Mille Miglia last year. The beauty of the 550 spyder is that it can be raced on the track and then driven home. When he designed his first 356, Porsche said, “I couldn’t find the sports car of my dreams, so I built it myself.’ I’ve never owned a car. It would be a dream to own a 550 RS.”

“A Porsche is a bad idea,” I said sharply. “Last month, James Dean crashed and died in a racing Porsche on a California country road. With your daredevil spirit you’d end up killing yourself.”

“You’re probably right. I don’t even know how to drive. I’ll stick to taxicabs.”



Panzer Tiger IIs attacking in France, June 1944 – Author, Wagner, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“Ferdinand Porsche,” I said, “learned a lot from Ford Motors by visiting various plants to study their mass production techniques which he applied in the manufacture of the 356 model. To explain theory of design, he said, ‘A formally harmonious product needs no decoration, it should be elevated through pure form.’ Porsche didn’t only design cars. In 1937 he joined the Nazi Party and the SS, reaching the rank of SS-Oberführer during the war while designing for the war effort. He participated in the design of the Tiger I, II, and giant 200 ton Panzer VIII Maus tank with a Krupp-designed 128 mm that could destroy Allied armored vehicles at ranges greater than 3,000 yards. Porsche even contributed to the engineering design of von Braun’s V-1 missile. Due to the severe shortage of German workers, Porsche used Soviet POWs for forced labor, a crime for which he was sentenced to prison after Germany’s loss of the war.”

“I’d think,” Giovanni said, “considering the appalling destruction that the Panzer and Tiger tanks unleashed on Europe, they’d throw away the key. What happened to the Ford factories after Germany declared war on the U.S.?”

“Ford and GM lost control. Nazi managers determined the manufacture of armaments.”



Panzer VI, (Tiger II, Königstiger) weighed 70 tonnes, protected by 4 to 7 inches of armor, armed with the long barrel 8.8 cm KwK 43 L/71 anti-tank cannon – Author, Haman, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Tiger II dual exhaust – Author, Rama, Saumur Général Estienne Museum, Wikimedia



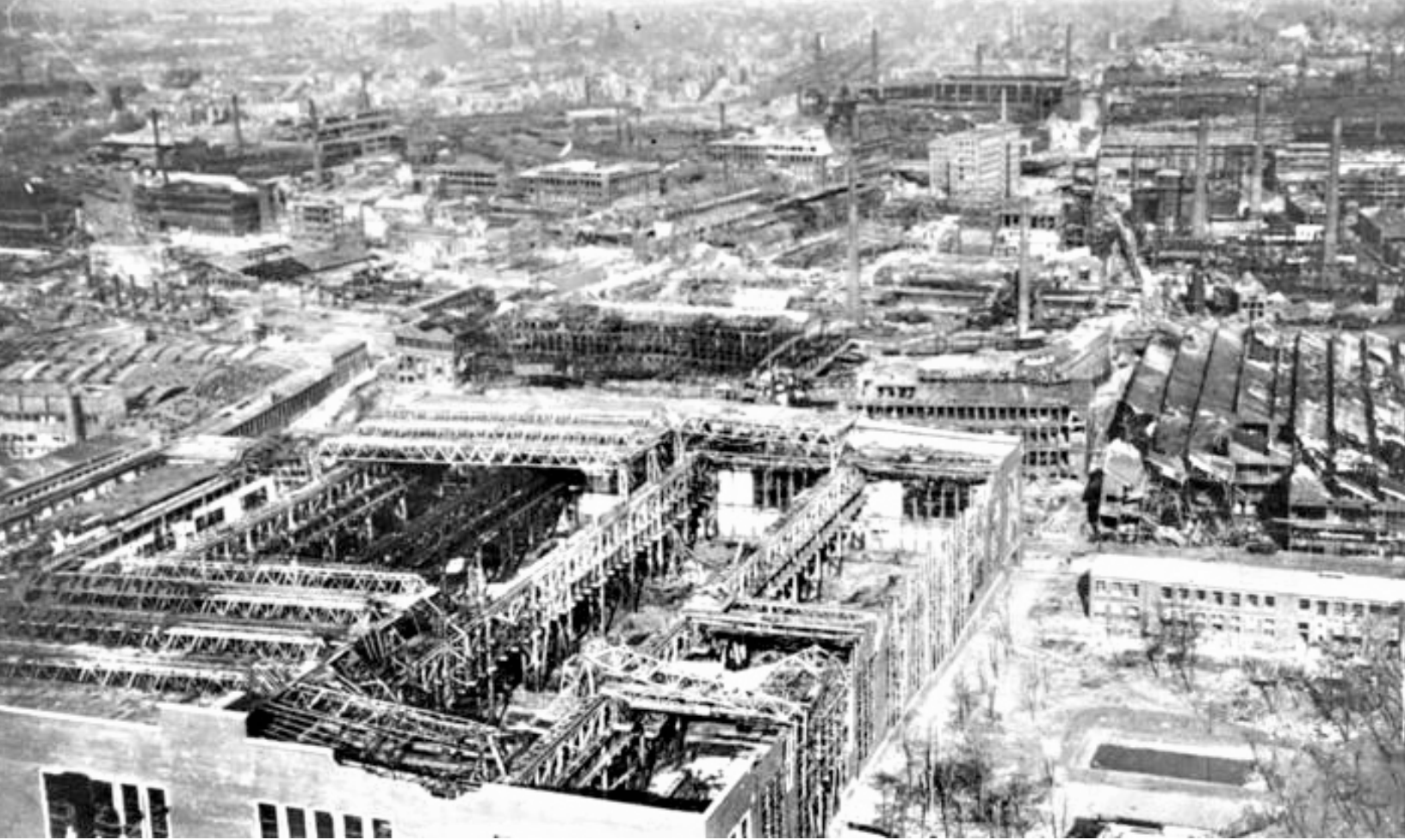
Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme commander of the Allied expeditionary forces, inspects an overturned Tiger II tank designed by Ferdinand Porsche, 1944 – Author, Acme News Photos, public domain, Wikimedia.

“Allied saturation bombing,” Giovanni said, “must have obliterated the factories of both GM and Ford.”

“True. Opel was a principle target of hundreds of Allied bombing missions because 35,000 workers at Opel were manufacturing warplanes and developing rocket technology. Upon recovering their Opel assets after the war, GM collected millions of dollars in war reparations because the Allies had bombed its German facilities.”

“It’s hard to accept that GM could make money from both sides in the war.”

“And so did Switzerland which was the commercial nexus of World War II. With its neutrality, financial secrecy laws, and an absence of strict ethics, the Swiss made business with everybody. To encourage deposits from those who were fleeing Nazi Germany, the Swiss banks tightened their banking secrecy laws to guarantee the anonymity of depositors while at the same time refusing to take Jews fleeing the Nazis. While the banks of Switzerland were guilty of being the repository for vast quantities of gold and possessions stolen from the Jews, GM was far more important to the Nazi war machine than the Swiss banks. The Germans could



Krupp industrial complex destroyed by Allied bombing, April 1945 – U.S. Signal Corps Photo, public domain, Wikimedia

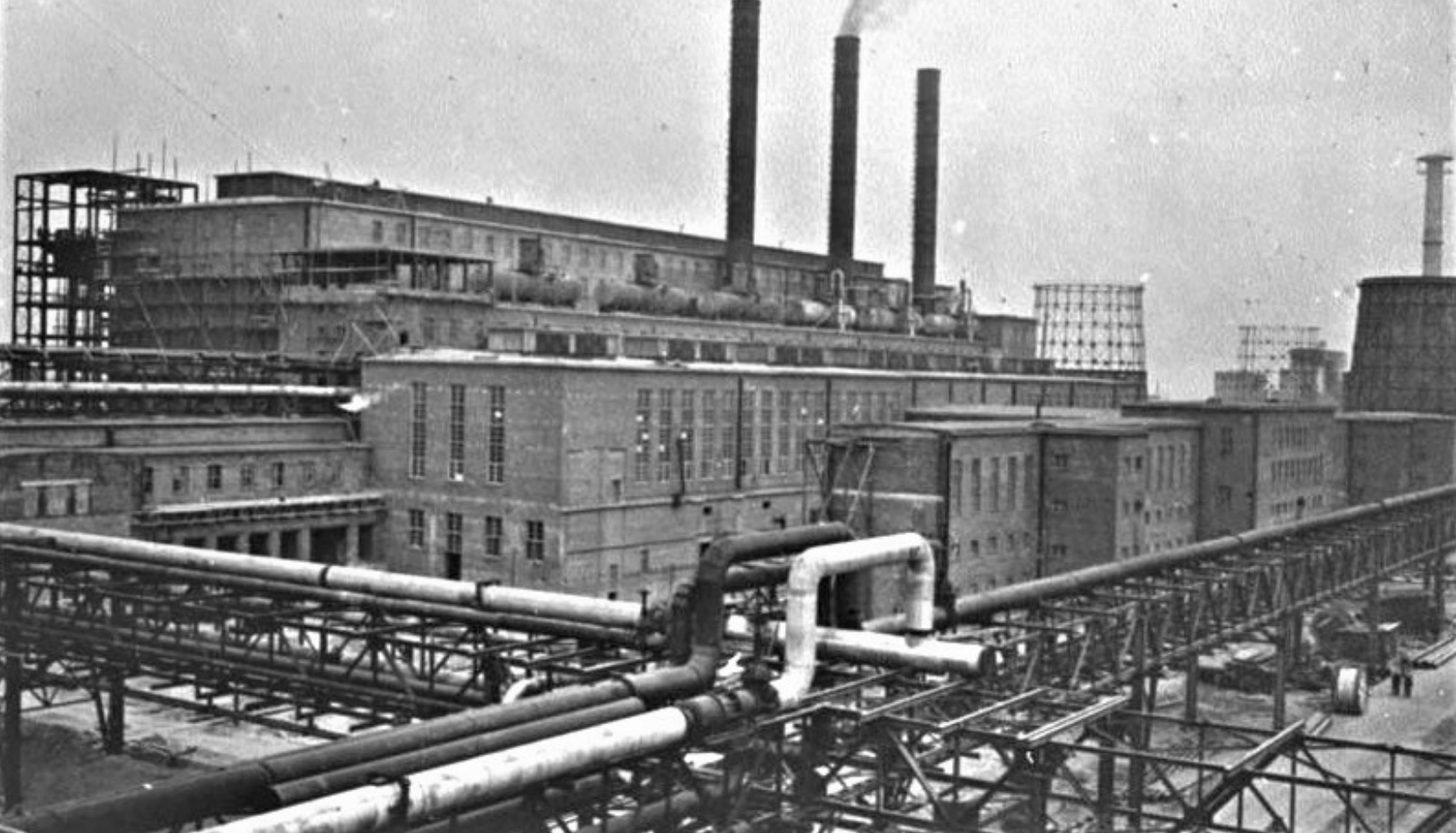
have invaded Poland and the Soviet Union without Switzerland, but they couldn't have done it without the factories of GM and Ford. The surprising thing I've learned is how heavily invested American multinational corporations were in German enterprises. American directors were on the board of some of the largest conglomerates."

"How did American business men," Giovanni said, "get so involved in Germany?"

"After the loss in World War One, the German economy was exhausted. It required infusions of capital to rebuild the economy. American corporations invested heavily in German enterprise and over time developed a web of financial liaisons. Some of the greatest names of American industrialists, Edsel Ford, officers of the Federal Reserve Bank, and Standard Oil Company officers were on the board of directors of IG Farben's subsidiary in America. During the election of 1933, the greater percent of Hitler's campaign funds were secretly provided by IG Farben."

"What did IG Farben make?"

"IG Farben was a conglomerate made up of eight chemical manufacturers, including the principal ones,



IG-Farbenwerke Auschwitz chemical factory, 1941 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia. IG-Farben, the most infamous German industrial concern during the Third Reich, used slave labor from surrounding concentration camps, 30,000 from Auschwitz alone. IG-Farben supplied the poison gas Zyklon B responsible for killing millions of people in the gas chambers during the Holocaust.

Bayer, Hoechst, and BASF, making it the largest chemical corporation in the world. IG Farben was indispensable for the war effort because Germany had its nitrate cut off from Chile.

“Why was nitrate so necessary?”

“Nitrate is essential for producing agricultural fertilizer. They had to have nitrate to produce the food to feed the soldiers. Even more important, nitrate is a key ingredient in the manufacture of gunpowder and dynamite. The IG Farben subsidiary, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Schädlingsbekämpfung, the German Corporation for Pest Control, DEGESCH for short, made Zyklon B, a pesticide that was used to snuff out millions of lives.”

“Jesus God!” Giovanni exclaimed, “That’s the same pesticide that Mussolini used to asphyxiate hundreds of thousands of Abyssinians.”

“At Auschwitz III-Monowitz, Reichsführer Himmler checked out the effectiveness of Zyklon B. After inspecting the factory of IG Farben, Himmler visited the concentration camp at Auschwitz to inspect the extermination procedure, watching the prisoners being selected before taken to the gas chambers. He was impressed. Himmler approved Zyklon B.”



Aerial photograph of Auschwitz and IG Farben plant, Poland, June 1944 – Author, National Security Council. Central Intelligence Agency, public domain, U.S. National Archives, Wikimedia

“Was IG Farben connected directly to the extermination camps?”

“IG Farben needed thousands of workers to manufacture synthetic oil and rubber, a process they’d been developing since the 1920’s. The first camp at Auschwitz was built in 1940 in Upper Silesia, once part of Prussia, that the Nazis intended to ‘Aryanize’ by killing the Polish inhabitants and replacing them with Germans. In 1941, Himmler ordered a second camp for 100,000 constructed at the village of Birkenau to house slave laborers made up of Russian prisoners of war.”



Heinrich Himmler, second from left, inspects the IG Farben plant near concentration camp Auschwitz III, Poland, 1942 – Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Forced worker on a lathe at IG Farben, Auschwitz-Monowitz, 1941 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Forced labor at the IG-Farbenwerke Auschwitz-Monowitz, 1941 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Heinrich Himmler visiting the Dachau concentration camp - Author, Friedrich Franz Bauer, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Forced labor at Sachsenhausen concentration camp, 1936 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Nazi prisoners hauling earth for the construction of the Russian camp at Mauthausen concentration camp, 1942 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Were the women and children forced to work too?”

“Only the strong ones were allowed to live. At Auschwitz, old men and women and children were killed first. They weren’t fit to work. Too costly to feed. But the younger, healthy ones were put to work in the factories. Since synthetic rubber was derived from coal and due to the closeness of the coal mines, railways, and the great number of slave labor, IG Farben built a synthetic rubber plant at Auschwitz using 10,000 forced construction laborers, paying the SS masters of the camp three Reichsmarks per hour for unskilled and four for skilled workers, an important source of income for Heinrich Himmler’s Schutzstaffel. Of the 35,000 inmates, 25,000 died of overwork, malnutrition, and disease. The partnership of industry and forced labor was so successful that IG Farben constructed another plant to produce synthetic rubber and fuels at Dwory using labor from Auschwitz III. At its peak in 1944, the factories at Auschwitz were operated by 83,000 slave laborers, those who dropped dead in their tracks replaced by train loads of incoming slaves every day.”

“Were there other corporations using slave labor besides IG Farben?”

“As far as I have discovered, all of the big manufacturers used slaves. The physically fit German men had been drafted into the armed forces. There just weren’t enough German men. It was the same story as in World War One. Hitler had learned nothing from the previous war except that panzers and trucks moved faster than horses. The Nazis couldn’t resupply the war effort with a depleted work force. Hitler’s plan of conquest was dependent on forced labor. Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring declared that forced labor was obligatory. Hitler’s architect and Minister of Armaments Albert Speer wanted to use German women in the factories to make up for the shortage of workers, but Hitler forbade it. Women’s role was in the home. By 1944, IG Farben units, BASF, Bayer, and Hoechst, had 80,000 forced laborers. Daimler-Benz had 40,000, Auto Union, 50,000, Bosch, 20,000, Volkswagen, 12,000, and Thyssen Krupp, 75,000 enslaved workers. Guenther Quandt who joined the Nazi Party after Hitler became chancellor in 1933, became a *Wehrwirtschaftsführer*, Leader in the Defense Economy, his factories manufacturing rifles, artillery, and submarine batteries, employing 50,000 slave workers from the concentration camps. Although Quandt took over the operation of industrial plants in the Nazi conquered territories and even had execution sites at his forced labor factories, he never served time after the war. The submarine docks at Bremen were built by thousands of slave workers and Mittelwerk’s underground factory in the mine tunnels at Kohnstein used thousands of forced laborers from the Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp to build V-2 ballistic missiles designed by Wernher von Braun that terrorized



Hungarian Jews arriving at Auschwitz death camp, summer 1944 – German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Auschwitz, 1945, Jewish twins used in Josef Mengele's medical experiments – Belarusian State Archive of Film and Photography, Wikimedia

England. Of the 60,000 prisoners which passed through the Mittelbau-Dora camp, a third died from exhaustion, malnutrition, disease, or execution.”

“How many slave workers did Germany have?”



Children dead of starvation, Belsen concentration camp – U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, public domain. The Nazis marked Jewish, Polish, Romani children, resister’s children, and children with mental and physical defects to be gassed, starved to death, or given phenol injections to the heart.

“In total, it’s estimated that over two million prisoners from all of the conquered territories were shipped in boxcars to the camps in a vain attempt to keep the German war machine supplied, which in the end was impossible. In the last stage of the war, after all the other death camps had been abandoned, Auschwitz-Birkenau surpassed all the others in mass executions. The Nazi realized the war would be soon ending. This was their last chance to kill the undesirables and carry out their ordained mission. To speed up the killing, they built an additional rail track directly into the Birkenau camp to get the victims to the chambers faster, often finishing off 12,000 every day. Due to the late deportations of Hungarian Jews and the liquidation of the Lodz ghetto, the gas chambers at Birkenau were working to the maximum capacity.”



