



EXTERMINATION MAP FOR THE BALTIC COUNTRIES

Map illustrated with coffins attached to the comprehensive report of "Action Group A" for the year 1941. (PS 2273)

- (1) Execution of Jews successfully carried out by Action Group A.
- (2) Free of Jews.
- (3) The number of Jews still alive is estimated at 128,000.

# HARVEST OF HATE

Léon Poliakov

INTRODUCED BY  
LORD RUSSELL OF LIVERPOOL, C.B.E., M.C.

FOREWORDS BY  
FRANÇOIS MAURIAC and REINHOLD NIEBUHR

LONDON

ELEK BOOKS



## The Over-all Plan of Extermination

THE ARCHIVES OF THE THIRD REICH and the depositions and accounts of its leaders make possible a reconstruction, down to the last detail, of the origin and development of the plans for aggression, the military campaigns, and the whole array of procedures by which the Nazis intended to reshape the world to their liking. Only the campaign to exterminate the Jews, as regards its conception as well as many other essential aspects, remains shrouded in darkness. Inferences, psychological considerations, and third- or fourth-hand reports enable us to reconstruct its development with considerable accuracy. Certain details, however, must remain forever unknown. The three or four people chiefly involved in the actual drawing up of the plan for total extermination are dead and no documents have survived; perhaps none ever existed. Such is the secrecy with which the masters of the Third Reich, however boastful and cynical they may have been in other matters, surrounded their biggest crime.

### THE DECISION

Undoubtedly it was the Master himself, Adolf Hitler, who signed the Jews' death warrant. Certain people might have influenced him: extremists like Josef Goebbels or the party chancellor, Martin Bormann, whose star was rising to its zenith;<sup>1</sup> these were just the men to press him to the decision. According to a strange piece of testimony—by Dr. Felix Kersten, (1) a Finn who was Himmler's per-

(1) Dr. Felix Kersten was a physiotherapist in Berlin. At the beginning of 1939, he was recommended to Himmler, who was suffering from violent stomach cramps. With the help of massage Kersten succeeded in eliminating the pains. Himmler made Kersten his personal physician; he became (in the phrase of the English historian, Trevor-Roper) Himmler's "confessor" and

sonal physician and confidant—the order to begin the systematic extermination of the Jews was given to Himmler by the Führer in the fall of 1940; this decision was supposed to have been extorted from him by Goebbels. However trustworthy a witness Kersten may be, his story, which refers to a conversation he had with Himmler in 1942, must be accepted with reservation. All we can

acquired a certain influence over him. Thus he was able to influence a great deal of humanitarian activity, a fact which was officially recognized after the war by the government of the Netherlands. He was particularly responsible for the initiation of the Himmler-Bernadotte conferences of February-April 1945.

In his memoirs entitled *Klerk en Beul; Himmler van nabij* (Amsterdam, Meulenhof, 1948), Kersten stated that Himmler confided to him in November 1942:

"I did not want to exterminate the Jews, Kersten. I had other ideas on this subject. But that miserable Goebbels did everything he could to make it turn out this way."

I looked at Himmler in astonishment.

"I fully understand your surprise," Himmler went on, "and nobody will believe me. In the beginning of 1934 the Führer ordered me to force the Jews to emigrate from Germany. We set up an organization to make this possible—to enable hundreds of thousands of Jews to create a new life for themselves abroad. Nevertheless, an infamous campaign was carried on against us, one that led to the war. Up to 1940, the Jews could still leave Germany freely; then Goebbels won out."

"Why Goebbels?" I asked.

"Goebbels thought that the Jewish problem could be settled only by the total extermination of the Jews. Every Jew still alive was an implacable enemy of German National-Socialism. That is why any consideration shown the Jews was absurd. This was not my opinion. As early as 1934, I had proposed to the Führer that all the Jews be evacuated to Madagascar and there be established as an independent state. The island was fertile, the climate excellent."

"But doesn't Madagascar belong to France?"

"We could have called an international conference, and victorious Germany would have solved the problem once and for all. But for months and years Goebbels kept exciting the Führer to exterminate the Jews by radical means. Once the war had begun, he finally gained the upper hand. In the summer of 1940, the Führer ordered that the Jews be exterminated by degrees. He gave this task to the SS and to me. That was the one and only time I contradicted the Führer. He was at his headquarters in France. I told him, 'The SS is ready to fight and die from myself down to the last man, but don't give us a mission like this.' The Führer became furious and said, 'Himmler, you are being disobedient! What is the meaning of this? This is an order; I take the responsibility for it.'

