

On the Nazi Vocabulary

By NACHMAN BLUMENTHAL

"La parole a été donnée à l'homme pour déguiser sa pensée"
(*Talleyrand*)

THE LANGUAGE SPOKEN and utilized by the Nazis at first sight appears to belong to the family of tongues spoken by the human race. Its vocabulary was German as in the hated era of the Weimar Republic, eked out by a variety of vulgar expressions. This supplement was necessary to prove its folk-quality. In addition archaic German words and a high-sounding, bombastic terminology were introduced and profusely used. The Nazi linguistic style was probably unique for its excessive use of phrases like "Opferwilligkeit" (readiness for self-sacrifice), "Liebe" (love), "Glauben" (faith), "Treue" (loyalty), "Ehrenhaftigkeit" (uprightness), "Vaterland" (fatherland) and "Volk" (folk, people). The term most commonly used, of course was "Das Volk". For had not the Führer spoken thus: "Mein Volk ist alles, ich bin nichts"? In all things "das Volk" took priority. For the people one must live and die².

¹ Such as "Sippe," "Gau" etc.

² The criminal hypocrisy of these sentiments is clearly reflected in Hitler's actions towards the close of the Second World War, when neither the sufferings of his people, nor the destruction of the German cities, nor the annihilation of German Youth had any effect whatsoever upon him. Previously, already, he had said: "Wenn das deutsche Volk nicht bereit ist, sich für seine Selbsterhaltung einzusetzen, gut: dann soll es verschwinden." (If the German people is not prepared to defend itself, it were better that it should disappear).

Henry Picker, *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier 1941-42*, Bonn 1951 no. 89 (27.1.1942), towards the end. Statements of this kind

If having no knowledge whatever of the period in which the language of the Nazis was developed, we confined ourselves exclusively to its linguistic aspects, the conclusion might have been that the era in which it was created was one of comparative peace and tranquillity, unprecedented in German history. The disingenuity suffusing this language, the criminal and even murderous motives which underlay it, can only be conceived by examining words, idioms and expressions side by side with the objects and situations they were used to describe and convey. It is necessary to juxtapose common German words with the new meaning given to them by the Nazis, in the context of the new situation they created and their own actions (not all of which have yet been brought to light). The dictum of Talleyrand cited above does not render the essence of the Nazi language. The purpose of the latter was not to conceal thought but to conceal criminal acts. For that reason alone indeed it can be described as criminal in itself. It has been said that the primeval sin of Hitler was the profanation of the German language. This profanation assumed various forms, the chief of which was mutilation that led directly to its impoverishment³, arousing among foreign people a repugnance both because of the course of its development and its exploitation as an instrument for crime. Those who recall the importance Hitler attributed to the spoken word (an importance stressed several times in his book), and the tremendous impact of his pronouncements (borne out by personal recollections and also by testimony given in the courts)⁴ must endorse this view.

made on various occasions prove that they do not reflect a passing mood, but a deeply-held opinion. These opinions remained unknown to wider circles. They were not disseminated by the German propaganda machine.

³ "Schäbiges Deutsch".

⁴ Both statesmen (like Schacht) and military commanders (e.g. Guderian) testified to this effect.

Pope Pius XI was one of the first to protest against this mutilation and perversion of the German language by the Nazis (though he did not explicitly mention them by name). In his encyclical "Mit Brennender Sorge"⁵ he enumerated the words and expressions used by the Nazis but deriving ultimately from Christian dogma, and which for centuries had stood in close relation to principles of the Christian faith. The Pope underlined the secular and even heretical meaning given to these expressions in Nazi Germany. The first example cited by the Pope was "Offenbarung" (revelation), perversely used in respect of a person who could be no other than a "Wahnprophet" (a false prophet). The use of the terms *Glaube*, *Unsterblichkeit*, *Gnade* was described as "an idle deliberate play with words or something even worse". Whatever doubts may at the time have been expressed in regard to the motives of the Nazis in the use of this phraseology can now be removed. They did indeed seek "something even worse". For that reason the insistence of the head of the Catholic Church that "if he did not wish to be a Christian, he must refrain at least from enriching the vocabulary of his heresy from out of Christian terminology" was pointless.