Captured Jewish women in Wesselényi Street, Budapest, Hungary, October 1944 – Author, Faupel, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Auschwitz-II Birkenau, Poland, 1944. Hungarian Jews being selected for work or the gas chamber – Auschwitz Album, Yad Vashem, Wikimedia



Hungarian Jews arriving at Auschwitz II-Birkenau extermination camp, May-June, 1944 – Author, possibly SS photographers E. Hoffmann or B. Walter, Source, Yad Vashem, public domain, Wikimedia



New arrivals at Auschwitz II-Birkenau, May-June 1944 – Author, possibly SS photographers E. Hoffmann and B. Walter, Source Yad Vashem, public domain, Wikimedia



Railway to Auschwitz death camp – Dmitrijs Mihejevs, Shutterstock, 333292880



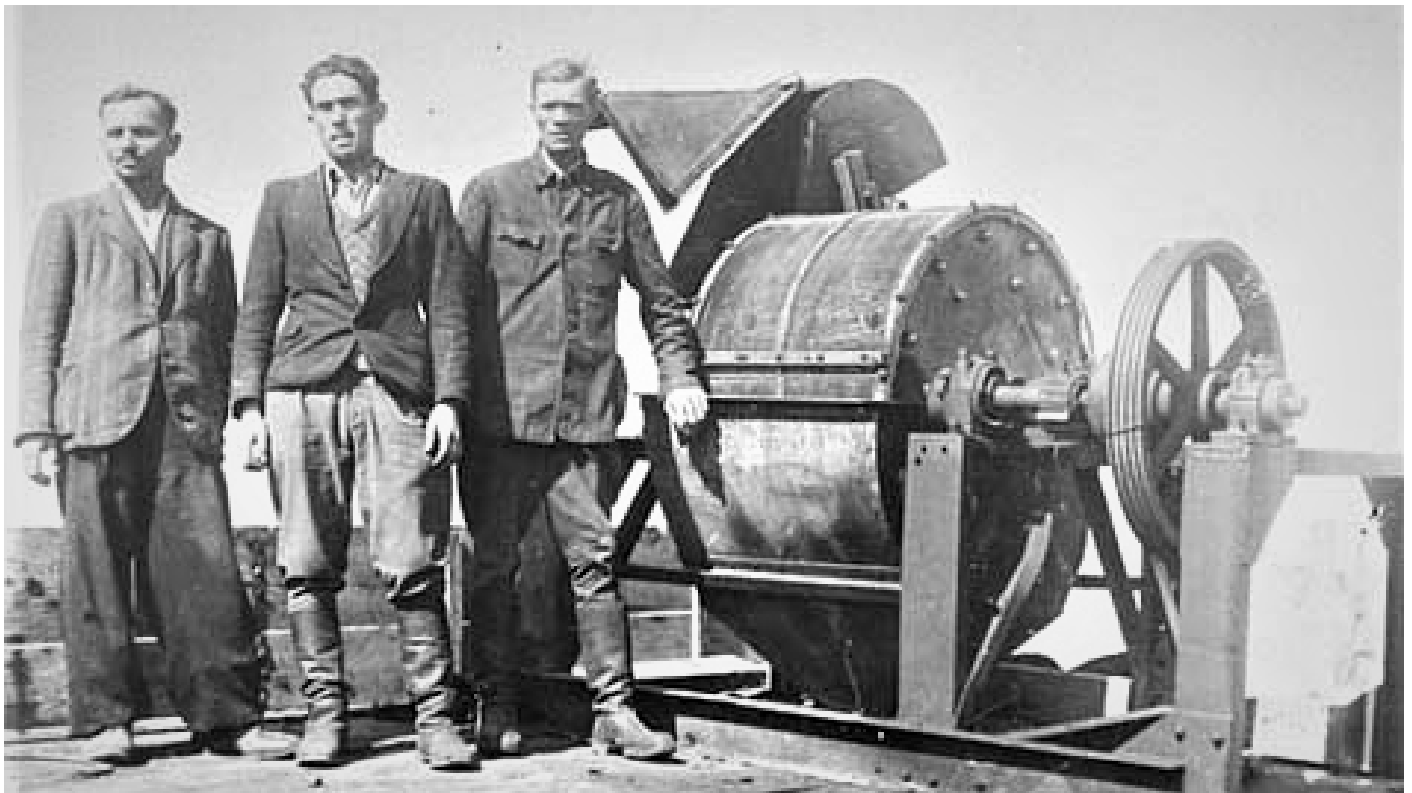
Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland – Szymon Kaczmarczyk, Shutterstock, 623262317



Buchenwald Slave Laborers, April 1945, second row, seventh from left is Elie Wiesel – U.S. National Archives, Wikimedia



Hungarian Jews arriving to Auschwitz-Birkenau – Public domain, *The Budapest Beacon*



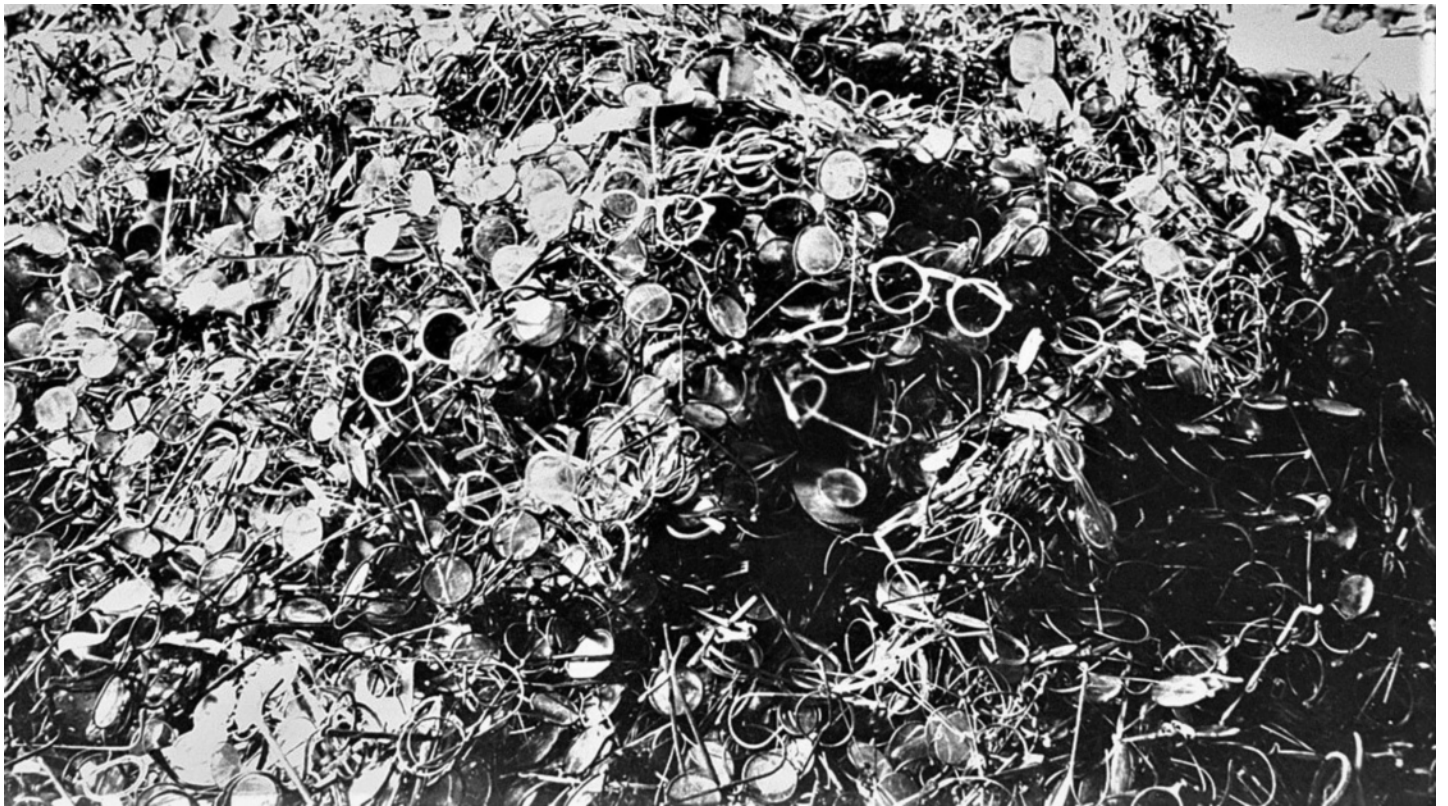
Former members of the Sonderkommado 1005 unit next to a bone crushing machine in the Janowska concentration camp. Soviet prosecutor Colonel Lev Smirnov testified at the Nuremberg Trials, February 1946, that over 200,000 Soviet citizens were murdered at Janowska – Author, Red Army photograph, Soviet Extraordinary State Commission war crimes investigation team, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, public domain, Wikimedia



Buchenwald concentration camp prisoners standing during roll call, Buchenwald, Thuringia, Germany – Unknown author, courtesy of Robert A. Schmuhl, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, public domain, Wikimedia



Women in Auschwitz II, May 1944 – Unknown author, source, Yad Vashem, public domain, Wikimedia



Eyeglasses of victims at Auschwitz, 1945 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Bones of victims in the Buchenwald crematorium on the day of liberation by the 3d U.S. Army – U.S. National Archives, Wikimedia



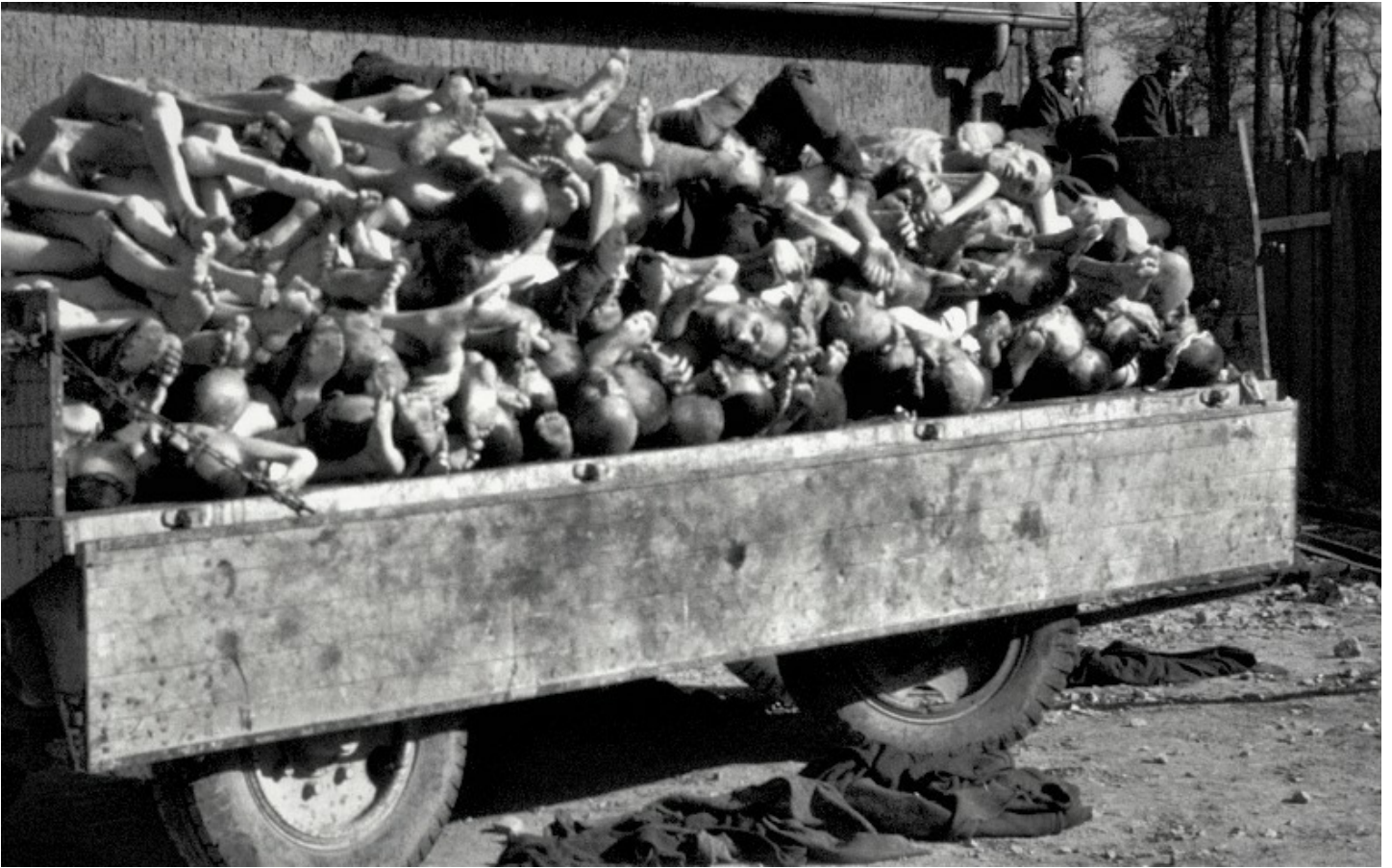
Auschwitz electrified fence – Nejrón Photo, Shutterstock, 187054097



Twenty Polish forced laborers awaiting execution, Buchenwald, Thuringia, Germany – Unknown author, courtesy of Robert A. Schmuhl, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, public domain, Wikimedia



British bombing raid, 3 and 4 April 1945, destroyed the barracks in Nordhausen, killing 1300 prisoners in the sub-camp of the Mittlebau-Dora Nazi concentrations camp – Author, T4c. James E. Myers, U.S. National Archives, public domain, Wikimedia. An overflow camp for sick and dying inmates, Nordhausen barracks eventually held 6,000 prisoners, with 100 dying each day.



Corpses outside the Buchenwald crematorium, 16 April 1945 – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, public domain, Wikimedia



Nazis were unable to cremate dead prisoners before Gen. Patton's Third Army liberated the camp – Unknown author, U.S. Dept. of Defense, U.S. National Archives, public domain, Wikimedia

“How many were killed?”

“In the very last days, 600,000 Jews were gassed, mainly Hungarian, their bodies burned in crematoriums and even in open pits making the death camps at Auschwitz the most notorious of all the camps. In total at Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1.3 million died, 1.1 million of them Jews and Gypsies. The most heart-wrenching story at Auschwitz was the Sonderkommando units, chosen from the Jewish prisoners to make up a special squad of workers to carry out the executions.”

“They had Jews killing Jews?”

“Himmler thought it a brilliant solution — having the Jews killing the Jews.”

“Their job was to take the victims in and turn the gas on?”

“And take the dead from the gas chamber and cremate the bodies. That was the hard part, burning the bodies. After the burning, they were in charge of sorting the shoes and clothes and eyeglasses into separate piles, then the sonderkommandos would bring the next bunch in.”

“I’d think they’d crack.”

“Many committed suicide.”

“I can understand that. I’d kill myself.”

“The SS guards treated the sonderkommandos better, housed them separately and let them keep some personal possessions they’d looted from the dead that they traded on the camp black market. It took a lot of sonderkommandos to handle 12,000 deaths in a day. During the last months of the war when they were frantically slaughtering the Hungarian Jews, there were around 800 on the death squads. But their possessions were not enjoyed long for they were generally dead after a few weeks, shot by the SS. Incoming prisoners were selected to form new sonderkommando squads.”

“They killed the killers. What for?”

“I would think that the constant killing would demoralize even the most hardened sonderkommando. Dispirited, they’d lose their proficiency. Efficiency demanded a constant replacement of the killers with other killers, soon to be replaced with new killers — an unending cycle of death. To have the power of life and death appeals to men. Killing is addicting.”



Liberation of Buchenwald, April, 1945 – Everett Historical, public domain, Shutterstock 249573964

***When one is deprived of one's liberty, one is right in blaming not so much
the man who puts the shackles on as the one who had the
power to prevent him, but did not use it.***

— Thucydides.



Bodies waiting to be burned in a fire pit near crematorium V in Auschwitz II-Birkenau, 1944 – Author, Alberto Errera, Greek Sonderkommando prisoner who secretly took photos before dying at Auschwitz, public domain, Wikimedia



Upon liberation of the Ohrdruf concentration camp, Gen. Dwight Eisenhower and U.S. Army officers view the charred remains of prisoners burned during the Nazi evacuation of the camp – Unknown author, courtesy of Harold Royall, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, public domain, Wikimedia. General Omar Bradley is to the right of Eisenhower and General George S. Patton is to the far right in the first row.



Czesława Kwoka, child victim of Auschwitz, prisoner identification photo, 1942 or 1943 – Author, Wilhelm Brasse, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, public domain, Wikimedia



Liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, a British Army bulldozer pushes dead bodies into a mass grave, 19 April 1945 – Author, Sgt H Oakes, Imperial War Museum, public domain, Wikimedia



Mass grave discovered upon the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, April 1945 – Author, UK Army, Imperial War Museum, public domain, Wikimedia

“I still can’t comprehend,” Giovanni cried, “how the great majority of the German people could support a man with such warped visions of humanity, a man who would exterminate millions and bring the German nation to ruin? How could that happen?”

“It is hard for people to see into the future. Hitler was cunning in his planning of each step. After losing the 1932 March election to a hero of World War One, Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, Hitler began assembling funds for the election of July 31. Helped by campaign contributions from industrialists and the violent intimidation of the opposition by Ernst Röhm’s Sturmabteilung, the Stormtroopers, the Nazi Party won 37% of the vote, making it the largest bloc in the Reichstag. Since they were the largest party, according to German precedent, the Nazis had the right to appoint Hermann Göring to Presidency of the Reichstag. Although Hitler pressured President von Hindenburg to appoint him chancellor, the old warrior refused for he distrusted Hitler’s drive for power and Röhm’s paramilitary Stormtroopers.”

“With the President refusing to appoint him chancellor, how did he overcome that?”

“There was an unexpected twist. In the November election, the Nazis lost support and the Communist Party surged. The communist plan for land redistribution scared hell out of the property owners — the communists could stage a coup d’état, confiscate the landowners’ property and give it to the peasants. Franz von Papen, a former right wing chancellor, realized that without the support of the Nazi Party, it would be impossible to defeat the communists. Papen told the president that if Hitler was appointed chancellor, once he failed to revive the economy, the Nazi Party would lose credibility and the demagogue could be replaced with a conservative chancellor.

“The other factor that helped Hitler was that since the end of the war, the military had refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Weimar Republic. The Reichswehr leadership dreamed of ultimately fusing the military and civilian government into a totalitarian military state. General Hans von Seeckt had reinforced the traditional concept of the Reichswehr as a state-within-the-state which meant that the military was free from the control of the civilian government. This was similar to the Japanese military being a state-within-the-state. Admiring the Nazi Party’s militarism and seeing the growth in Hitler’s share of the vote, the Reichswehr leaders decided to press Hindenburg to appoint Hitler chancellor for he was the one leader who had the political strength to build a national consensus and create the Wehrstaat dictatorship.

“I can see,” Giovanni said, “this is the moment Hitler was going to take power.”

“Hitler’s biggest piece of luck came when Chancellor Schleicher was damaged by false rumors going around Berlin that he was going to stage a putsch. I would suspect that the SS was behind the rumors. The threat of a putsch turned President Paul von Hindenburg against Schleicher and allowed Franz von Papen, the

former chancellor to convince the old warrior to appoint Hitler as chancellor. Assured by Papen that they'd have no problem in controlling Hitler if they appointed only a few Nazi to the cabinet, President Paul von Hindenburg dismissed Kurt von Schleicher and appointed Hitler Chancellor of Germany, on January 30, 1933.

“What were Hitler’s first moves?”

“On his first day as chancellor, he convinced von Hindenburg to dissolve the Reichstag and call for new elections on March 5. In order to limit the Communist Party, Hitler requested the president to issue a ‘Decree for the Protection of the German People,’ prohibiting public meetings, limiting freedom of the press, prohibiting publications ‘dangerous to the security of Germany,’ and banning political meetings and marches. He met with the armed forces General Staff to announce that he was going to make Germany a great power again, implying that Germany in accordance with the *Lebensraum* ideology, would annex territories in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia and resettle the lands with racially pure Germans. At a cabinet meeting, Hitler revealed his vision for rearming Germany within five years and ordered Hermann Göring to call a meeting with the top German industrialists and financiers — an ideal role for Göring with his convivial personality and hero image as a fighter pilot decorated for a number of kills in World War One. Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, former president of the Reichsbank, was invited to help finance Hitler’s rearmament plan. Reassured by the banker’s participation, the industrialists pledged three million Reichsmarks to Göring, Himmler, and Schacht to finance the election of Hitler, with IG Farben contributing the largest sum, 400,000 Reichsmarks. In the following month, Schacht was appointed director of the Reichsbank under the Nazi regime.”

“Why didn’t the communists join with the Social Democrats to form an alliance to stop Hitler?”

“You’ve hit upon the Communist Party’s biggest error. With its classic inflexibility, the Comintern leadership called the moderate left, ‘social fascists’ and tried to destroy them. Obeying orders from Moscow, the communists rejected the plea of the Social Democrats to join in a political alliance to stop Hitler.”

“Is this when Hitler created the Gestapo that gave him a death grip on power?”