"So I had no other recourse. Understand me, Kersten, and I hope that History will understand me also." (*Klerk en Beul*, p. 197-98.)

know with certainty is that the decision to exterminate the Jews was taken by Hitler some time between the end of the western campaign in June 1940 and the attack on Russia a year later. Contrary to Kersten's account, it would seem more plausible to date the decision some months later—that is, at the beginning of 1941.

At this point we must enter the domain of psychological speculation, if we are to answer the second question: What were the factors that influenced this decision? Why was this policy adopted, whose consequences—in the words of Frank, the hangman of Poland—"could not be effaced in a thousand years," (2) and which provoked emotion even in the worst Nazi criminals? Such terms as "hatred of the Jews" and "Hitler's folly" are too general and explain nothing; Hitler could be a shrewd and calculating politician, at least so long as the fate of the Third Reich was not sealed. Besides, we have seen that extermination of the Jews did not figure among the original Nazi aims. Why, then, was this irrational decision made, and why was it made just at this particular time?

In seeking an answer to these questions it should be remembered that such deductions as we shall make are entirely speculative in the absence of any concrete evidence.

The extermination of the Jews was ordered at a moment when it had become evident that, contrary to the Nazi dreams of 1939-40, the war they had started would last a long time, whatever its outcome. A speedy victory was no longer possible. Chances for a compromise peace with England had vanished, and so the Nazis resolved to gamble everything on one big blow. The German people's efforts had to be united to the greatest possible degree. To do this, was it not advisable to involve them in an undertaking from which there was no possibility of turning back? This at least is what a passage from Goebbels' diary (dated March 2, 1943) would seem to say:

We are so entangled in the Jewish question that henceforth it is impossible to retreat. All the better. A movement and a people that have burned their bridges behind them fight with a great deal more energy—experience shows it—than those who are still able to retreat.<sup>2</sup>

(2) International Military Tribunal of Nuremberg, session of April 18, 1946.

Another document, dating from a grimmer hour in German history and employing the same reasoning, gives us an insight into the workings of the Nazi mind. It is a report prepared by Jodl, chief of staff of the Wehrmacht, in February 1945.

At that time the Nazi strength was rapidly failing and a denunciation of the Geneva Convention was being considered; this would make it possible for them to murder the Allied war prisoners at their leisure. Jodl submitted a study to his master which weighed the pros and cons of the matter. And among the pros the faithful valet included the following: "Burn all bridges . . . so as to arouse the people to even stronger combativeness." (3)

Burn all bridges. . . . What proved impossible in the case of Allied prisoners-of-war at the beginning of 1945 was quite practicable for Jewish women and children from 1941 on. Burn all bridges so as to arouse the German people to even stronger combativeness. . . . At a moment when on the one hand, Germany was at the peak of her power, and so could scorn all "degenerate humanitarian" considerations, while on the other hand, confronted by an unconquered England, she had attacked Russia and gambled everything for world domination—at this juncture it quite accorded with the spirit of the "great simplifier" to make all Germans his accomplices in the perpetration of an unheard-of collective crime and so unite them to him even more strongly than before. There is no stronger bond than complicity in crime. To make retreat of any kind impossible or terribly difficult; to launch his people upon an undertaking that would banish them as a group from the ranks of humanity, into which they might be readmitted only at the price of treason to their country—such a calculation and course of reasoning are quite in keeping with what we know of Hitler. The holocaust in which such an alliance was cemented would establish for centuries to come the sanguinary myth of the thousand-year Reich and the bestial cult of blood and soil.

These calculations were made against a background of endless and unceasing hatred. The Jews had long served to excite Nazi fanaticism and discipline the faithful; now for the last time they

(3) Jodl's report to Hitler, February 21, 1945. (D 606) As we know, the Nazis did not have the time to carry out this project.

would unite master and servant in a destructive and insatiable communion. This is not to deny that the murder of the Jews represented the fulfillment of some kind of collective vow which Nazi sadism had sworn; or that its commission brought no relief to a people tormented by homicidal madness and only served as the first link in a chain of murder and destruction which would have gone on forever if the fortunes of war had not changed.

A more concrete reason was the clear and determined opposition which the Jews of the occupied countries showed to Hitlerism, and their part in the rising resistance movements; this might have been a subsidiary factor in forcing a decision. But then why kill the women, the old people, and the children? We shall see later with what cynicism the authors of these infamies, big and little, pleaded before the Nuremberg Tribunal that they were suppressing "eventual avengers."

