Goebbels’ face clouded. Then he smiled again and asked, “Are there any more questions?”

That was the end of the press conference, but not quite the end of the Anna Rath story. Norman Ebbutt gave me that when he told me that one of his men had gone to Nuremberg and found her confined in a hospital for the insane.²⁷

CONNECTIONS

What does Quentin Reynolds’s story suggest about life in Nazi Germany? How would you describe the people who went to the parade? Why do you think that there was so much laughter?

According to the hotel manager, a lesson was taught. What was that lesson? At whom was it aimed: the victims or the bystanders?

Could the incident Reynolds describes happen here?

Photographs of carnivals held in Germany between 1934 and 1938 are reprinted in Elements of Time, pages 146-147. Compare those images. What similarities do you see in the way Jews are portrayed in the four photos? What differences seem most striking? Is there a connection between the way Jews are depicted at the various carnivals and the escalation of antisemitic measures?

READING 11

Killing Ideas

By May, the Nazis were burning books. The first book burning took place on May 6, 1933. Students from the Berlin School of Physical Education demolished the Institute of Sexual Science, one of the first scholarly groups to study homosexuality, ceremonially hung a bust of the institute’s founder, and then burned twelve thousand books as they sang the nation’s anthem. Four days later, the Nazi German Students’ Association set up more bonfires, this time to burn books written by Jews and other “undesirables.” At one gathering, Joseph Goebbels told a cheering crowd, “The soul of the German people can again express itself. Those flames not only illuminate the final end of an old era; they light up a new!” Lilian T. Mowrer, an American who lived in Germany, described what happened next:

The books we were reading – whether by Thomas Mann, Bernard Shaw, Stefan Zweig, Werner Bergengruen, or Paul Claudel – like modern art – turned into bills of indictment against society. They made us confront National Socialism. They mobilized our defiance.
I held my breath while he hurled the first volume into the flames: it was like burning something alive. Then students followed with whole armfuls of books, while schoolboys screamed into the microphone their condemnation of this and that author, and as each name was mentioned the crowd booed and hissed. You felt Goebbels’s venom behind their denunciations. Children of fourteen mouthing abuse of Heine! Erich Remarque’s *All Quiet On The Western Front* received the greatest condemnation… it would never do for such an unheroic description of war to dishearten soldiers of the Third Reich.²⁸

Of all the events that took place in Germany in the spring of 1933, the book burnings made the greatest impression abroad. Helen Keller, an American writer, sent the organizers of the event a letter. “History has taught you nothing if you think you can kill ideas. Tyrants have tried to do that often before, and the ideas have risen up in their might and destroyed them. You can burn my books and the books of the best minds in Europe, but the ideas in them have seeped through a million channels and will continue to quicken other minds.”²⁹

Others quoted the words of the great German poet, Heinrich Heine, whose family was Jewish. Referring to book burnings in the nineteenth century, the poet had said: “Where they burn books, they will soon burn people.” Yet even those who quoted Heine could not truly believe that anyone would go that far.

**CONNECTIONS**

Why do you think the Nazis began the book burnings by casting books about gays into the flames? What other books were cast into the fire? Why were they singled out? Who made the decision?

Lilian T. Mowrer recalled that “the burning of books affected me more deeply than anything else. I could not have been more shocked by the sight of martyrs at the stake, for although torturing people was revolting enough, regimentation of the individual was ultimately more sinister and the Nazis were beginning to apply their racial theory with ruthless efficiency.” For her full account of the event, see the packet on *Kristallnacht* available from the Facing History Resource Center. Why do you think she responded to the book burnings with such emotion? How do you account for Helen Keller’s response? How do you think you would have responded?

In what respects is a book burning like a rally or a parade? What differences seem most striking? How do individuals make decisions at such events? How do you think the atmosphere that surrounds a book burning affects what is written? What is published?
Compare the book burnings in 1933 with the one in 1813 (Chapter 2, Reading 5). What similarities seem most striking? How do you account for differences?