“You’ve guessed right. The minute he became chancellor, Hitler appointed Göring to a cabinet position — Interior Minister for Prussia giving him command of the largest police force in Germany. Within ninety days, Göring created the Schutzstaffel, SS, assigned to ferret out dissidents dangerous to the state, simultaneously creating the Secret State Police, Geheime Staatspolizei which became known as the Gestapo, appointing his protégé Rudolf Diels as chief. Göring purged the police force of men loyal to the Weimar state



Hermann Göring as a veteran fighter pilot, 1917 – Nicola Perscheid, public, domain, Wikimedia. As a World War I Ace fighter pilot known as the Blue Max, Göring was a recipient of the *Pour le Merite*. Göring became one of the most powerful figures in the Nazi Party, the Reichsmarschall, senior to all others in the Wehrmacht, Supreme Commander of the Luftwaffe, and creator of the Gestapo. After World War One, Göring was an advocate of the “stab-in-the-back” fabrication that proclaimed that the Marxists, Jews, and Weimar Republicans were responsible for overthrowing the German monarchy and losing the war.

and replaced them with Nazi loyalists, telling them, ‘A bullet fired from the barrel of a policeman’s pistol is my bullet. If you say that is murder, then I am the murderer . . . I know only two sorts of men — those who are with us and those who are against us.’”

“Once,” Giovanni said, “a demagogue takes control of the police, democracy is over.”



Göring issuing an order for German troops on the Eastern Front, June 1941 – Author, Eitel Lange, public domain, Wikimedia. Left to right, Marshal Hermann Göring, General Hans Jeschonnek, General Otto von Wadau.



Adolf Hitler meeting Hermann Göring and automotive and panzer engineer Ferdinand Porsche at Wolfschanze, 1942 – Author, Reprich, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“Göring didn’t waste a minute,” I said, “immediately enrolling 50,000 Nazi Storm Troopers as auxiliary police. Two days later, they raided the Communist Party’s headquarters, planting forged documents which proved the communists were planning an armed revolution against the state.”



Adolf Hitler and Hermann Göring on the balcony of the Chancellery, Berlin, 16 March 1938 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“Göring didn’t waste a minute, immediately enrolling 50,000 Nazi Storm Troopers as auxiliary police. Two days later, they raided the Communist Party’s headquarters, planting forged documents that proved the communists were planning an armed revolution against the state.”

“I see his method. As soon as he was chancellor, Hitler struck with lightning speed to take over the police. Hitler used blitzkrieg in politics as well as in war.”

“It was a blitzkrieg,” I agreed. “Everything in 1933 happened like lightning. Right after picking up campaign funds from the industrialists, the Reichstag fire broke out on February 27, 1933, only 28 days after his ascension to chancellor. A fiery inferno gutted the historical parliament building, a masterpiece of neo-classical architecture, the sacred symbol of the German government reduced to a burned out shell.



Reichstag Fire – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, public domain, Wikimedia

“While it was still smoldering, Hitler, Göring, and Goebbels rushed to the Reichstag. A journalist reported Hitler screaming, ‘This is the work of the communists. With his blue eyes bulging out his head, Hitler screamed, ‘You are witnessing the beginning of a great new epoch in German history.’”

“The Reichstag fire was Hitler’s golden opportunity,” Giovanni said, “a crisis he could use to arrest the communists. Hitler’s Storm Troopers started the fire and pinned it on the communists.”

“It’s not as simple as that. Marinus van der Lubbe, an unemployed Dutch communist was arrested climbing out the Reichstag. During the police interrogation, he swore that he’d set the fire by himself. Van der Lubbe said that he had no connection with the German Communist Party, the KPD. He had acted alone to awaken Germany to the Nazi threat. Van der Lubbe burned the Reichstag to start a revolution — a symbolic act to inspire the workers to rise up against the state. Instead of a revolution, it gave Hitler the golden opportunity to whip the people into a frenzy of fear, convincing them that the communists were planning a coup d’état to overthrow the government, giving Hitler an official reason to execute his strongest opponents.”



Reichstag Fire, February 1933 – Unknown author, U.S. National Archives, Wikimedia

“How ironic,” Giovanni said, “a crazy 24 year old amateur communist provided the Nazis with the means to destroy the Communist Party and take total power. Are you sure it wasn’t the Nazis who did it?”

“It’s never been proved who was guilty beyond a shadow of a doubt. Who had the most to lose? Who had the most to gain? Certainly not the communists. It was thought by many that Göring and Goebbels had ordered the burning of Reichstag and blamed it on the communists. After the war, at Göring’s Nuremberg Trial, a witness testified that Göring had taken the credit for ordering the burning of Reichstag, an accusation Göring denied. Ultimately it didn’t matter whether it was the communists or the Nazis who burned the Reichstag. The end result was the death of the Communist Party in Germany.

“On the following day of the fire, February 28, President von Hindenburg’s approved Hitler’s demand for an emergency act, the ‘Decree for the Protection of the People and the State.’ From that time forward it was known as the Reichstag Fire Decree. It suspended the right to assembly, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and removed any restraints on the investigations of the police, giving them the right to arrest anyone without charge. The Nazi Party rejoiced. Hitler had saved the nation from Bolshevism. It was the beginning of the end for Germany’s democracy.”

“What happened in the March 5th election? Did the Nazi win in a landslide?”

“Not quite. Six days before the election, thousands of Storm Troopers attacked leaders of the Communist Party, trade unionists, the Catholic Center Party, and the Social Democrat Party. Despite the terror, the Nazi Party could only muster 44% percent of the vote and 288 members, well short of a majority. Requiring a super majority to pass an act giving him control of the Reichstag, he needed to get the support of the Catholic Center Party and the German National Peoples Party.”

“What was the German National Peoples Party?”

“The DNVP was led by Alfred Hugenberg, millionaire who had invested in depression distressed newspapers, film, and publishing houses to publicize his political philosophy and by the end of the ‘30s controlled the great majority of German media markets. While managing Krupp industries, Germany’s main supplier of weapons, he doubled Krupp’s profits and became a star of the industrialists.”

“What was Hugenberg’s political philosophy?”

“The overthrow of the democratic Weimar constitution and creation of an authoritarian government. Like Ludendorff and Hitler, Hugenberg was anti-Polish and pushed for the repudiation of the Versailles Treaty

and the ‘Germanization’ of the East. The Weimar Republic democracy, Hugenberg declared, has failed to improve the condition of the working class. We must establish a colonial empire — build a Greater Germany to defeat Britain, Russia, and the United States in the race for world supremacy.”

“Hugenberg and Hitler had similar goals.”

“Both were virulently anti-Semitic. Due the similarity of the Nazis and DNVP platforms, and calculating that he could maneuver Hitler into accomplishing his own ends, the media mogul began funding the Nazi Party and gave Hitler, the man who he’d once denounced as a socialist, sympathetic coverage in his newspapers. Hugenberg’s vast press empire published hysterical reports that the Marxist were going to mobilize millions of the unemployed in the Great Depression and start a revolution. Only the DNVP could save the nation. But the anti-communist campaign backfired for the major beneficiary of the Hugenberg anti-Marxist campaign was not the DNVP as planned, but rather the National Socialists who portrayed themselves as a more powerful anti-Marxist fighting force.”

“I’m sure,” Giovanni said, “the Storm Troopers had a lot to do with creating Hitler’s tough image.



Sturmabteilung unit, propaganda march, Berlin, 1932 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia. The Nazi paramilitary SA “Storm Detachment,” protected Nazi rallies, disrupted demonstrations of opposition parties, combated the paramilitary of the Communist Party, intimidated unionists, and enforced the 1933 boycott of Jewish businesses.



Beer Hall Putsch trial defendants, Erich Ludendorff and Adolf Hitler, center right, Ernst Röhm, second from right, 1 April 1924 – Author, Heinrich Hoffmann, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Nazis who supported Adolf Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch, Munich, 9 November 1923 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“A lot to do with it. In politics, image is everything. Hugenberg joined with the Nazis in a short lived federation, ‘National Opposition,’ issuing a joint statement of co-operation ‘for the overthrow of the Weimar government.’”

“How did the DNVP strategy work out?”

“They were in an alliance at one moment and at each other’s throats in the next, for they were competing for the same voters. Hugenberg decided to vote with the Nazi Party because he believed he could out maneuver Hitler in the end.”

“Did the DNVP vote for the Reichstag Fire Decree?”

“Hugenberg later deeply regretted voting with the Nazis. Accommodation was a deeply flawed political strategy because Hitler had a strikingly different goal in mind — the outlawing of all parties to create a one party state. A second flaw in Hugenberg’s calculation was that his deadly boring speeches in the Reichstag couldn’t compete with Hitler’s charismatic style and the DNVP began hemorrhaging voters to the Nazi Party. By the end of the year, the flaw of Hugenberg’s strategy was clear. The media baron’s news agency, the Telegraph Union was taken over by the Goebbels Propaganda Ministry.”

“You mentioned earlier that Moscow had forbidden the German Communist Party to form an alliance with the Social Democrats to stop Hitler from becoming chancellor. Couldn’t the communists see the writing on the wall?”

“Ideological purity ended up destroying the Communist Party in Germany. Hitler cleverly took advantage of the hostility between the hard left wing and the moderate right wing. With so many parties, political fragmentation helped him to take power. Without an alliance between the communists and the liberal center, there was no way of stopping Hitler at the ballot box. Despite the Nazi Party holding only a minority of the Reichstag seats, the German National Peoples Party voted in mass with the Nazi Party on March 23, 1933, giving Hitler the necessary super majority to approve the Enabling Act — *Gesetz zur Behebung der Not von Volk und Reich* — Law to Remedy the Distress of the People and Reich.”

“What powers did the Enabling Act give Hitler?”

“It made him absolute dictator. His cabinet now had the power to enact laws without the consent or participation of the Reichstag. Under the emergency act, he banned all parties except the Nazi Party, dissolved the



Hitler's Reichstag speech at the Kroll Opera House calling for the Enabling Act after the Reichstag fire, 23 March 1933 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

existing Reichstag and packed the entire legislature with Nazi Party members. The Reichstag was no longer a deliberating legislature, only a stage for Hitler to speak. Since the fire, the Reichstag met at the Kroll Opera House, the perfect stage for his operatic speeches. Along with his prodigious ability to lie and to inspire devout loyalty, Hitler's success sprung from his theatrical showmanship — his ability to enthrall an audience at will.”

“Why would the Catholics support Hitler? Hitler was a pagan.”

“Hitler solved the problem by promising Catholic leader Ludwig Kass that the Catholic Center Party would continue to exist and Catholic schools, civil servants, and religious liberties would be protected — promises that he'd later break.”

“I still can't comprehend why the Reichstag would give up power?”

“Under the Reichstag Fire Decree, Hitler had arrested all of the KPD communist deputies and many Social Democrats. At that point there weren't enough opposition deputies remaining to vote against him.”

“What was his next move after passing the Enabling Act?”



Ernst Röhm at right with Kurt Daluge, SS-Gruppenführer, and Heinrich Himmler, SS Reichsführer – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia. Following the assassination of SS leader Reinhard Heydrich, Kurt Daluge became the Deputy Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. Daluge played a role in the Night of the Long Knives, Hitler’s elimination of Ernst Röhm and the SA Stormtroopers. Daluge believed that if the state planned to prevent complete moral degeneration, “asocial enemies of the people must be eliminated by state intervention.” In response to the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich by Czechoslovakian agents, Daluge directed the retribution, ordering the Czech villages of Lidice and Ležáky destroyed, all the men murdered, and the women and children deported to Nazi concentration camps. Charged as a major war criminal after the defeat of Germany, Daluge was extradited to Czechoslovakia for trial, sentenced to death, and hanged in Pankrác prison in Prague.

“Eliminate his enemies.”

“But he’d wiped out all of the opposition. Who could possibly oppose him?”

“His own Nazi Party, the Sturmabteilung — Storm Battalion, the paramilitary wing.”

“The SA was a threat to Hitler? It doesn’t make sense. They were the shock troops that brought him to power. He couldn’t have done it without the SA.”

“There was a complex situation within the Nazi party — the left and the right. The SA was commanded by Ernst Röhm, a captain in the First World War who was awarded the Iron Cross and wounded at Verdun. A founding member of the Nazi Party, an accomplice in the failed Beer Hall Putsch of 1923, and a close friend of Hitler, Ernst Röhm, and Gregor Strasser, founded the Nazi Storm Trooper Battalion. Röhm was the only one of the Nazi leaders who called Hitler by his first name, ‘Adolf’ or, ‘Adi,’ becoming his close companion right from the beginning of the movement. Röhm was efficient, within a short time, the SA militia had over a million members battling in the streets with the paramilitary Red Front Fighters of the Communist Party, beating up Jews, Slavs, Romani, newspaper editors, politicians, businessmen, professors, anyone who opposed the Nazi Party and frequently innocent bystanders.”



Hitler reviewing SA troops, Nuremberg, 1935 – Unknown author, Charles Russell Collection, U.S. National Archives, public domain, Wikimedia

“Hitler’s Brownshirts,” Giovanni said, “were inspired by Benito Mussolini’s Blackshirts — street thugs who terrorized everyone.”

“Do you know why they wore brown shirts instead of olive green or black?”

“Why?”

“Before the war, the government had ordered brown uniforms for the colonial troops in the African colonies. When Germany lost the war, they lost their colonies and were left with a huge surplus of brown uniforms which the SA picked up for practically nothing.”

“It reminds me,” Giovanni said, “of how Garibaldi’s soldiers, got their red shirts from the Argentine slaughter houses. How could the Nazi paramilitary possibly be a threat to Hitler?”

“By the time of the Enabling Act, there were nearly 3,000,000 of the Storm Troopers and they were not under Hitler’s command. Commander Röhm was a fighter for the workers, his shock troops supporting the strikers and beating up the strike breakers. Now that Hitler had attained the chancellorship in January, Röhm was pushing for a second revolution to redistribute wealth from the rich to the workers. Along with Gregor and Otto Strasser, Röhm opposed any form of capitalism—a diabolical invention of the Jews. Mostly consisting of World War One veterans from working class backgrounds, many awarded the Iron Cross for bravery, the SA leaders believed in the nationalization of big industrial firms, giving control to the workers, confiscating the unused estates of the Prussian aristocracy and redistributing the land to the farmers and workers.”

“How odd,” Giovanni said, “the program of the Nazi left wing, wasn’t that much different than the program of the communists — a similar philosophy of the ones they’d beaten up, killed, or driven underground. I see where you’re going. Röhm, who’d been Hitler’s friend and staunch supporter since the very beginning was blocking Hitler path to power. The working class followers of Röhm believed heart and soul in pure socialism. Röhm was pressing Hitler to eliminate the bourgeoisie. The idea of confiscating their factories, stealing their wealth, putting labor in control of the factories — scared the crap out of the industrialists. To take power, Hitler had to kill Röhm.”

“You’ve understood perfectly. Röhm was in command of the most fanatical of all Nazi followers. Hitler feared anyone who had too much power. His compulsion was to control all things, all the time — a quality that helped him ascend to power and in the end would bring him down. Hitler hated anyone who crossed him. His vengeance knew no limits — he was going to kill everyone who had ever opposed him, even his kindergarten teacher.”

“His kindergarten teacher . . .”

“Made it up,” I laughed. “Literary license. If Hitler’s kindergarten teacher had punished him, I sure she would be on his death list. Seriously though, the left-wing Strasserist faction, led by the party’s *éminence grise*, Gregor Strasser, was an existential threat to Hitler.”

“Who was Strasser?”

“A Nazi who was the leader while Hitler was in prison. In agreement with Röhm who believed in the



Gregor Strasser, early Nazi leader and Hitler's foremost rival was murdered in The Night of the Long Knives – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

redistribution of wealth, Strasser challenged Hitler's policy of appeasing giant capitalists like Emil Kirdorf."

"Kirdorf, the chief of the coal industry."

"Yes, Kirdorf the 'Chimney Baron.' Strasser's and Hitler's relationship, strong in the beginning, deteriorated rapidly due largely to the success of Strasser's intelligent leadership. The breaking point came in 1932 when President von Hindenburg appointed Kurt von Schleicher as chancellor who invited Strasser to be his deputy with the strategic intention of Strasser bringing with him the left wing of the Nazi Party. Before Strasser could accept, Hitler raging at his betrayal, called a meeting of the Nazi leaders to repudiate Strasser. After the leaders renewed their vows to Hitler and Hermann Göring was made President of the Reichstag, Strasser had no option but to resign from the party. He'd lost all influence on the future of the Nazi party.

"Strasser's dream," Giovanni said, "of nationalizing the banks, building strong trade unions, and redistributing the wealth in Germany was dead."

“Hitler betrayed the workers. He’d promised labor a new world, but his promise was one of many deceptions in his drive for power. Hitler didn’t care about the worker, only the extermination of the undesirables, the Slavs, Gypsies, and Jews, and the ultimate goal of the conquest of Europe and the Soviet Union.

“In April of 1934, Hitler instructed Himmler and Heydrich to build a dossier on those to be liquidated — Ernst Röhm, leaders of the Sturmabteilung, the Strasserist supporters, and the German nationalist right, the politicians who’d opposed him since his failed Beer Hall Putsch eleven years before.

“On June 30, 1934, Hitler gave the order for the Röhm-Putsch, called The Night of the Long Knives, commanding Röhm to assemble the SA leaders at a spa in Bad Wiesse, where they were surprised by a battalion of Schutzstaffel troops led by Dachau concentration camp obergruppenführer, Theodor Eicke. Imprisoned in Munich’s Stadelheim prison, the SA leaders were shot. When Röhm refused to commit suicide, Eicke executed him. Hitler couldn’t forgive Gregor Strasser’s betrayal. Schutzstaffel Reinhard Heydrich had Strasser shot in his cell leaving him to slowly bleed to death. Gregor’s brother Otto Strasser fled to Canada with a multi-million mark reward posted by Goebbels for his murder. Hitler left no enemy standing — the Schutzstaffel agents killed General Kurt von Schleicher who’d been the Reich Chancellor before Hitler, killed madam von Schleicher and his military collaborator, Major General Kurt von Bredow. Going back to memories of his 1923 arrest and imprisonment, Hitler ordered the execution of Gustav von Kahr, the Bavarian chief of state who had suppressed the Beer Hall uprising. Similar to Stalin, Hitler saw treason everywhere — never forgot a slight or injury. He sought vengeance for every offense.”

“I am astounded,” Giovanni exclaimed, “how Hitler succeeded at treachery time and time again.”

“Have you heard of a dictator who wasn’t treacherous? It’s one of the chief requirements for the job. The most surprising of the extra-judicial killings was the decision to assassinate the former Chancellor Kurt von Schleicher.”

“How could he get away with killing a former chancellor?”

“If you’re patient, I’ll make a stab at it.

“I’m the paragon of patience.”

“To begin I have to go back to the years right after the end of the war. In order to get around the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty, General Hans von Seeckt founded the Arbeits-Kommandos, Work

Commandos, under Major Ernst von Buchrucker, disguised as a construction group of laborers who in reality were soldiers.”

“I get it,” Giovanni said. “Seeckt was concealing his troops from the inspectors for the Versailles Treaty’s regulations.”

“The Reichswehr generals hated the severe restrictions. Beginning in January 1920, the size of the German military was limited to 4,000 officers and 100,000 men. Rifles, machine guns, mortars, and artillery were strictly limited. Arms and munitions could only be manufactured in Allied inspected factories. German naval forces couldn’t be greater than 6 battleships, 6 cruisers, 12 destroyers, and 12 torpedo boats. Submarines were forbidden. The General Staff of the Germany was to be disbanded and not reconstituted.”

“How did Schleicher fit into the equation?”

“In the early 1920’s, General von Seeckt appointed his protégé Schleicher to a command in the Sondergruppe R, a secret corps inside the Arbeits-Kommandos to direct the secret buildup of the German war machine.”

“How could they keep a military buildup secret? Pretty hard to hide an army.”