The poisoned atmosphere of the Third Reich and the Nazi mentality made it especially easy for the decision to be taken. The preceding chapters have shown how even in their subconscious minds the Germans had been trained to consider the Jews as pariahs, the refuse of humanity. Their "elimination from the German national body" was clearly a necessity. Under the circumstances, did the method matter? What great difference is there between sending all the dogs of Constantinople to the Prinkipo Islands, and locking them up in a pound? May we be forgiven such a comparison—but it suits the character of the men and morality of the Third Reich better than any other.

#### THE STAGES

The decision, then, to eliminate European Judaism was made by the Führer about the end of 1940 or early in 1941. Himmler was notified of this at the very moment when the RSHA sections were busily employed on the project of the mass transfer to Madagascar. The Madagascar preparations were not discontinued immediately (such discontinuation was officially announced to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs only in February 1942).<sup>3</sup>

Once extermination had been decided upon, there were many stages to be gone through. First of all, there were the practical

problems. Techniques had to be discovered, and these, as we shall see, proved very difficult to perfect. It was no easy matter to put to death six million people chosen arbitrarily and haphazardly from the most diverse environments, classes, and countries of the world. An industry for the slaughter of human beings had to be organized in detail. Added to the problem of exterminating so many people were the problems of deportation. The need for manpower in a Reich at war and the economic usefulness of the Jewish slaves often delayed matters; but in the end these things were never an obstacle, as we have seen, to their extermination. Finally, certain considerations which the Nazis termed "psychological," as regards their own nationals, the satellite governments and peoples, and (at least during the year 1941) American public opinion, acted more or less as a deterrent.

For all these reasons the extermination plan, known as the "final solution," (4) had to be carried out stage by stage. We can roughly distinguish three chief stages, whose crucial dates are June 1941, April 1942, and October 1942. Each stage developed out of the previous one by trial-and-error fumbblings. The individual and local initiative so characteristic of the Third Reich played a considerable part, and the utter lack of precedent for such an undertaking necessitated changes and adjustments.

1. From the very beginning of the war in Russia, the Jewish population of the invaded territories was systematically exterminated by special SS detachments, the so-called "action groups" (*Einsatzgruppen*) that followed immediately behind the armies. Deep in Eastern Europe, amid the confusions and turmoil of a pitiless conflict, "psychological" and other considerations counted scarcely at all. Jews were executed on the spot. The technique employed was rudimentary, a matter of shooting people and dumping them into common graves. We can call this the stage of chaotic exterminations. In some important centers, however, the Jewish population was temporarily spared, generally for economic reasons.

(4) The expression "final solution" (*Endlösung*), which appears from 1938 on, progressively changed in context. At the beginning it was applied to the project for total emigration. From the end of 1941 on it indicated extermination. Other Nazi terms similarly became more and more sinister in meaning as time passed; e.g., *Sonderbehandlung* ("special treatment").

Meanwhile preparations were made to extend the scope of the exterminations to include all of conquered Europe. Experience gained elsewhere, especially from the "euthanasia program" (which had just been perfected), made possible a more scientific and more discreet technique of extermination. Though the extermination program had been entrusted to Himmler, it was his rival, Goering, by virtue of his old authority, who gave Heydrich the order (on July 30, 1941), to "take all preparatory measures . . . required for the final solution of the Jewish question in the European territories under German influence."<sup>4</sup> Thus the head of the RSHA "became, for all practical purposes, by the terms of the mission confided to him by the Reichsmarschall, Commissioner for Jewish Questions for all Europe."<sup>5</sup> The actual powers of execution were concentrated in the hands of Adolf Eichmann.

The meaning of the term "final solution" began to grow clear. The anti-Semitic campaign was intensified in anticipation of the measures soon to come and out of fear of a popular reaction in Germany and the conquered countries. Goebbels gave the press instructions (5) appropriate to the "imminent political measures." While waiting for the program to begin in earnest, Heydrich authorized Eichmann to start the first deportation trains rolling. These were not the "savage deportations" of 1940, for it was no longer a question of evacuation but extermination.

2. Although the extermination system was set up during the second half of 1941, it was not until the spring of 1942 that it began to go full blast. The entry of the United States into the war did not make the Nazis reconsider; in fact, it increased the tempo of the Nazi action. After December 1941 the extermination camp at Chelmno, Poland, was used as a veritable "experimental station." Signs of what was coming multiplied; Goebbels launched a propaganda campaign, and his article of November 25, "The Jews Are the Culprits," was taken by people in the know as the signal for action.<sup>6</sup> Streicher, echoing Goebbels, demanded the extermination of the Jews. On December 16, Hans Frank, governor of Poland,