Inge Scholl provides a different perspective on the book burnings. Although she, her brother, and her sister were attracted to the Nazis, they continued to read and exchange forbidden books:

The books we were reading – whether by Thomas Mann, Bernard Shaw, Stefan Zweig, Werner Bergengruen, or Paul Claudel – like modern art – turned into bills of indictment against society. They made us confront National Socialism. They mobilized our defiance.

These books, however, were not gifts from heaven – they came from the hands of young friends... They came to grasp that experience arises not from what you read, but from what you do. Books could stimulate, could impart an insight, could light a candle. But all of this would be relevant to your own life, your true self, only when you put into practice what you had determined was right.

In most authoritarian regimes, books are smuggled in and out of the country. Is reading a revolutionary act? Were Hitler and other authoritarian rulers right to believe that books are dangerous?

Ludwig L. Lenz, a physician who worked at the Institute of Sexual Science, raised a number of questions about the first book burning.

[Our] Institute was used by all classes of the population and members of every political party... We thus had a great many Nazis under treatment at the Institute. There was, for instance, a lady from Potsdam who, in referring to Dr. Hirschfeld [Magnum Hirschfeld, the director of the Institute] invariably said “Dr. Kirschfeld.” When I drew her attention to this mistake, she replied blushing and glancing at the swastika on her breast: “Oh, Doctor, if you don’t mind I should rather say ‘Dr. Kirschfeld,’ it sounds more Aryan.”

Why was it then, since we were completely non-party, that our purely scientific Institute was the first victim which fell to the new regime? “Fell” is, perhaps, an understatement for it was totally destroyed; the books from the big library, my irreplaceable documents, all the pictures and files, everything, in fact, that was not nailed down or a permanent fixture was dragged outside and burned. What explanation is there for the fact that the trade union buildings of the socialists, the communist clubs, and the synagogues were only destroyed at a much later date and never so thoroughly as our [peaceful] Institute? Whence this hatred, and what was even more strange, this haste and thoroughness?

Lenz believed it was because “we knew too much.” He insists that many Nazi leaders consulted the Institute for help or were known to doctors there through their victims. An historian argues that “if the Institute
did indeed keep tens of thousands of confessions and biographical letters, does it make sense to assume that they were all thrown into the fire? Is it not rather more likely that they were saved for use by the Gestapo? Indeed, is it not possible that the entire event was staged to deceive, and that the apparent destruction of Institute was really a cover operation to retrieve Hirschfeld’s case histories and other incriminating evidence against prominent Nazis and their opponents? What do you think? Was the Institute targeted because it was associated with homosexual activity? Because the doctors knew too much? Or to acquire evidence that could be used against opponents?

READING 12

*Whenever Two or Three Are Gathered*

Throughout the spring and early summer of 1933, the Nazis terrorized one group after another in Germany. By May, they had eliminated the nation’s trade unions. Workers now had to join a new organization called the Nazi Labor Front. It was to integrate workers, many of whom had supported the Social Democrats or the Communists, into the Nazi state. Then in June, Hitler outlawed the Social Democratic party. By mid-July, the Nazi party was the only political party in a country where the Reichstag no longer passed laws and the constitution no longer protected civil rights. These changes did not take place behind closed doors. They were loudly proclaimed and celebrated.

Other organizations were also brought into line. Not even special interest groups – glee clubs, soccer teams, historical societies, and so on – were allowed to function independently. As historian William Sheridan Allen put it, “Whenever two or three were gathered, the Fuehrer would also be present.” Not everyone accepted the changes. Over twenty-seven thousand people went to prison. Thousands of others, including sixty-three thousand Jews, left the country by 1934. But most of the nation’s sixty million people stayed and adapted to life in the “new Germany.”

CONNECTIONS

Write a working definition of totalitarianism. You may wish to include a picture of a totalitarian government as part of your definition. Does totalitarianism mean that whenever two or three are gathered, the Fuehrer is also present? Why do you think the Nazis tried to turn every get-together into a “Nazi gathering”?