“Schleicher’s job was to negotiate clandestine deals with the Red Army to build factories in Russia to construct weapons for the Soviets using advanced German technology in exchange for the Soviets helping the Reichswehr conceal their military buildup. Schleicher established fake corporations to laundry millions of Reichsmarks into the USSR to manufacture aircraft, tanks, artillery, and poison gas delivery systems. By producing arms outside German borders, it allowed the Reichswehr to maintain a cutting edge in advanced weaponry. Through an elaborate deception, the army hid their violations of the Versailles Treaty and laid the foundations for the crash rearmament of the Third Reich in the mid 1930’s. Ironically, at the same time that Schleicher’s superior officer Seeckt was suppressing communist uprisings in Germany, he was forming an alliance with the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union.”

“Amazing, the amount of deception.”

“Deception is the rule in politics and war. A supporter of the monarchy who detested the democratic pretensions of the Weimar Republic, von Seeckt was a crafty leader. In his zeal to avoid the treaty’s restrictions, the general set up a secret Black Reichswehr commando group under the wing of Sondergruppe R.”

“I’m almost afraid to ask. What was the job of the Black Reichswehr?”

“They were assassins secretly under orders to murder Germans who were supplying information to the Allied Control Commission in charge of inspecting military installations for compliance with Part V of the treaty. When Schleicher was cross examined in court about the Black Reichswehr murders, he denied any involvement by the Reichswehr. But a letter from General Seeckt to the president of the German Supreme Court which was trying a Black Reichswehr assassin for murder, said that the court should acquit the defendant because the murders were justified by Germany’s struggle against the Versailles Treaty.”

“Germany was a dark place,” Giovanni sighed. “Long before Hitler, the germ of the Nazi SS was planted in the Black Reichswehr.”

“It’s true in most revolutions, after seizing power the revolutionaries adopt the brutal secret police methods of their predecessors. Black operations of one authoritarian regime morph into the black operations of the following regime. I’m sure some of the Black Reichswehr later served in Reinhard Heydrich’s SS. When Seeckt was serving as the Ottoman army chief of staff, he’d justified the Turkish extermination of the Armenian people saying that it was a necessary act to save Turkey from internal decay. As long as Germany was allied with the Ottoman Empire, it was impossible to oppose the mass extermination of disloyal people. Called the Sphinx for his disdain of useless conversation and his facility of making cold blooded decisions based not on what was humane, but on what was good for Germany, Seeckt made his own rules about genocide rather on the churchmen’s sermons. Christian sentiment, he said, must be rooted out because of the absolute imperative of the war effort. Seeckt ordered Jews, no matter what their qualifications, banned from serving in the Reichswehr despite the 1919 Constitution prohibiting religious discrimination. Another task that Seeckt assigned Schleicher was to form the Freikorps.”

“You said that the Freikorps was responsible for killing Rosa Luxemburg during the Spartacus Revolt. Was the Freikorps part of the Reichswehr?”

“It was separate. The Freikorps was a voluntary militia formed to defend Germany in case of a Red Army invasion. Composed of demobilized soldiers, officers, nationalists, street toughs, and unemployed youths, the Freikorps was dedicated to the elimination of traitors to the Fatherland.”

“If Schleicher was setting up armament factories in the Soviet Union, I don’t understand how could there be a threat of a Red Army invasion?”



Reichskriegsflagge, the flag associated with the German Empire, raised as a standard during the Kapp-Putsch led by General Walther von Lüttwitz and Wolfgang Kapp – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsch troops. "Halt! Whoever proceeds will be shot." Wilhelmplatz, Berlin, 13 March 1920 – Author, Ludwig Vantahlen, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Troops of the Marinebrigade Ehrhardt with swastikas on their helmets, distributing leaflets during the Kapp-Putsch, 13 March 1920 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Hermann Ehrhardt, leader of the Freikorps Marinebrigaden Ehrhardt paramilitary army enforcing the Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsch, March 1920 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“A good question. I think it was an excuse to form paramilitary armies that could be used independently of the Weimar government. The Freikorps was used to brutally crush the communist inspired Spartacus League Revolt and the Bavarian Socialist Republic. On January 20, the deadline to meet the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, the Weimar government gave the order to disband the Freikorps Marinebrigaden Ehrhardt and Lowewenfeld. Walther von Lüttwitz, the ranking general in the Berlin area, refused to obey. Captain Herman Ehrhardt, a monarchist sympathizer and commander of a Freikorps brigade, with the blessing of General Lüttwitz, marched on the capital with 6,000 troops. Having only 2,000 men to face 6,000, Defense Minister Gustav Noske called upon General Hans von Seeckt to defend the Republic. Seeckt refused, saying ‘Reichswehr does not fire on Reichswehr.’”



Demonstration in Berlin against the Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsch – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“You mean the Reichswehr had the right to refuse to defend the government?”

“Inherited from the Prussian military model, the Reichswehr was a state-within-a-state.”

“What does that mean?”

“The Reichswehr made its own rules and didn’t have to respond to the civilian political leadership or the Reichstag. Deserted by the military, the Weimar cabinet fled Berlin and Ehrhardt declared the dissolution of the Weimar Republic, proclaiming right-wing politician Wolfgang Kapp as chancellor and Walther von Lüttwitz as Minister of Defense and commander of the Reichswehr.”

“I thought,” Giovanni said, “that the Weimar Republic survived until Hitler seized power.”

“The Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch failed.”

“How could it fail with the Reichswehr refusing to defend the Weimar Republic?”

“The trade unions refused to accept the loss of their democracy. They had fought so hard for their rights and they weren’t giving them up. The unions called for a massive strike — the workers must shut down Berlin.



Communist Party KPD leader Ernst Thälmann supporters in Essen, March 1925 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Communist Party KPD leader Ernst Thälmann, center left, leading the Roter Frontkämpfer-Bund, RFB, a paramilitary defense organization during the Weimar Republic, Berlin 1927 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia. Arrested by the Gestapo after the Reichstag Fire in 1933, Thälmann was held in solitary confinement for eleven years, then shot in Buchenwald on Adolf Hitler's orders in 1944.



Members of the Red Army during the Ruhr uprising during the Weimar Republic, 1920 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Without running water, no trains running, no electricity or gas, the great city ground to an absolute halt. With millions of workers in the streets, no deliveries could be made, nothing could run. Berlin was paralyzed. Chancellor Knapp issued a decree to shoot the strikers. The decree angered the workers even more, the strike spreading across Germany — the Ruhr, Cologne, Saxony, Hamburg, Bavaria, Bremen, and Prussia. The governmental, postal, and railway employees supported the socialists and communists, for the first time taking the side of the working class. With the city unable to budge, only five days after the putsch, Wolfgang Kapp resigned and ran away to Sweden.”

“I get the picture,” Giovanni said. “With violent uprisings, clashes between right and left, warfare between the workers and the army — Germany was in a perfect state for a dictator to declare he was the messiah — the one who would bring order to the nation.”

“It got even worse. To support the strike in Berlin against the Kapp putsch, the Social Democrats and the unions called for a nationwide strike, just what the socialists and communists were waiting for. They mobilized 50,000 armed men.”



Fighters of the Red Army killed in the Ruhr Uprising by the German Reichswehr, 1920, Möllen, Germany – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“I see it coming,” Giovanni said, “another blood bath for the workers.”

“On March 13, all across the Ruhr industrial area, workers councils took power and four days later, Red troops defeated the advancing Freikorps Lichtschlag and captured hundreds. For two weeks the Red Army held their ground until the Weimar government sent in the Reichswehr and Freikorps, some of the same soldiers who had tried to overthrow the Weimar Republic in the Kapp-Lüttwitz coup d’etat. Outgunned, the resistance collapsed and the government troops executed the insurgents in mass, killing anyone possessing a gun, even the wounded. While the Kapp putsch soldiers had been treated leniently, the Weimar government slaughtered the workers in the Ruhr uprising, a savage suppression that outraged the people.”

“What happened,” Giovanni said, “to the Freikorps militia after they were disbanded? I’d think that decommissioning numerous right-wing armed men during hard economic times would have some very negative consequences.”

“A sage observation. Members of the disbanded Hermann Ehrhardt’s Freikorps Marinebrigaden regrouped in Bavaria and formed an ultra-nationalist underground terrorist cell called the Organisation Consul dedicated to the assassination of the detested ‘November Criminals,’ those responsible for Germany’s surrender in 1918. The mission of the O.C. was to form a secret organization made up of men pledged to unconditionally obey commands in making war against all internationalists and Jews, social democracy and leftist-radicalism with the goal of overthrowing the Weimar constitution. Secretly supported by Ernst Poehner, chief of the Bavarian police, and operating clandestinely behind the front of a Wood Products Company in Munich, the secret O.C. murdered over 300 victims, including Matthias Erzberger, Minister of Finance who had signed the 1918 armistice. Their most despicable act was to attack the limousine of the Foreign Minister, Walther Rathenau with machine gun fire and a grenade, killing the statesman who at the outbreak of the war in 1914, Minister of War Erich von Falkenhayn had put in charge of the KRA, the War Ministry’s Raw Materials Department that directed the conservation and distribution of strategic raw materials for Germany’s war production.”

“Why would ultra-nationalists murder a statesman who had done so much to organize Germany’s war effort?”

“Number one, because he was a Jew. Number two, Walther Rathenau was noted for negotiating with Georgi Chicherin, foreign minister of the Soviet Union, the Treaty of Rapallo which normalized diplomatic relations between the two former enemies, renouncing all territorial and financial claims against the other and pledging a spirit of goodwill in pursuing economic progress for both countries. The Treaty of Rapallo dissolved the extremely harsh conditions of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk which had been so damaging to the Soviets. The most significant part of the treaty was not to be found in the treaty, but was a silent recognition of the secret military collaboration between Russia and Germany which as I’ve noted, was directed by the secret corps of Kurt von Schleicher’s Sondergruppe R.”

“Despite Rathenau leadership during the war and despite the fact that the Treaty of Rapallo expanded Germany’s trade possibilities making it possible for the military to secretly rearm, the extreme right accused

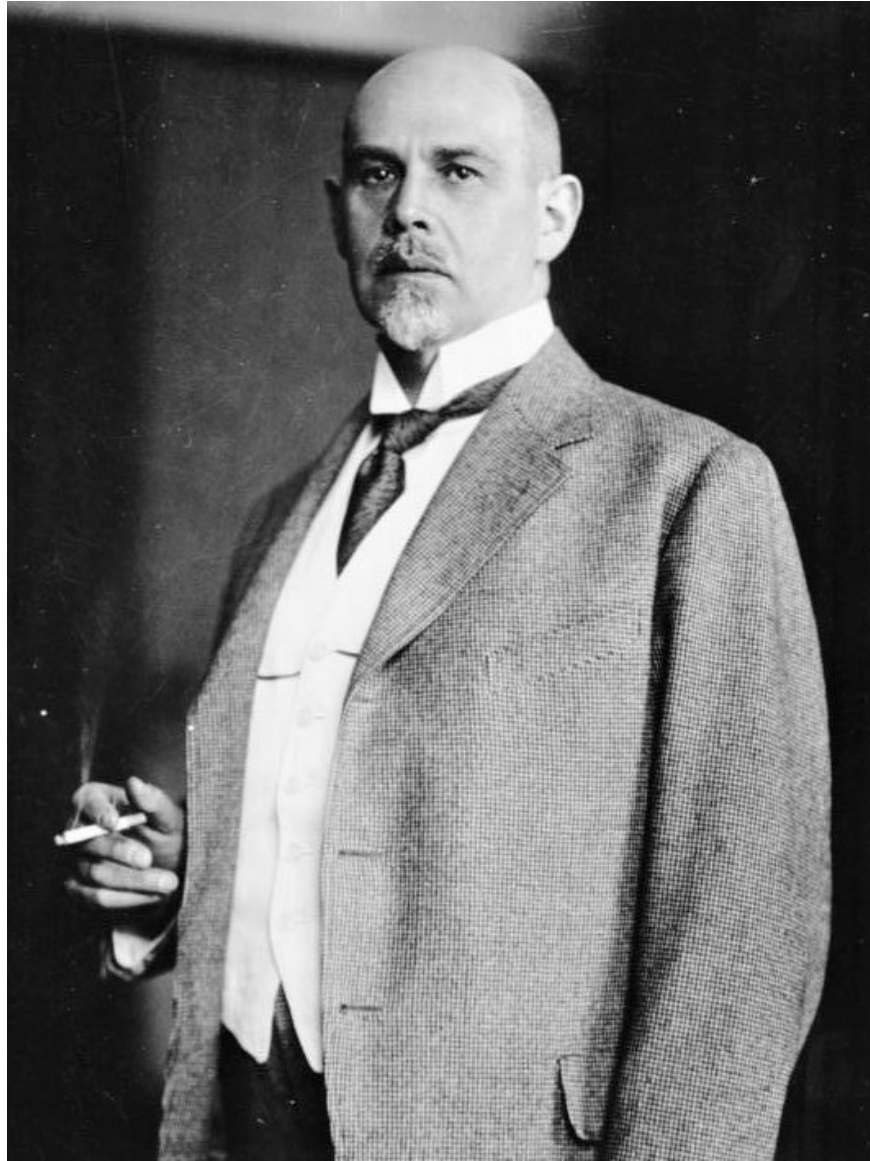


Hermann Ehrhardt, sitting at left, leader of the Organisation Consul, O.C. an ultra-nationalist, anti-Semitic and anticommunist terrorist force that conducted assassinations from 1920 to 1922 – Author, Robert Sennecke, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia. The Organisation Consul with 5,000 members was responsible of the assassination of Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau on 24 June 1922. The O.C. assassinated over 300 people, targeting those who the O.C. held responsible for Germany's surrender in 1918. After the O.C. killed Walther Rathenau, the Reichstag passed the "Law for the Protection of the Republic" banning the O.C. in July 1922. The "Spiritual Aims" of the Organisation Consul were "The cultivation and dissemination of nationalist thinking; warfare against all anti-nationalists and internationalists; warfare against Jewry, Social Democracy, and Leftist-radicalism; fomentation of internal unrest in order to attain the overthrow of the anti-nationalist Weimar constitution

him of being the architect of a Jewish-Communist conspiracy. When he was appointed foreign minister in 1922, his friends feared Rathenau would be marked for assassination. Two months after he signed the Treaty of Rapallo, the extreme right-wing Organization Consul terrorists assassinated him.”

“How many,” Giovanni said, “paradoxes and perversities exist in politics and religion. Rathenau must have been an exceptional man.”

“Rathenau was learned in many areas, one of the most eminent minds in all of Germany — a renaissance man. Rathenau said, ‘A man must be strong enough to mold the peculiarity of his imperfections into the perfections of his peculiarities.’ His father founded Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft, the electrical engineering giant AEG. Rathenau studied physics, chemistry, and philosophy in Berlin and Strasbourg and graduated with a doctorate in physics. A noted writer, Rathenau was more than just an innovative industrial



German Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia. Rathenau negotiated with Soviet Foreign Minister Georgi Chicherin the Treaty of Rapallo that dissolved the harsh conditions of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk that the Germans had imposed on the Bolsheviks to end the Eastern Front in World War One

manager. He was a philosopher and a statesman who possessed the mystical gift of seeing into the future. It's thought that the character of industrialist Paul Arnheim in Robert Musil's novel, *The Man Without Qualities*, was based on Walther Rathenau. Convinced that the era of unrestricted capitalism was over, he recognized in *Die neue Wirtschaft, The New Economy*, published in 1918, how the debilitating strife between capital and labor damaged the economy. Opposed to the nationalization of industry by the state, Rathenau called for greater worker participation in corporate management. By buying distressed companies and efficiently reorganizing them, he assembled a great fortune that allowed him to give time to the state. But as high as he rose, Rathenau had to endure the accusation that Jews could never put Germany first. He was keenly aware that he'd come into the world as a second-class citizen and that no matter what he accomplished he would remain one."



Memorial service for assassinated German Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau, June 1923 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia. Rathenau's husbandry of Germany's diminishing resources during World War One kept the country's hopes for victory alive, but the anti-Semitic ultra-nationalists saw Rathenau, not as a patriot brilliantly managing a failing economy, but as a Jew who was enriching himself. While it was a wise decision for the two pariah states, defeated Germany and Bolshevik Russia, to coordinate their economies despite their ideological differences, the nationalists and Hermann Ehrhardt's Organization Consul saw him as a Jew in league with the Jewish Bolsheviks. They marched in the streets, shouting *Knallt ab den Walther Rathenau! Der Gott-verfluchte Juden-sau! Tear down Walther Rathenau, the God-forsaken Jewish sow!* Rathenau was murdered a few weeks later.

“That’s what Les said — America would always view him as a second-class citizen.”

“There wasn’t a single Jewish officer in the entire Prussian Army. The military reviled Rathenau as an internationalist and a Jew. The officer corps was violently anti-Semitic. Many of the discharged officers formed paramilitary groups that eventually morphed into Ernst Röhm’s Storm Troopers, the army that Hitler had to terminate before it could terminate him.”

“It appears to me,” Giovanni said, “that by building up the German military with the secret deal with the Soviets, Schleicher was working for the same goals as Hitler. You still haven’t told me why Hitler would want to kill him?”

“Politics in the dying days of the Weimar Republic was complex. You really want to hear the whole story?”

“You’ve got me hooked.”

“Like the industrialists, Schleicher was alarmed by the 1928 Reichstag election. The Social Democrats won the greatest percentage of votes by a fierce opposition to the building of the *Panzerkreuzer A*, the lead ship of the proposed Deutschland class, a heavily armed cruiser constructed under restrictions set down by the Versailles Treaty. To construct a larger ship with less weight, they were the first large warships to use welding and all-diesel propulsion which made them faster than current ships. Their 11 inch guns were so formidable that the British called them ‘pocket battleships.’”

“I take it,” Giovanni said, “that the Social Democrats were opposed to war.”

“The SD were for the people’s welfare — instead of spending money on large warships, it was wiser to spend it on social programs for the people. This was anathema to Schleicher. The warships were essential. Schleicher believed that the 1928 election proved democracy was an incompetent system. It allowed people to elect people who’re hostile to the military — the core institution of the German state. The Weimar Republic was decadent. The Social Democrats couldn’t be trusted with power. The people needed discipline and order. Only the army could bring discipline and order. The entire system of democracy had to be thrown out. Politically sophisticated enough to realize that a coup d’état against democracy would offend the German tradition of legality and result in a strong backlash against the military, Schleicher decided they had to do away with democracy incrementally.”