(5) Thus, for example, the *Tagesparole* (press briefing) of the Propaganda Ministry indicated on August 21, 1941: "It is in our interest to headline all Jewish attacks against Germany or other authoritarian countries. In fact, political measures of an internal order are imminent."

confided to his closest collaborators: "We must finish with the Jews. . . . There will be big discussions on the subject in Berlin in January. . . . A huge Jewish emigration is going to start. . . . We must exterminate the Jews wherever we find them."<sup>7</sup>

The discussions announced by Frank took place on January 20, the date on which Heydrich outlined the extermination plan to a conference of representatives of all the Reich administrative departments. The Jews would be forced to work until they died; if death was slow in coming they would be "treated accordingly." Here are Heydrich's own words:

Within the framework of the final solution, the Jews must be transported under the appropriate guard and there assigned to the appropriate work service. In work gangs, the able-bodied Jews, separated by sex, will be brought to these territories to build roads. It goes without saying that a large part of them will be eliminated by natural decrease.

The final residue will have to be treated appropriately. This residue will represent a natural selection, which when freed must be viewed as capable of forming the nucleus for a reconstructed Jewry (see the experience of History).<sup>8</sup>

What was to be understood by the term, "treated accordingly," was not long in being demonstrated in the months that followed. April 1942 was a time of intensive activity. Many of the death camps (Belzec, Treblinka, Sobibor) began to operate in Poland, swallowing thousands of victims every day. The assassination of Heydrich in May 1942 would seem to have been the signal for such great holocausts as the mass deportations from Warsaw and Paris (July 1942). Adolf Eichmann, the chief of the deportation system, extended his network throughout all Europe. Poland, the "trashcan of Europe" according to Nazi terminology, was the place of execution; there the gas chambers were completed and the crematories built. At Belzec Commissioner Christian Wirth, formerly a specialist in euthanasia, completed all his arrangements; at Auschwitz, Rudolf Hoess, Himmler's favorite, introduced new improvements and soon surpassed his master. "Cyclone B," an insecticide with a prussic acid base, replaced carbon monoxide.

3. In October 1942 there was a new and final intensification of operations. At the end of September von Ribbentrop had been

charged with instructing all the German diplomatic services "to speed up as much as possible the deportation of all Jews from Europe";<sup>9</sup> everywhere German diplomats lent Eichmann and his men a strong and efficient hand. Himmler ordered the setting aside of all economic considerations, and had the remaining Jewish specialists in German industries replaced by Polish Aryans.<sup>10</sup> Once again the propaganda trumpets were sounded; a new wave of incendiary speeches swept across the Third Reich. In its wake Bormann had a decree published which for the first time dealt publicly with what was being done, although in somewhat veiled terms.<sup>11</sup>

A few weeks later the Führer ordered Himmler to put the extermination program into high gear (6) and asked for a statistical report on its progress. He had the satisfaction of learning that "since 1933, i.e., during the first decade of National Socialism, European Judaism decreased by almost one half." (7)

Thereafter nothing affected the tempo of genocide, apart from such purely technical factors as the number of men Eichmann could dispose of or the availability of transport. To these factors, however, must be added the more or less shadowy and passive opposition of the European peoples. This opposition took different forms in different countries and under different governments, and even made itself felt in Germany itself. Most important, it forced the executioners, following mishaps caused by the public massacres in Russia, to adopt a highly secret technique of extermination, which complicated things a great deal. In Russia the Nazis were able to carry on their work of extermination openly, by fire and sword; in conquered and dismembered Poland they had to do it secretly; elsewhere they could not do it at all. (This perhaps throws a revealing light on what are certain of the ultimate barriers and

(6) It seems that this was in answer to the Allied landing in North Africa. Cf. Kersten, citing Himmler's words: "In answer to the landing, the Führer has ordered intensified action against the Jews still in our power." (*Op. cit.*, p. 197.)

(7) Report from Kornherr, inspector of statistics in the Reich, to the SS Reichsführer, Berlin, April 19, 1943. Himmler had first asked for a report from the RSHA services. But "because of the lack of professional precision," he appealed later to the statistical services of the Reich. The compilation of the report required more than two months. It consisted of sixteen pages; an abridged extract of six pages was drawn up for the Führer.

psychological impossibilities in the world of the concentration camp.) Under these circumstances a few hundred thousand Jews were able to disguise or hide themselves, or simply be forgotten, and survive until the arrival of the liberation armies. Himmler, who had been engaging in undercover negotiations for several weeks with the representatives of American Jewry without the Führer's knowledge, thought it prudent to stop the exterminations on his own initiative in October 1944. Since June 1942 a special unit had been going about carefully destroying all traces of the Nazi holocausts.