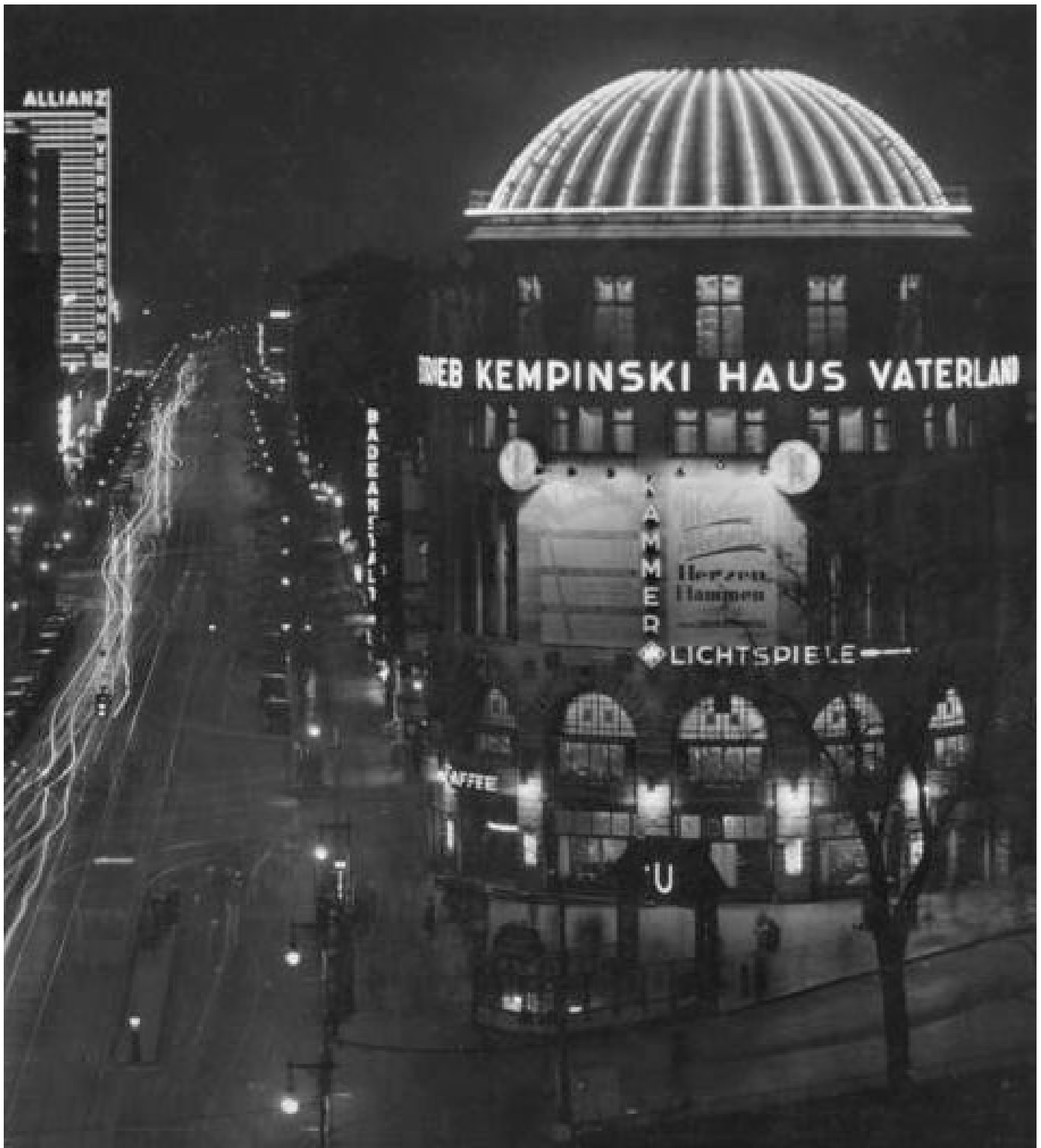


German “pocket battleship, *Deutschland*, 1935, reclassified as a heavy cruiser and renamed *Lutzow* in 1939 – Source, Heinrich Hoffman Collection, seized foreign records, U.S. National Archives, public domain, Wikimedia



A jazz band plays for a dance in the garden of the Esplanade Hotel, Berlin, 1926 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia. During the severe recession after the war, the Weimar Republic experienced out of control inflation of one trillion percent between the winter of 1919 and the autumn of November 1923. A radical economic reform program, and introduction of a new currency, the Rentenmark, led to a period of rapid economic growth, the opening of German universities to Jewish students, and an explosion of artistic works, an era known as the Golden Twenties noted for its cabaret performances, modernist Bauhaus architecture, and the arrival of German expressionist films – Robert Wiene’s *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, F. W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu*, Fritz Lang’s *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*, and the dystopia futurism of *Metropolis*, Georg Wilhelm Pabst’s *Pandora’s Box*, and Josef von Sternberg’s *Blue Angel* with Marlene Dietrich and Emil Jannings. The Golden Twenties corresponded to the Roaring Twenties in the U.S. and *Les Années folles* in France where James Reese’s band, known as the Harlem Hellfighters of the 369th Infantry Regiment brought Ragtime to Paris, and Josephine Baker excited the audiences in *la Revue nègre* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and as the *Black Venus* at the Folies Bergère.

“It’s such a paradox,” Giovanni said. “After the terrible recession and inflation of the 1920s, there was an explosion of artistic expression and the seeking of pleasure during the boom. While the Germans were living it up in the cabarets, nightclubs, and dance halls, the country was simultaneously being ripped by violent undercurrents of hatred — the ultra-nationalists, fascists, communists, Nazis, and the secret O.C. assassins murdering their opponents. After the depression of the losing of the war, came the thrill of freedom while the whole world remained oblivious to the coming Great Depression and the rise of the Third Reich. Beneath the hedonism and pleasure, the forces of fate were moving like tectonic plates inexorably preparing for the massive earthquake to come. Schleicher had the same plan as Hitler for killing democracy — destroy it by its own rules.”



Haus Vaterland, a grand house of entertainment in Berlin, represented the freedom of expression and hedonism of the late 1920s – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia. The era of the Weimar Republic, called a Periclean Age, saw a rebirth of intellectual and artistic creation, a counter-reaction to the militarism that led to a fatal war. Sociologists and philosophers – Martin Heidegger, Max Weber, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Rudolf Steiner, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, and Erich Fromm, created new ideas. Architects Eric Mendelsohn, Marcel Lajos Breuer, Hans Poelzig, Peter Behrens, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius, founder of Bauhaus, invented modern architecture. During his years in Berlin, Albert Einstein arose to public distinction, winning the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1921. The brilliant achievements of the Weimar Republic, the brief renaissance of a shattered nation, would be wholly destroyed by the rise of Nazism in the next few years.



Tanz-Kabarett im Europahaus, one of hundreds of cabarets in Weimar Berlin, 1931 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Prototype of high-speed train, 1930 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia. The prototype, built by the Krukenberg Engineering Company travelled at 230 kilometers per hour, 143 mph, from Hamburg to Berlin in 1931



Bauhaus designed apartment in Dessau, Germany – Author, Wohnheim Einzelbalkone, public domain, Wikimedia



Armchair designed by Mies van der Rohe, 1927, manufactured by Bamberg Metallwerkstätten, Berlin – Author, Daderot, public domain, Wikimedia



Long chair designed by Marcel Breuer, molded and laminated plywood, 1935-1936 – Source, Brooklyn Museum, public domain, Wikimedia



Einstein Tower solar observatory designed by Eric Mendelsohn, Potsdam, Germany – Author, Astrophysikalisches Institut Potsdam, Wikimedia

Intolerance of ambiguity is the mark of an authoritarian personality.

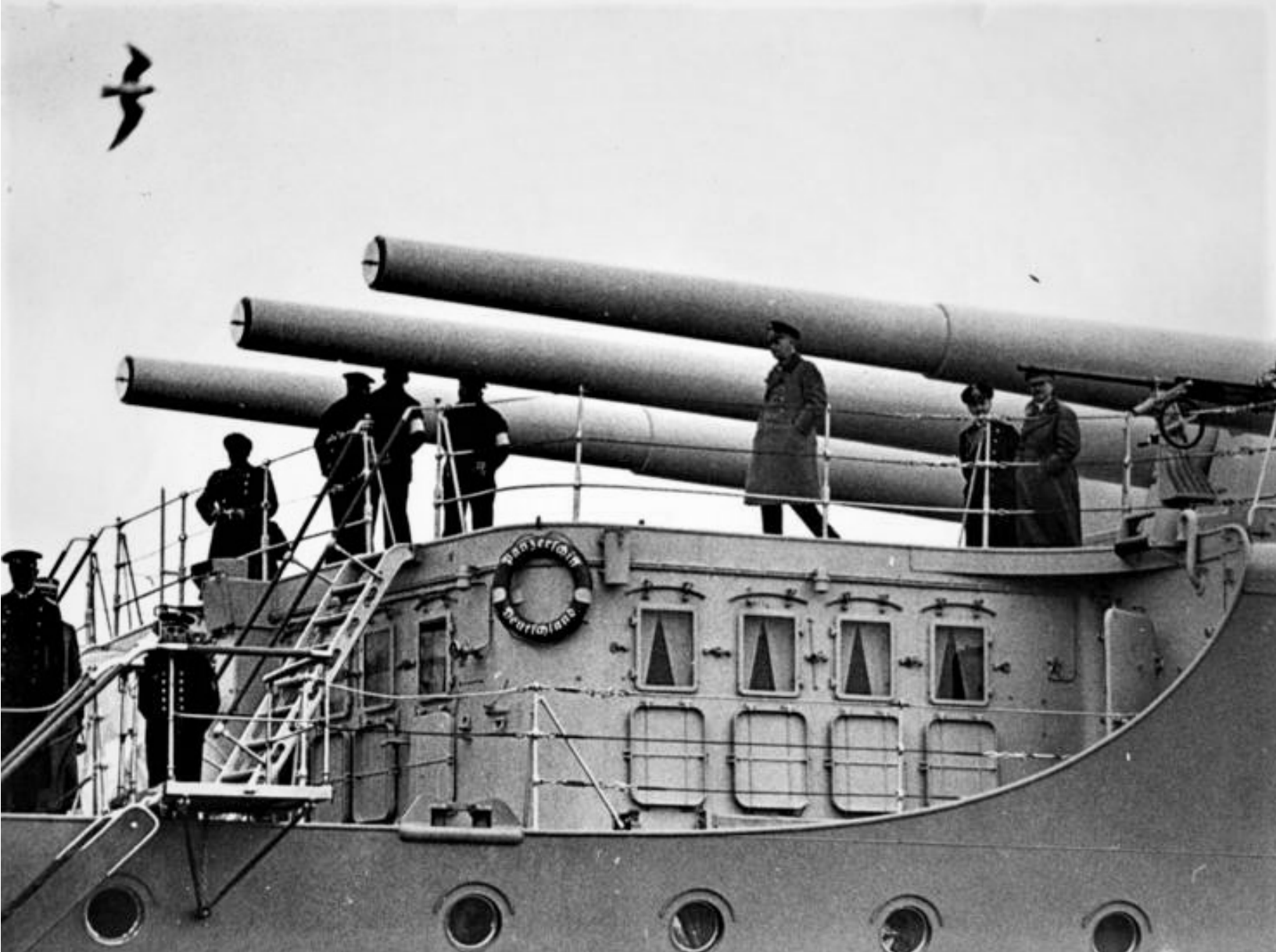
— Theodor Adorno



Industriepark Höchst designed by Peter Behrens, Frankfurt, Germany, 1924 – Author, Eva Kröcher, Wikimedia



The Grotes Schauspielhaus, or Great Theater, Berlin, designed by Hans Poelzig, 1919 – Author, Karl Ernst Osthaus, public domain, Wikimedia. The theatre was designed for Austrian Max Reinhardt, the most renowned director of German theatre and founder of the Salzburg Festival. After the Anschluss of Austria under Nazi Germany in 1938, Reinhardt fled from the oppression of anti-Semitism to Great Britain, then to the United States. Reinhardt directed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with James Cagney, Mickey Rooney, Joe E. Brown, and Olivia de Havilland, with music by Felix Mendelssohn that was banned by the Nazis due to Reinhardt's Jewish ancestry.



Adolf Hitler and Admiral Erich Raeder aboard the pocket battleship *Deutschland*, built to the Versailles Treaty limitations – Author Kriegsmarine, Deutschland, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia. The *Deutschland* was sunk in April 1945 by Royal Air Force bombers in the Piast Canal, Kaiserfahrt, a canal that connects the Oder Lagoon with the Baltic Sea.

“That’s right. Schleicher and Hitler had concluded that the way to establish an authoritarian government was to keep up the appearance of abiding by constitutional law while simultaneously dismantling democracy one step at a time. The other point of agreement was their concept of total war.”

“I remember,” Giovanni said smiling proudly, “Erich Ludendorff’s *Total War* — the entire physical and spiritual resources of the nation must be mobilized for war.”

“Right, Ludendorff’s concept of *Der Totale Krieg* had been adopted by the Reichswehr leaders. Germany would become a dictatorship and wage war on all Europe. Schleicher, like the rest of the Reichswehr leadership, saw democracy as a barrier to military power. He was convinced that only a dictatorship could make Germany a great military power again.



General Kurt von Schleicher, at left, with German Reichswehr officers, 1930 – Author, Oscar Tellmann, public domain, Wikimedia. Von Schleicher directed the secret military collaboration between Russia and Germany during the Weimar Republic. Schleicher and Ernst Röhm, leader of the SA brown shirts, made a secret agreement that in the event of a war with Poland or a Communist putsch, the SA would mobilise and come under the command of the Reichswehr. The close friendship between Schleicher and Röhm was a compelling reason for Hitler to accuse them of plotting to overthrow him, thus providing a justification for having them exterminated. Schleicher and his wife Elisabeth were murdered on the orders of Hitler during the Night of the Long Knives, 30 June 1934.

“By 1931, due to the Versailles Treaty’s prohibition on conscription, Germany’s experienced military reserves had been seriously weakened. An entire generation had come to age during the 1920s without experiencing any military training. Unless conscription was brought back, Schleicher believed, German military power would be decimated. While it was possible for the Reichswehr to cheat by building war machines in Russia, but what to do about training a greater body of troops?”

“I see the answer,” Giovanni said sharply, “Röhm’s Storm Troopers.”

“You guessed right. Schleicher initiated secret talks with Ernst Röhm, and they soon became good friends, you might say — co-conspirators. Schleicher changed Reichswehr’s rules to allow Nazi Party members to serve, as long as it wasn’t in a combat role. This subterfuge got around the Reichswehr rule that no member of the military could join a political party, a rule that assured the Reichswehr would remain non-political.”



Nazi Party chief Adolf Hitler saluting the Sturmabteilung, SA storm troopers, Braunschweig, Lower Saxony, April 1932 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“I can understand,” Giovanni said, “how a militarist like Schleicher would be impressed with the militarism of the Nazis.”

“Schleicher and Röhm made a secret pact that in case of a war with Poland or a Bolshevik putsch, the SA would mobilize their forces and place them under the command of Reichswehr officers.”

“Weren’t these secret deals going to put Hitler and Schleicher on a collision course?”

“Correct. They were rivals competing for control of the military. However, in order for Hitler to win the Reichswehr over to his side, he had a grave problem — what to do with the SA paramilitary, the brown shirts? I’ve talked before about Ernst Röhm urging Hitler to merge the much smaller 100,000 man Reichswehr into the SA with 3,000,000 troopers under arms. The Reichswehr would never agree to give up control. They’d go to war before allowing a merging of their professional forces with the riff raff SA.”

“It becomes clear,” Giovanni said, “why Hitler was motivated to kill Röhm and General von Schleicher. He couldn’t appease the leaders of the Reichswehr unless he eliminated Röhm and the Storm Troopers. Once Ernst Röhm, Kurt von Schleicher, and Gregor Strasser were eliminated, the only thing between him and total power was President von Hindenburg. All of his opponents would be dead. Hitler was a master of treachery.”

“Have you ever heard of a dictator who wasn’t treacherous? Murder is part of the job description. Fearing that Schleicher aided by Röhm’s troopers could overthrow him, Hitler had considered Schleicher a target for assassination for some time. After the purge of his enemies in the Night of the Long Knives, in a speech to the Reichstag, Hitler justified the deaths of Schleicher and Röhm because they were traitors working in the pay of France to overthrow the government. Of course it was another great lie. Lying was Hitler’s second nature. The bigger the lie, the easier it was to make the public believe.”

“Do you think it possible,” Giovanni said, “that if the Allies had listened to John Maynard Keynes advice and had refrained from punishing Germany so severely after World War One, then Hitler would’ve never seized power? Maybe if France and Britain hadn’t been so vindictive towards Germany, World War II would’ve never happened?”

“One can never know with certainty if a more reasonable treaty would have produced a lasting peace. While the severe reparations put an impossible financial stress on the Weimar Republic, The Black Friday stock-market collapse of 1929 set off a worldwide depression. Germany’s industrial production shrank by half in the following three years. Stocks lost over 60 percent of their value. Inflation went wild and unemployment was 25% with the Weimar government being held responsible for the failure. When the capitalists and nobility saw Hitler’s popularity rise with the workers and the middle class, they joined forces with Hitler believing that he would be good for industry. Even though Hitler may be power mad, he might do some good in pulling Germany out of the depression. The industrialists believed that with their economic power, they could control a boisterous demagogue.”

“The theatrical fanaticism,” Giovanni said, “of his speeches mesmerized the people.”

“Hitler was a genius of psychological manipulation, his instincts able to calculate the weaknesses of his opponents, making false promises not to threaten the Reichstag or the church — saying one thing in one moment and another thing in the next moment and able to get away with it. By shrewdly switching between friendly negotiation and the threat of violence, Hitler was able to sweep away all opposition.”

“Do you believe that a demagogue like Hitler is possible in the United States?”

“It could happen in any democracy. It depends on the strength of a nation’s democratic tradition — for how long and how deep. In a time of national distress, if a demagogue is successful in creating a specter of fear, then anything becomes possible.



A crowd gathers outside the Stock Exchange after the Crash of Black Thursday, 29 October 1929 – Author, U.S. Government, public domain, Wikimedia. During the second half of the 1920s, the economy and industrial profits advanced at a record rate, giving rise to hundreds of thousands of Americans investing in the stock market, a large percentage of them buying on margin, borrowing money from a broker to purchase stock. To drive the market, brokers were commonly lending small investors more than 60% of the face value of the stocks they were buying. Over 8.5 billion dollars were out on loan, a greater figure than the entire amount of currency circulating in the U.S. When the stock market dropped, the small investor could not cover the margin loans, prompting more mass selling to cover the loans, driving the stock prices down in a spiraling descent. The American stock market crash of October 1929 kindled the Great Depression in Europe causing mass unemployment in Germany, a gift to the Nazi Party.



The Great Depression – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. American loans had supported the Weimar economy since 1924, leaving the Germans deeply in debt. After the market crash in 1929, financiers began to call in existing loans and issuing no new ones. Formerly the largest importer of German products, the U.S. put up tariff barriers forcing many German companies to fail, setting off runs on the banks causing many to fail. By 1932, German production was 58% of its 1928 levels, and by 1933, the year Hitler rose to power, there were six million without work and unable to feed their families, the children suffering the worst, thousands dying from malnutrition.



Unemployed men outside a depression soup kitchen in Chicago, February 1931 – Unknown author, U.S. Information Agency, U.S. National Archives, Wikimedia

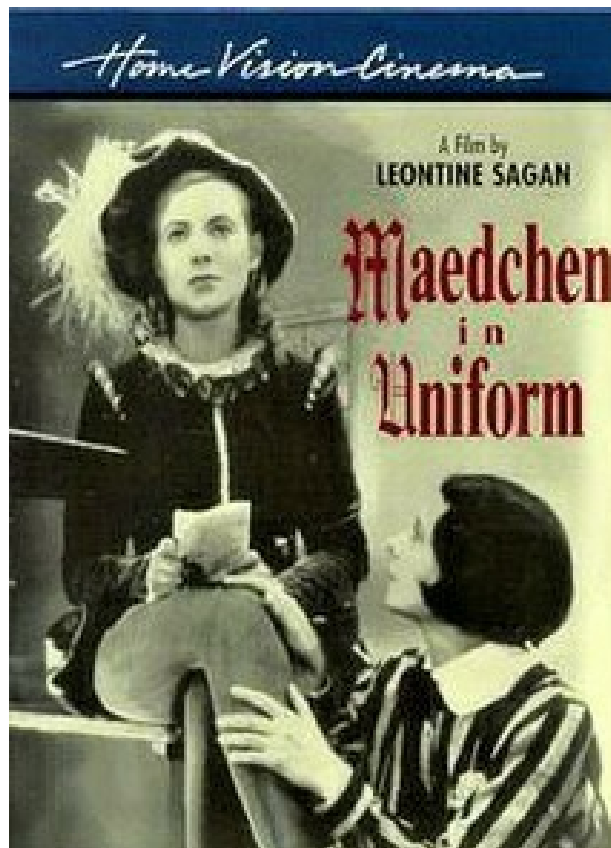


A woman gathers vegetables in the street thrown out by a vegetable seller, 3 November 1923 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“Hitler anointed the Jews and the Communist Party as the villains responsible for Germany’s despair, successfully convincing the people that only he could save the nation. All of the democracies in the West misjudged him. The more they appeased Hitler the more powerless they were to stop him. Josef Goebbels said, “One of the most ridiculous aspects of democracy will always remain . . . the fact that it has offered to its mortal enemies the means by which to destroy it.””

“It’s hard to believe that democracy is so fragile. But it was true in my country as well. In Papa’s youth, Italy was a democracy, but a demagogue became dictator despite Italy’s democratic tradition.”

“The absence,” I said, “of a democratic tradition in Germany’s history was an enormous factor in the fall of the Weimar Republic. The German people had never lived under a democracy before the Weimar Republic. Authoritarianism had strong roots in Germany. Prussian militarism was entrenched in the national psyche, even in schools for girls. The German film *Mädchen in Uniform* based on a play by Christa Winsloe and directed by Leontine Sagan with a cast of all women was inspired by the life story of a fourteen-year-old girl in love with her teacher in a girl’s Prussian boarding school. Persecuted by the school for her adolescent love, Manuela threw herself down a stair. The fall left her lame for the rest of her life.



Mädchen in Uniform, directed by Leontine Sagan with a cast of all women – Fair use, Deutsche Film-Gemeinschaft

“Because of the film’s condemnation of the cruelty of the Prussian educational system, Hitler ordered *Maidens in Uniform* to be burned for its decadent homoeroticism. Many of the film’s cast and crew were Jewish. Those who couldn’t escape Nazi Germany died in the death camps.

“The Weimar Republic’s artists and writers were iconoclastic and experimental. They opposed big business, authoritarianism, and Prussian militarism — the powers that the Nazis embraced.”

“The cultural spirit of Weimar,” Giovanni said, “was the total opposite of the Friekorps paramilitary, the Organization Consul terrorists, and the storm troopers. The Nazi movement was a backlash to the freedom of the Weimar Republic. With millions out of work in 1933 and with the Nazis’ talent for scheming and lies, the backlash won.”

“The autocratic German establishment,” I said, “proclaimed the Weimar works to be decadent. It had to be suppressed. The burning of ‘un-German’ books by Nazi students in 1933 was symbolic not only of the destruction of Weimar art, but the death of an enlightenment that flourished briefly in Germany.

“You’ve made a good case that the Versailles Treaty laid the foundations for World War Two.”

“The big difference in the endings of World War One and World War II was that the Versailles Treaty was taking whereas the Marshall plan was giving. Keynes understood that one war prepares the ground for the next war. From one holocaust will evolve the next holocaust. Because of the advances of technology, each succeeding war has slain more people than the previous war. Einstein said, ‘I know not with what weapons World War Three will be fought, but World War Four will be fought with sticks and stones.’ John Maynard Keynes philosophy makes me think of a folk tale about a contest between the wind and the sun.”

“Tell me the folk tale.”

“One day on top of Mount Olympus, the wind was bragging to the sun about his strength. The sun listened respectfully for a while then said, ‘I can see you are quite strong. Would you like to show me how strong you are?’ ‘I’d be delighted,’ roared the wind, ‘Give me any task and I’ll show you how strong I am.’”

“‘There’s a traveler on the road going up the mountain. It’s a chilly day and he’s wrapped up tightly in his wool cloak. Do you think you’re powerful enough to remove the gentleman’s cloak?’ ‘Oh,’ the wind laughed, his breath bending the trees, ‘that’s an easy thing for someone as strong as I.’ He huffed and puffed but the man only pulled his cloak ever tighter against the fury of the wind. Worn out by all of his huffing and

puffing, the wind turned to the sun to see him shining down on the traveler for the wind had blown all the clouds away. In the warmth of the sun, the traveler took off his coat.”

“What a great story!”

“Would you like to do my neck again?”

Giovanni lifted my head and slid his knees underneath until my head was cradled in his lap. On his fingers lingered the scent of sandalwood, sacred to Lord Ganesha, the Elephant God — the Hindu deity of knowledge, wisdom, and new experiences. Placing his hands upon my neck, he cupped my chin and drew his hands ever so gently upward to my temples, his lingering caress moving down my face and slowly up again.

“You have a magic touch, Giovanni. Your fingers have the same grace as your dancing. It’s the animal in you that I love.”

“You’re the intellect and I’m the animal . . . A perfect balance.” He paused for a moment, then said, “I’ve been thinking about something you once said. If Einstein is right and World War Four will be fought with sticks and stones what hope is there for mankind?”

“The hope is for mankind to grow wiser by examining the past — discover what worked and what didn’t work. In my lectures, I give my students a number of examples of the cycle of revenge leading from one war to the next — the delayed domino theory of history.”

“You mean the theory that if one country falls to communism, then the next state will fall to communism too?”

“Not at all. I mean that all of history is intimately interconnected. You can’t study a historical event as an isolated incident. Karl Marx said, ‘Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under existing circumstances transmitted from the past.’ The unrest in the Middle East today has its roots in the rule of the Ottoman Empire over several centuries and the colonial mandates set up by the Allied powers.

“I’ll give an example of one event causing a counter reaction, which in turn created another reaction decades later. After defeating the Prussians at the beginning of the 19th century, Napoleon levied heavy reparations. When Bismarck’s Prussian army conquered France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, they took revenge by levying heavy reparations on France and taking Alsace-Lorraine. The French retaliated on the

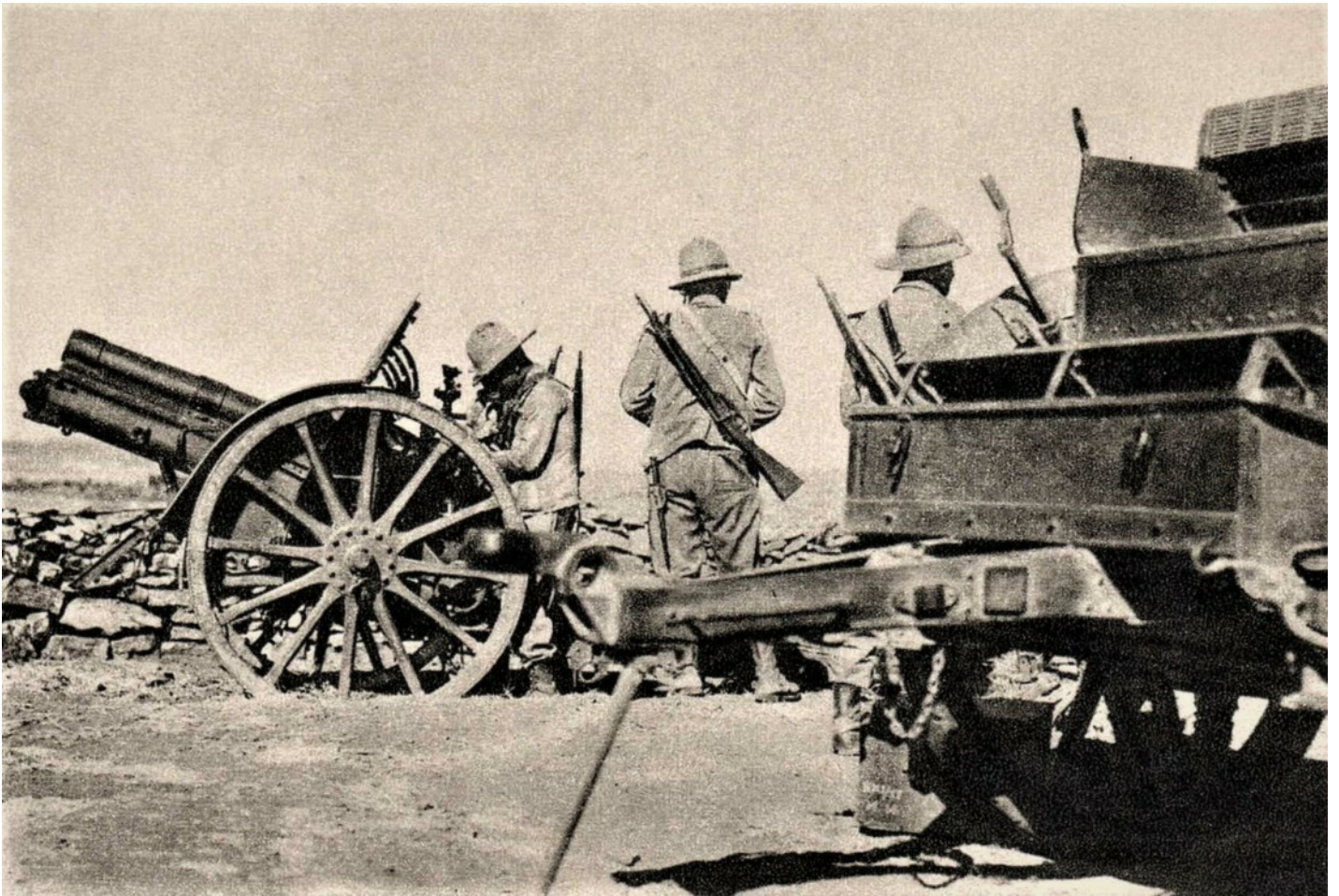


Benito Mussolini inspecting troops during the Second Italo-Abyssinian War – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

Germans after World War One, by forcing upon them the harsh conditions of the Versailles Treaty. Throughout history, punishment begets punishment, retaliation begets retaliation.”

“Your idea,” Giovanni said, “of one war growing out of a previous war was true in my country. At the end of the 19th century, the Italian army invaded Abyssinia. Supported by Russian advisors and armaments, the Abyssinians destroyed the Italian army in the Battle of Adwa. Italy’s pride was crushed. In combat with a minor power, Italy had suffered a higher casualty rate than in any other European battle of the 19th century, including Napoleon’s loss at Waterloo.

“When Mussolini came to power with the help of his Fascist black shirt thugs, the *squadristi* suppressed all opposition with violence. Mussolini declared that while the 19th century had been the century of the individual, the 20th century was the time of collectivism — the century of the state. Il Duce’s glorification of war was one of his core principles. But the *squadristi* didn’t attain any glory during the war. Three divisions of them were wiped out in the North African Campaign of ’42. The poet Gabriele D’Annunzio had revived the old Latin name for the Mediterranean, *mare nostrum*, ‘our sea.’ Mussolini seized upon it as a propaganda slogan for his



Italian artillery during the colonial conquest of Abyssinia, 1936 – Unknown author, Foto luce – ediz. D'arte, public domain, Wikimedia

desire to conquer new colonies. Il Duce called it *spazio vitali* for the Italian people just as Adolf Hitler had demanded *lebensraum*, 'living room' for the German people.”

“Thirty years later, the 19th century defeat of Italy led to a second invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. This time Abyssinia had no European power to defend it. The Abyssinia army was made up of untrained peasants. They had obsolete rifles and bows and arrows instead of machine guns and heavy artillery. While the Italian army had hundreds of tanks, the Abyssinians had three obsolete tanks. The Italians had hundreds of aircraft while the Abyssinians had just a few old fashioned aircraft. Despite the vast superiority of Italian weaponry, the war didn't go well at first. You were telling me how Kaiser Wilhelm II ordered the use of chlorine and mustard gas in the First War. Mussolini did the same thing in Abyssinia. Papa told me that to kill the maximum number of Abyssinians, Mussolini gave the order to spray them with mustard and phosgene gas. Il Duce ordered the extermination of all Abyssinians including prisoners. I was only three years old at the time, but when I was sixteen, Papa showed me photos of Italian troops posed next to cadavers hanging from the gallows and displaying chests full of decapitated heads.”



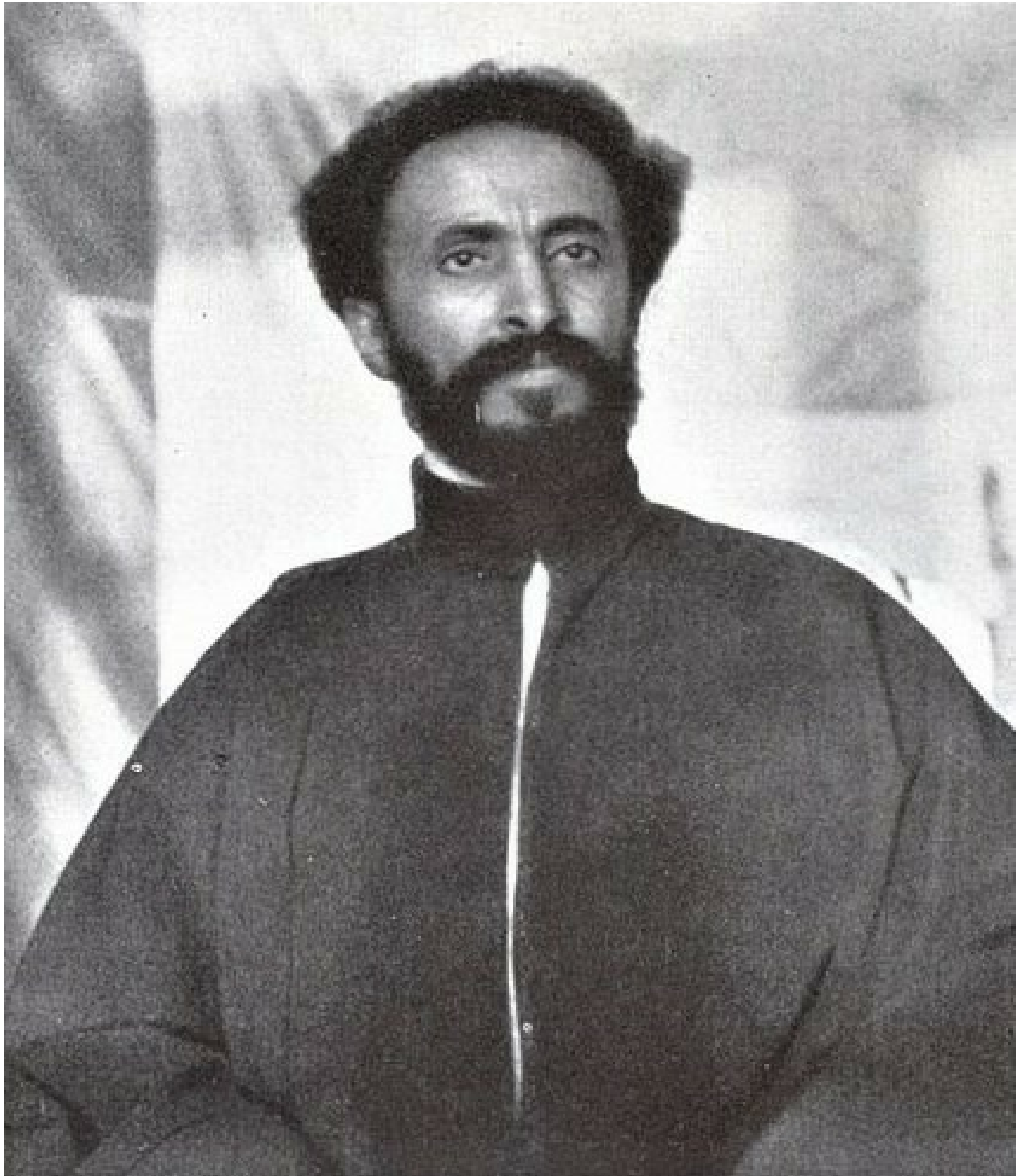
Abyssinian army marching to Jijiga, 1935 – Unknown author, public domain

“All of the colonial powers,” I said, “treated Africans with brutality. King Leopold of Belgium set up a personal fiefdom in the Belgian Congo to export ivory and develop rubber plantations using forced labor. If the workers failed to make their production quotas, they were beaten and mutilated by having their hand cut off. King Leopold’s mercenary troops were responsible for killing several million Congolese and slaughtering an unknown number of elephants.”

“Not even King Leopold,” Giovanni said, “accomplished what Mussolini did. Papa told me that the Italians equipped aircraft with the type of sprayers used for insecticide spraying. In wave after wave of flights, the Italians sprayed a fine rain creating a continuous sheet of poisonous fog over the countryside. Can you imagine? That bastard Mussolini just crop dusted the whole country with poison gas as if people were hordes of cockroaches.”

“Think of the pilots flying the planes,” I said, “spraying poison on the Abyssinians, wiping out the lives of thousands. They’re inducted into the army, collecting salaries, doing what they’re told to do. It’s a job. While below, people are dying an excruciating death by asphyxiation.”

“Haile Salassie, the leader of Abyssinia,” Giovanni said, “testified before the League of Nations saying that not only soldiers, but women, children, animals, rivers, and lakes were drenched by a deadly rain so pervasive that nothing could survive. Even though the use of gas warfare was documented by the Red Cross, the western nations in the League of Nations ignored the evidence and recognized Italy’s conquest of Abyssinia.”



Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, 1934 – Author, Walter Mittelholzer, public domain, Wikimedia

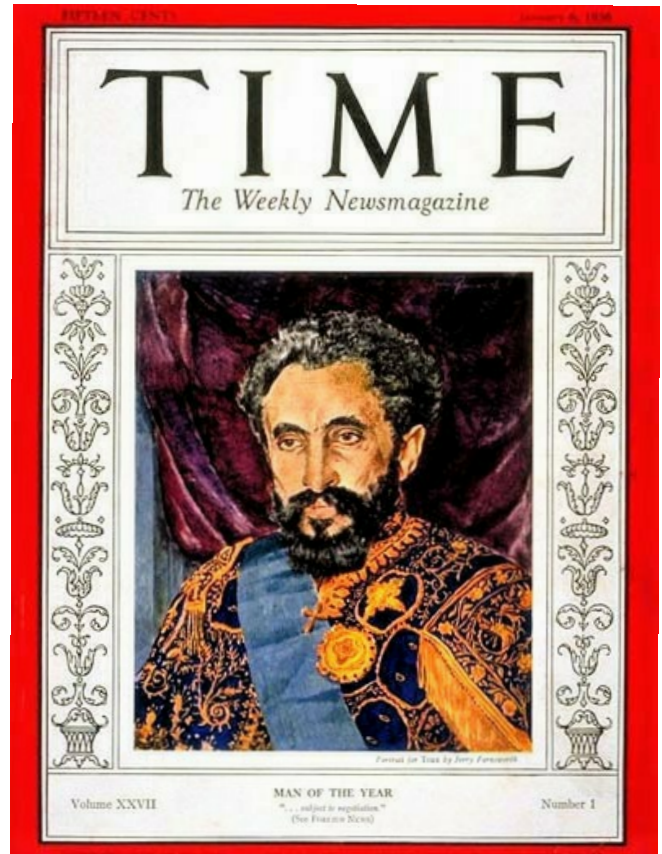
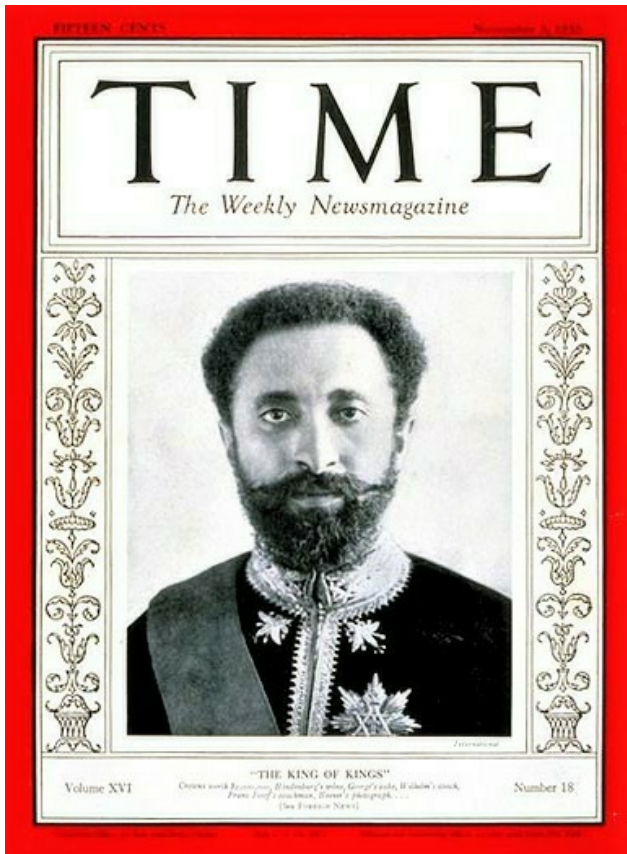


Haile Selassie, Emperor of Abyssinia – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia. Upon addressing the League of Nations, 30 June 1936 on the Abyssinian Crisis and the Italo-Abyssinian war, Haile said, “It is not merely a question of the settlement of Italian aggression. It is collective security: it is the very existence of the League of Nations. It is the confidence that each State is to place in international treaties. It is the value of promises made to small States that their integrity and their independence shall be respected and ensured.”

“Gabriel Péri,” I said, “spoke out in the French National Assembly condemning Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia, but the government did nothing.”

“I’ve heard of Denis praise Péri. He was in the Resistance.”

“Péri was a virulent opponent of fascism during the 1930s. In the early days of the occupation, the Nazis executed him at Fort Mont-Valérien. Poets Paul Eluard and Louis Aragon wrote the “Ballad to Him who Sings While being Tortured.” Péri was a noble man.



Haile Selassie, cover of *Time* magazine, 3 November, 1930, at left. At right, Haile Selassie, *Time* magazine Man of the Year for his resistance to the Italian invasion, 6 January 1936 – Author, Jerry Farnsworth, public domain, Wikimedia



French politician and journalist Gabriel Péri, 1932 – Author, Agence de presse Mondial Photo-Press, Source Bibliothèque nationale de France, Wikimedia. Péri denounced Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia and France's failure to intervene in the Spanish Civil War. A staunch opponent of Nazi Germany, Péri was arrested 18 May 1941 and shot 15 December at Fort Mont-Valérien along with other French Resistants.

“I asked Papa how could the United States, England, and France be so blind to the repellant behavior of Italy in Abyssinia? He told me that they were under the delusion that if they gave in to Mussolini, he wouldn’t join forces with Hitler.”

“Britain,” I said, “was blind when they entertained the illusion that Mussolini wouldn’t join forces with Hitler. Soon as Mussolini became Prime Minister in 1922, he opposed Britain’s territorial claims and adopted a political program to force Britain out of the Mediterranean.”

“Papa thought the British were fools to expect one fascist dictatorship not to support another fascist dictatorship. Papa’s prediction came true. Just four years after his victory in Abyssinia, Mussolini entered World War Two as Hitler’s Axis ally.”

“Long before Mussolini’s genocide in Abyssinia,” I said, “the Germans committed genocide against the Herero and Namaqua people.”

“Where was that?”

“German Southwest Africa. It’s on the west coast of Africa just north of South Africa.”



Kamel-Schutztruppe patrol, German Southwest Africa, 1906 – Author, Walther Dobbertin, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“I’ve never heard of German Southwest Africa.”

“That’s because it no longer has that name. After Germany lost the war, the League of Nations assigned the colony to South Africa to govern as a mandate. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck originally sanctioned the colony in 1882 when he granted a colonial concession under the protection of Imperial Germany. Heinrich Göring, the father of Hermann Göring, Reichsmarschall of the Luftwaffe, was one of the original administrators. A few years later, it became a German Crown Colony and a system of laws passed which granted different rights to the Europeans than the indigenous people.”

“The Germans,” Giovanni said, “set up an apartheid system like South Africa?”

“It was the same story as the American Indians. Indigenous people were deprived of their rights. The arriving German colonists began confiscating the farms and the livestock of the Nama and Herero cattle herders. Gold and platinum, copper and diamonds were discovered that doomed the rights of the Nama and Herero people who were used as slave labor to build roads and railways. Resistance to the confiscations led to the first rebellion, the Hottentot Uprising of the Namas, followed by the War of 1904 when the Hereros learned that the Germans planned to split their territory in two by a railway into the interior, relocating them into reservations, essentially concentration camps. Jakobus Morenga forged an alliance between the Herero and Namaqua tribes and began raiding German farms killing a number of settlers that the *Schutztruppe* was not able to defend.”

“The *Schutztruppe*?”

“The *Schutztruppe* were colonial troops in German South West Africa who committed mass genocide against the Herero and Nama people.



Lieutenant General Lothar von Trotha – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia. Commander in Chief of the colonial forces in German Southwest Africa. At the Battle of Waterberg, Trotha’s troops encircled the Herero on three sides, leaving the only escape route to the waterless western end of the Kalahari Desert. Trotha’s troops poisoned the water holes and he issued the order, “The Nama who chooses not to surrender and lets himself be seen in German territory will be shot until all are exterminated. . . . Any Herero found inside the German frontier with or without a gun or cattle, will be executed. I shall spare neither women nor children.”



The Herero and Nama Revolt was suppressed by the German *Schutztruppe* cavalry, German Southwest Africa, 1904 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Schutztruppe cavalry mounted on zebras, German Southwest Africa, 1911 – Author, Scherl, Unknown source, public domain, Wikimedia

“The *Schutztruppe* cavalry was not only mounted on camels but zebras too.”

“Zebras can be domesticated?”

“Apparently so. It’s a curious sight. In response to Jakobus Morenga’s rebellion, Count von Schlieffen, head of the General Staff of the German Army appointed General Lothar von Trotha, *Oberbefehlshaber*, to command an expeditionary force of 14,000 troops to repress the rebellion.”

“Who was Jakobus Morenga?”



Jakobus Morenga, the Black Napoleon, led the Herero people in a revolt against the German Empire, 1904-1908 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

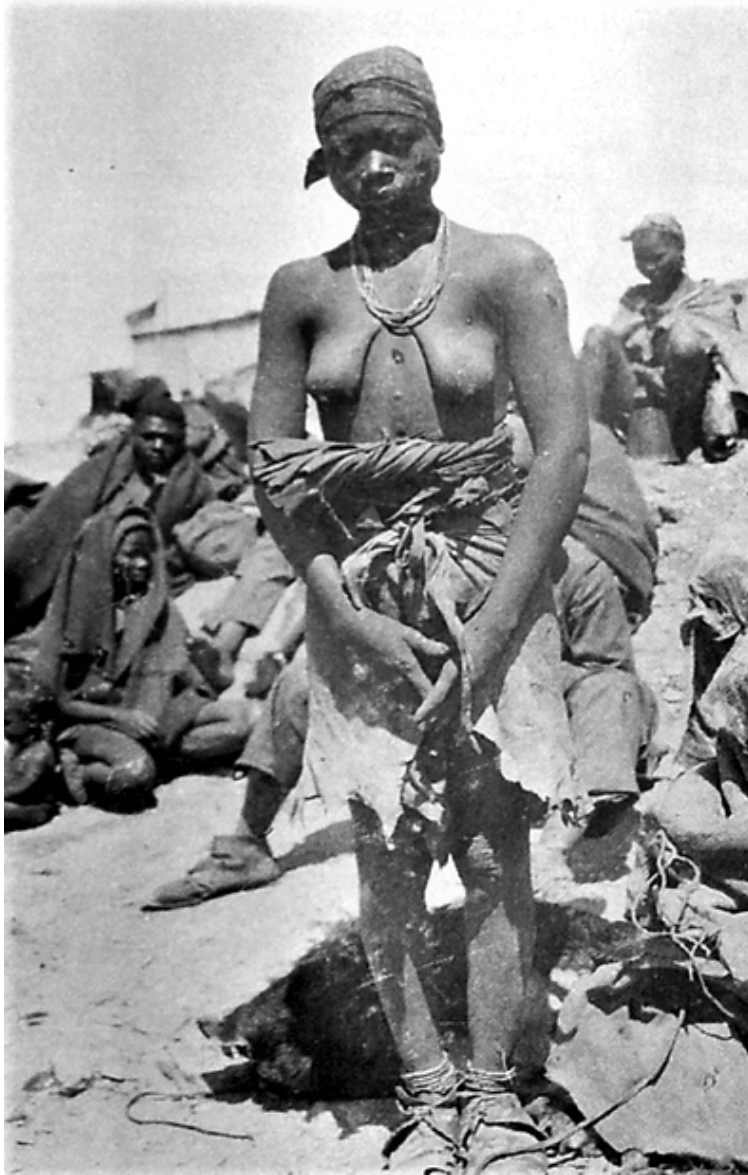
“Morenga was half Herero and half Nama, a mine worker in South Africa who’d been educated by Christian missionaries. A tactical genius, Morenga inflicted great losses on the German troops which alarmed the Reichstag in Germany. At the Battle of Waterberg, von Trotha’s German troops, armed with rifles, machine guns, and artillery surrounded 5,000 Ovaherero warriors equipped with obsolete weapons, but wasn’t able to kill all of the survivors who fled eastward into the Omaheke desert on the western arm of the Kalahari Desert, a region of little water and vast sand dunes sculpted by wind.



Namibia Desert – Author, Heyheyuwb, English Wikimedia

“Von Trotha said, ‘the Negro does not respect treaties but only brute force. The Herero are no longer German subjects. Every Herero, armed or unarmed, will be shot dead within the German borders. The nation should be destroyed. We will annihilate the Hereros by confiscating and poisoning their water holes. I will finish off the rebellious tribes by rivers of blood.’ Many of the women and girls were raped before being killed.”

“Rape,” Giovanni cried, “why is it always rape?”



Slave laborer, Shark Island concentration camp, German Southwest Africa, 1904 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Rape is used by conquering forces as a means of control — of racial domination. The German forces tracked the survivors, pushing them deeper into the Omaheke desert in the Western Kalahari chasing the fleeing tribesmen from one well to another until they were cut off from all water sources where the Hereros slowly died of dehydration and starvation. Photos of the time show the Hereros with their bones protruding from their flesh, their legs like sticks, like the living dead in Holocaust death camps. The ones who tried to return from the Omaheke desert were hunted down by von Trotha’s soldiers killing men, women, and children alike leaving the desert strewn with human skeletons and skulls. Survivors were pressed into slave labor in the copper mines of a consortium controlled by Deutsche Bank. Within a couple of years, 100,000 Hereros, Namas, and Damaras were dead — a policy of near total extermination. It was the first genocide of the 20th century.”



Herero prisoners in chains – Source, Jeremy Sarkin, *Germany's Genocide of the Herero*, James Currey, March 17, 2011, p. 225, public domain, Wikimedia

“Even before Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler” Giovanni said, “the policy of extermination of other races had a long history in Germany.”

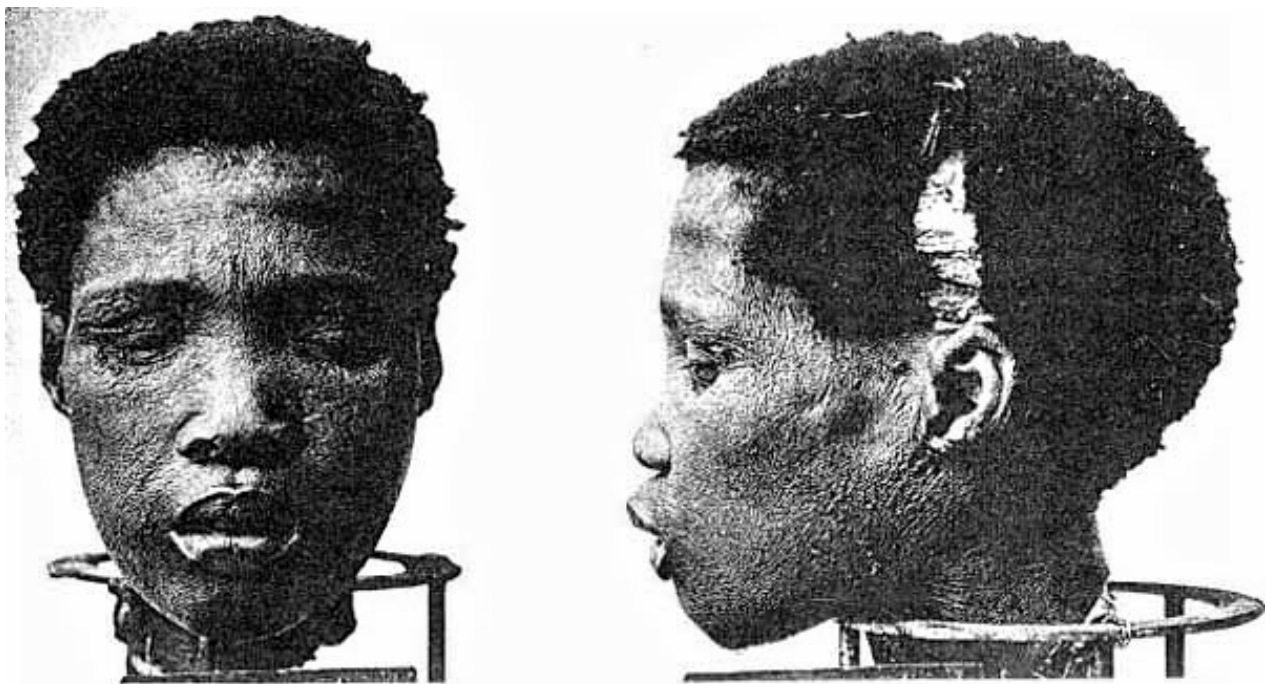
“You can’t single out just the Germans for the extermination of native people. Along with the American massacre of native tribes and the Japanese butchery of Asians, all the European powers, British, French, German, Italian, Belgian, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian practiced genocide against native people. It was the same story in German West Africa, Cameroon, Togoland, and German East Africa, which that were colonized using native people as forced labor to build roads, towns, and railways.



Child dying on the beach of Swakopmund, German concentration camp, German Southwest Africa, 1904 – Unknown author, University of Leiden, Netherlands, public domain, Wikimedia. “The angel of death has descended violently upon them.” – Ericksen.



A rare thunderstorm in the Kalahari Desert, Namibia – Author, Hp. Baumeler, Wikimedia. General Lothar von Trotha's *Schutztruppe* chased the fleeing Hereros into the Western Klahari desert until they were cut off from the wells, most of which had been poisoned. One by one, the Hereros died of starvation and lack of water.



Death Island prisoner's decapitated head used for medical experimentation – Unknown author, Source, African Studies Center, University of Leiden, Netherlands, public domain, Wikimedia. Death Island concentration camp in Lüderitz, Namibia, was used during the Herero and Namaqua genocide of 1904-1908. Several thousand Herero and Namaqua men, women, and children died, the great majority dying from typhoid and scurvy due to forced work, malnutrition, and unsanitary conditions.

“What happened to Morenga?”

“It was the same as the American suppression of Tecumseh and Sitting Bull, Geronimo and Cochise. Morenga was captured by British troops in South Africa, imprisoned then released under the condition that he never return to the German colony. Once again, he returned to organize his fighters in the Kalahari Desert, but was pursued and killed by German and British forces. Jakobus Morenga, ‘the Black Napoleon,’ the survivor of fifty battles was an African Nationalist visionary, hero of the Ovaherero and Nama nations.”

“What happened,” Giovanni asked, “after Germany lost Southwest Africa?”

“The League of Nations mandated German Southwest Africa to the United Kingdom. Governed by the Crown colony of South Africa, it was in effect a province of South Africa. The white minority elected representatives to a whites only South African Parliament. The National Party has enforced a rigid program of apartheid with racial classifications. Over a number of years, the chiefs of the Hereros have submitted petitions to the UN asking for Namibia independence from South Africa but have been denied. At the moment, it looks like they have little chance to win their freedom.”

“Are Germans aware of the terrible slaughter of the aboriginal people in their colonies?”

“Most Germans know little about their colonial past. Its colonial amnesia — a condition in all the European States. Germany has made an attempt to come to terms with the atrocities of the Reich and atone for the Shoah, but regarding the mass execution of the Nama and Hereros, there is only silence.”

“Italy,” Giovanni said, “followed in the footsteps of Germany. After the Abyssinians were wiped out, Papa went down to Rome to listen to Mussolini’s victory speech. In full military dress, Il Duce spoke from the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia, while thousands of Italians cried, ‘*Imperatore! Imperatore!*’ Mussolini declared, ‘People of Italy, people of the world, peace has been restored.’ The crowds were ecstatic with the news of victory. Finally the shame of 1896 had been banished. At last Italy had her empire. Time after time the crowd recalled Mussolini to the balcony while boys from fascist youth groups sang ‘Hymn of the Empire.’ Through a war of conquest, Italy had gained a huge new territory at the price of a half million Abyssinian deaths. It was Mussolini’s hour of glory. The people were delirious with joy. Mussolini had united the Italian nation. Fascism was victorious.

“Mama told me that when Papa came back from Rome, he barricaded himself in his workshop and didn’t talk for a week.



Benito Mussolini in Piazza Venezia, Rome – Unknown author, public domain, Everett Historical



Benito Mussolini reviewing adolescent soldiers in northern Italy, 1944 – Author, Vack, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Benito Mussolini and Fascist youth, 1935, Rome – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Papa was so ashamed of a country that had destroyed another civilization, he didn’t repair a single accordion for a month. The cult of Mussolini was dressed up by the ministry of propaganda as a revival of the Roman Empire with Mussolini as Augustus. Papa said the slogan Italians heard ad nauseam was *Il Duce ha sempre ragione*. Mussolini was always right about everything. The ministry of education took over the curriculum of the schools. Elementary schools taught children to be good Fascists. If teachers resisted, they were fired. Our textbooks glorified the Fascist soul. After 1920, fascist youth organizations sprang up — in 1926, the Opera Nazionale Balilla for kids 8 to 14 and the Avanguardisti and Giovani Italiane for those 14 to 18 that became a paramilitary organization to prepare men for the Italian Army, training them in physical courage and patriotism, ‘the Fascists of tomorrow.’ The Nazis duplicated Mussolini’s system of educating the kids.

“Papa said that Mussolini had projected that the conquest of Abyssinia would cost 5 to 6 billion lire, but

the true cost of the invasion turned out to be 35 billion lire, six times greater than planned. Mussolini's occupation of Abyssinia cost another 20 billion lire. When he supported Franco's overthrow of the Republican government of Spain, it cost Italy an additional 15 billion lire. That makes 70 million lire. My country is a poor country. The enormous cost of Il Duce's fantasy of establishing a colonial empire bankrupted Italy. When people clamor for the glory of war, they forget the staggering cost of war. When Mussolini signed the Pact of Steel with Hitler in 1939 that was the final straw. Papa began thinking of coming to America.



Prime Minister of Britain Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of France Édouard Daladier, Adolf Hitler, and Benito Mussolini signed the Munich Agreement, 1938 that gave the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia to Germany – Unknown Author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“I love Italy. It is a land of exquisite countryside, a great cuisine, and fabled history. I will always carry Italy in my heart. But I'm going to be an American. I'm preparing for citizenship by reading American history — Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, the ambassadors to France. I didn't realize that General de Rochambeau and Marquis de Lafayette and Admiral DeGrasse were so important in George Washington's defeat of the British army at Yorktown. Right now, I'm reading commentary on the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and Bill of Rights.



Mulberry Street, Little Italy, Lower East Side, New York City, circa 1900 – Author, Detroit Publishing Co., Library of Congress, public domain, Wikimedia

I’m learning a lot of things about Italians in my reading. For a long time Italians have made good Americans. In the 1880s, millions of Italians came to the United States from agricultural areas in Sicilia, Campania, Basilicata, and Calabria. So many Union and Confederate soldiers were killed in the Civil War that America was short of help. Italian immigrants helped fill the big hole in the work force. They worked in the fields and the mining camps, provided the labor to build roads, sewers, subways, and bridges. The Italians helped build America. Like Papa, I believe in democracy. Fascism, oligarchies, and oppression, that’s why we came to America.”

“Mama raised me as a Catholic, but I can’t understand how Christians can believe in God and yet justify such disregard for life as the Italians showed in Abyssinia. Mussolini was anti-clerical, but to get the Catholics behind him, he was baptized. That convinced many conservative Catholics to support him. The priests who opposed Mussolini did not have the power of the Vatican so they became active underground in the resistance. The Italian people’s massive support of Mussolini was one of the biggest disappointments of Papa’s life. The only good thing after Italy’s defeat in the war was that Papa brought me to New York. I was looking for a shining new world and New York City was the place to discover jazz.”



Fourteen-year-old Italian girl working at a paper box factory, 1913 – Author, Lewis Wickes Hine, New York Public Library, public domain, Wikimedia



Little Italy, Chicago, 1909 – Author, *Chicago Daily News*, Source, Chicago Historical Society, public domain, Wikimedia



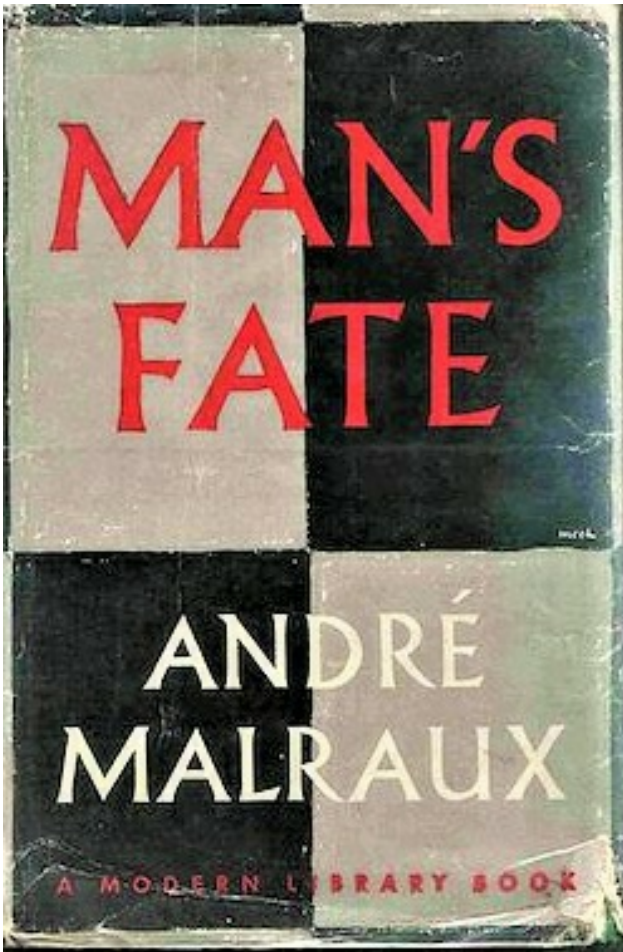
Portrait of Benito Mussolini, 1930 – Author, Keystone-France, Gamma-Keystone, public domain, Wikimedia

Giovanni poured another cup of espresso from the thermos. It's a good thing I'd brought a second thermos. The dark shadows under his eyes worried me.

After finishing his espresso he said, "The other day at rehearsal, Claude Romain was talking about the motivations of a fascist like Mussolini and he mentioned *mauvaise foi*. What is that?"

"*Mauvaise foi* means bad faith. It is the failure to make an authentic choice. A central theme of existentialism is overcoming our anguish over moral uncertainty. You'll remember, I once spoke of Sartre's doctrine of freedom — man is condemned to be free. Sartre argues that one cannot escape responsibility because the very act of avoiding making a choice is in itself a choice. When man attempts to escape the anguish of making a free choice, he commits an act of self-deception. That self-deception, *mauvaise foi*, is bad faith."

"But how does one determine," Giovanni said, "if one is making an authentic choice?"



At left, *La Condition Humaine*, *Man's Fate*, published in 1933 – Fair use, Wikimedia. At right, André Malraux portrait, 1974 – Author, Roger Pic, Bibliothèque nationale de France, public domain, Wikimedia. André Malraux, French writer, winner of the Prix Goncourt, and art theorist was a supporter of the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War and a leader in the French Resistance against the Nazis. After the war, Malraux became Charles de Gaulle's Minister of Information, and France's first Minister of Cultural Affairs. In an attempt to prevent Algeria's quest for independence from French colonial rule, the right-wing paramilitary OAS, Organisation armée secrete, attempted to assassinate Malraux with a bomb that failed to kill Malraux, but blinded a four-year old girl.

“In his novel *La Condition Humaine*, published in English as *Man's Fate*, Andre Malraux has a similar view to Sartre — making the authentic choice means standing up for what one believes is right even in the face of severe consequences. Malraux believes that it is a choice between hedonism and commitment to a higher cause. Two of Malraux's characters, father and son, face two possibilities, a choice of fighting oppression or the attempt to live by seeking any sort of comfort available. The father, a professor at the University of Peking has given up all illusions and taken solace in opium, ‘We must escape reality.’ But his son, Kyo renounces escape. Revolted by the oppression of the Chinese people, he chooses action and joins the 1927 revolutionary movement in Shanghai. By aiding the workers who are dying from hunger, he gives meaning to his life. When the revolution fails, Kyo loses his life.”

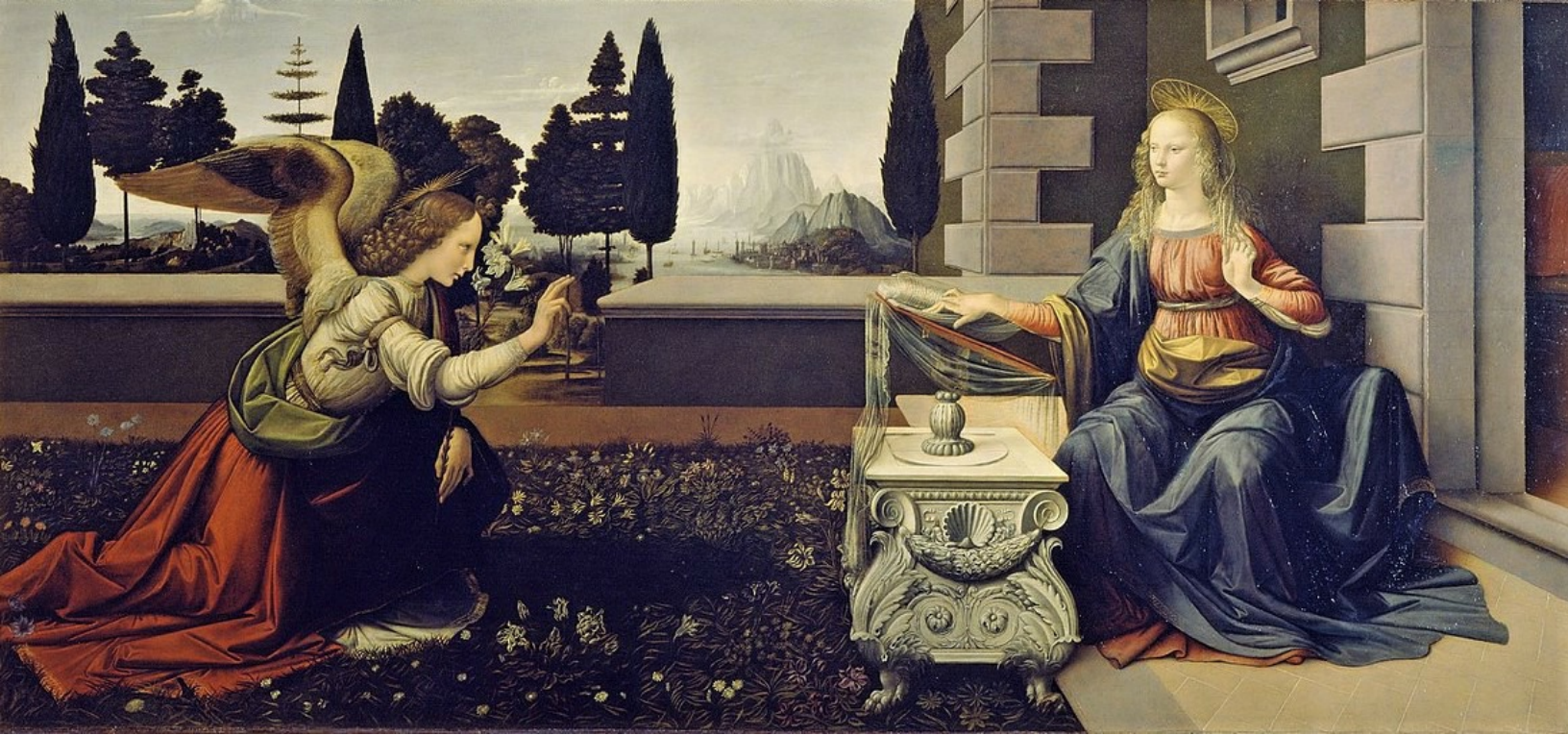
“Existentialism sounds like self-sacrifice,” Giovanni said. “We must revolt to be alive.”

“Your trumpet playing is a revolt against existing music. What you say is true, existentialism is a revolt — a commitment to bring about a more just world. While existentialism is not a unified philosophy, there is a shared focus on ethical values, how to choose between right and wrong. Malraux, like Sartre and Camus, believes that only through braving death — through choosing to die rather than living a life of compromise, can mankind find the ultimate freedom. Sartre believes that we must question the morality of all of our choices. In Sartre’s novel, *The Reprieve*, or *Le Sursis* in French, Daniel lives as if he had no control over his behavior. He lives encrusted in a series of habits and customs. For Sartre, this way of living is a living death. Man’s freedom of choice is the key to existentialism.

“In the early days of the war while Sartre was serving as a meteorologist in the French army, he was captured by German troops and was held for nine months in a Stalag prisoner of war camp in Trier, Germany. During his imprisonment, he read Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and began writing *Being and Nothingness*. Working with the camp’s group of playwrights, Sartre wrote his first play, *Bariona*, a retelling of the Annunciation story in the time of Christ. When the Roman tax collector levied a heavy new tax on the struggling villagers, Bariona, the village chief, says they will pay the harsh tax but they must resolve to bring no more children into the world for that will end the ‘suffering of our race.’ When the Archangel Gabriel appears to tell the Virgin Mary that she will bear a son, Bariona heads for Bethlehem to kill the newborn Messiah for a false hope promised to mankind.

“On the way to Bethlehem, Bariona encounters Balthazar, a wise man, played in the camp’s production by Sartre himself, who reveals Christ’s true, existentialist purpose — not to create heaven on earth but rather, to transcend humanity’s suffering by giving it meaning. ‘You will discover the truth which Christ came to teach you and which you already know: you are not your suffering. Christ came to teach you that you are responsible for yourself and your suffering.’

“Persuaded by Balthazar’s message that redemption is not found through despair but only by the choices we make and our responsibility to revolt against our condition. Bariona realizes that he must risk his life and oppose the tyranny of Rome. He vows to resist Herod’s plan to kill Jesus even if it costs him his life.



Annunciation, 1472 – 1475 – Author, Leonardo da Vinci, Uffizi gallery, Florence, Italy, public domain, Wikimedia

“During the rehearsals of his Christmas play, Sartre experienced a collective existence with the prisoners. Watching his fellow prisoners responding to his Christmas play — both Christians and atheists united in spirit, Sartre realized that a play could produce a religious experience.

“His nine months as a prisoner of war was the beginning of Sartre’s engagement. Before the war, he had been an academic professor of philosophy, but from that moment on, Sartre became a resister to the Nazi occupation. The French had lost all of their rights during the occupation. They had been imprisoned, tortured, and deported en masse. The all-powerful Gestapo existed to keep the people silent. The cruelty of the Nazis pushed the French to ask the question, the most profound question, ‘If they torture me, can I hold out?’”

“Although there is a great difference in their philosophies, there is a common theme between Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre. They share Voltaire’s and Marx’s view that a philosopher is valuable not only for interpreting the world but for his ability to bring about change in society. While Sartre and Camus disagreed about communism, they both agreed that the meaning of life is to take responsibility for your decisions in life. The secret of a free man is his power to resist pain and death. The philosopher must actively apply his conclusions to the world. Sartre said freedom is ‘what you do with what’s been done to you.’ The philosopher must be a force for justice. Sartre and de Beauvoir have traveled around the world to speak against colonialism and the oppression of man. Existentialism is not just a philosophy of speculation, it’s a philosophy of action.”

“I understand why,” Giovanni said, “we should act to bring about a better world. I am responsible for honing my talent and giving it to the world and I’m responsible for securing justice in the world. But, I also see another possibility. A commitment to action could also be the motivating principle of a terrorist who blows up a café killing dozens of people because he passionately believes he’s helping to oppose injustice.”

“That’s a valid point, Giovanni. The ultimate question is how do we determine what is right and what is wrong? That is the existential dilemma.”

I looked up at the sky. Grey clouds were swallowing the sun. For a time I laid in silence watching the clouds flying swiftly through the swaying tree tops, a scent of rain in the air. I was thinking of how I could say to Giovanni what I’ve been wanting to say. Finally I said, “I’ve had the thought that if something happened to me, Céline wouldn’t have anyone for support. I’ve saved most of the money I’ve inherited from Mama. But Céline would need more than money. I have sole responsibility for her. There’s no one here for her but me. She’d need someone to look out for her. If something happened to me would you stand by her?”

“What a crazy thought. You’re going to outlive me.”

“That could very well be considering the way you drink and smoke. But would you look out for her?”

“There’s no one else?”

“There’re two possibilities, both of them not good. Papa’s brother, Marcel isn’t trust worthy. He’d exploit Céline and walk off with mama’s money. On the other side of the family, there’s Mama’s sister, Catherine in Lyon. Because of my grandfather’s abuse, Mama ran away from home. She left her sister behind. We haven’t heard from Catherine in years.”

“You can count on me . . . I’ll take care of Céline.”

“Thank you, my darling. I knew I could count on you.” I kissed him and then kissed him again.

I looked into his eyes and saw the depths of his fatigue. “I worry about your smoking, Giovanni.”

“I’m trying to cut down.”

“We start living right,” I said, “only when it’s too late.”

“I read in *L’Express* that Hitler and Mussolini didn’t believe in smoking. Churchill and Roosevelt smoked. What does that tell you?”

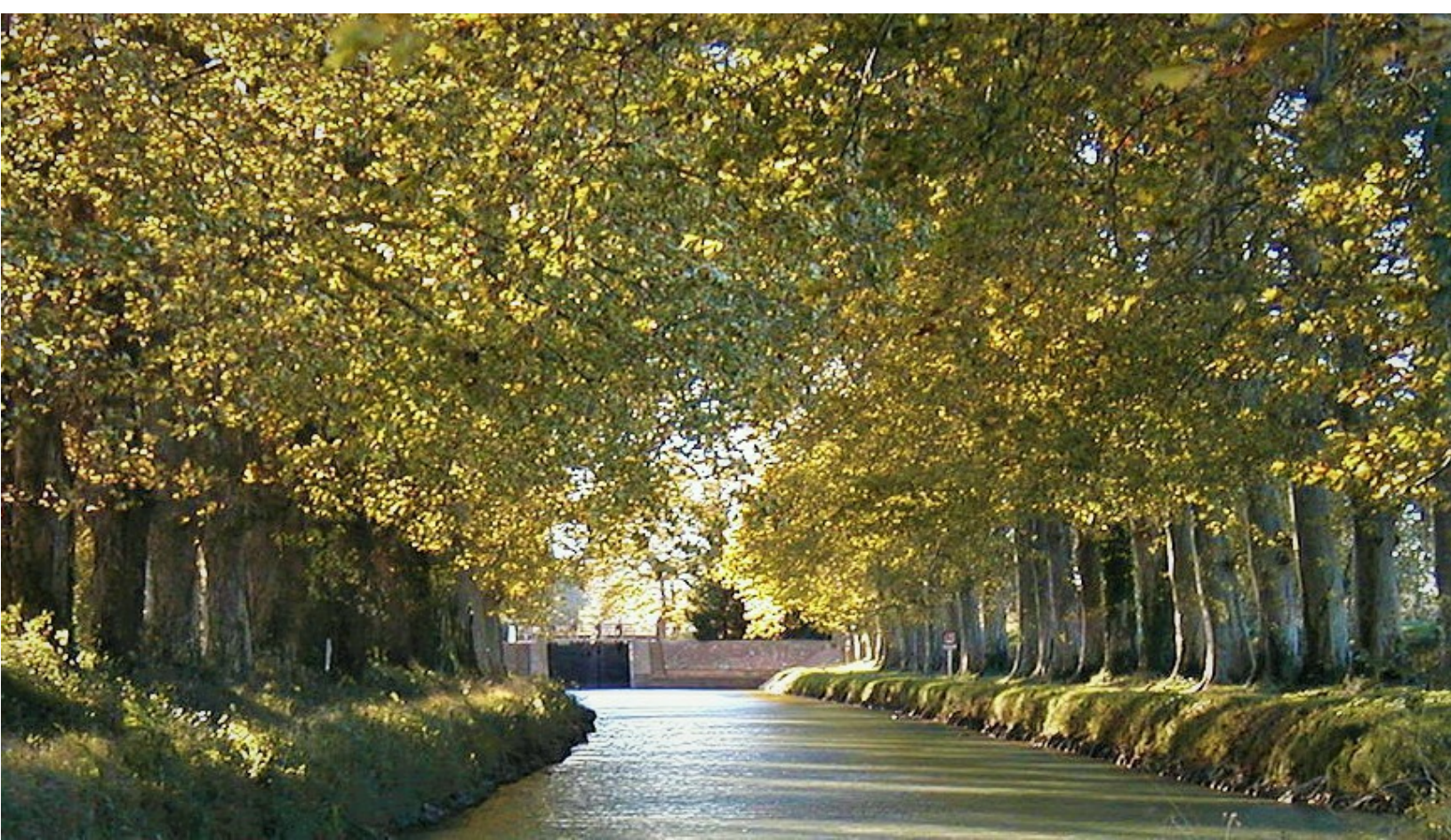
I laughed. “You have a point. But you’re looking run down. Those dark circles under your eyes, you really look a wreck. I’m worried.”

“A long tour is a bitch. I’d stay up all night unable to sleep. After a sleepless night, I sometimes had to catch an early train. Every week we moved to a different hotel, a different bed. One time, the bed was too soft, the next one too hard. I didn’t eat and drank too much. My hours were mixed up. I’d sleep a few hours here and a few hours there. One of the best drugs is sleep and I wasn’t getting any. Worst of all, *you* were missing from my bed.”

“I understand how much you’ve suffered,” I said. “Lay down, I’m going to make you suffer some more.”

I found a vial of Ylang Ylang in his kit and unbuttoned Giovanni’s shirt and slid it down to his waist and rubbed the Ylang Ylang into his skin, then stroked his neck with the Snowy egret’s plume, moving slowly down his chest and then up again, lingering on his shoulders and arms then across his pectorals and slowly down his stomach.

Responding to the caresses of the egret’s plume, he slipped his arms around my waist and caressed my thighs. I kissed his neck, dozens of kisses over his breasts. I slipped off his trousers and underwear, pulled off his socks marveling at his shapely feet, tasting the spicy pepperoncini on his lips as he kissed me, giving to me what I had longed for during so many weeks. I worshipped at the altar of my addiction receiving the pleasure that only he could give as long as I wanted it until I reached the divine place where only Giovanni could bring me, Giovanni, my beloved Giovanni.



Canal du Midi – Xvolks, Wikimedia

***Without words, without writing and without books there would be
no history, there could be no concept of humanity.***

— Hermann Hesse