The logical conclusion is clear: Hitler was not and did not wish to be a Christian and *for that reason* made use of Christian terminology. In seeking to influence the simplest minds he used words conveying the most powerful effect. At the same time he wanted to replace older beliefs and opinions by newer ones, in such a fashion that the people remain ignorant of his intention. The masses must be strengthened in the belief that the new doctrine was no more than a continuation of the old. It represented merely a new "revelation". When Hitler achieved this objective, he announced publicly that he had

⁵ Acta Apostolicae Sedis, Ann. XXIX, Series II, Vol. IV, Romae MDCCCXXXVII, pp. 145-167 (German), 168-188 (Italian). Reprinted by Hirt, Freiburg i. Br. 1946. — This encyclical is dated March 14th, 1937.

been sent by Providence to redeem the German people from its trials and distress. His aides followed his example, with greater faith and greater emphasis. When the Nazis later sought to replace both Catholicism and Protestantism with a new faith of "gottgläubig", the underlying purpose was to establish a religion based upon belief in Hitler. This objective was indeed achieved. The German people inspired by their faith in Hitler marched forth to battle in the Second World War, and it was in the name of Hitler that their deeds were executed.

There was nothing fortuitous accordingly in the use of Christian and religious terminology by the Nazis, nor in the sharp reaction this called forth from the Catholic Church. This choice of terms with a definite and accepted connotation and their introduction into the Nazi vocabulary was not an end in itself but merely part of the work of preparing the ground for mental confusion⁶. Research upon the subject which has since been carried out has established that both Hitler and Goebbels evinced a marked predilection for words and terms possessing a religious significance⁷. In the official Nazi literature we come across the term "Commandments for the Party Member". These 'commandments' contain precepts that cannot be described other than as dogmas, such as "The Führer is always right". Explicit use of the term "dogma" to indicate the nature of the obligations of the party members and the degree of their devotion to the party, constitutes another eloquent illustration⁸.

A third category of words and expressions to which Hitler and his henchmen were very partial belongs to the juridical

⁶ Cf. Mit Brennender Sorge, op. cit. p. 158; ed. Hirt, p. 14.

⁷ On Hitler see Victor Klemperer, *LTI Notizbuch eines Philologen*, 2nd ed., Berlin 1949, pp. 118-119. On Goebbels see: Werner Betz, *The National Socialist Vocabulary in the Third Reich*, London 1955, p. 793.

⁸ "Das Programm sei dir Dogma: es fordert von dir äusserste Hingabe an die Bewegung."

sphere. By constant use of such terms Hitler sought to underline the legality of his position and his policy. His most cruel actions and crimes are justified by references to laws and to statutes, and even to precedents dating from the pre-Nazi period. Indeed the older the enactment, the more suitable it was for the purposes of Nazi propaganda. Thus the Nazis sought to show that their decrees had their origins in "the good old days". For example, the German press law derived from legislation enacted during Bismarck's chancellorship, while the decree establishing the Lodz Ghetto, promulgated on 8th February, 1940 is based upon a regulation issued in 1931. Of course German customs of even more ancient origin were always preferable.

The degree in which both Nazi law and policy was not in accord with precedents deriving from an earlier period, is a subject for historical and legal research. However the extent to which old, even ancient, concepts (such as the term "Ghetto") were imitated and distorted without their new content arousing any reaction, belongs to the field of philological-psychological analysis.

Some idea of the extent to which legal terminology permeated the crimes of the Nazis can be gained from the following example. The systematic extermination of the Jews and the confiscation of their property showed of course a proper respect for the "law". Even after the death of their victims, however, the Nazis continued to exploit them by tracing their debtors and compelling the latter to pay their debts to the Nazi authorities as the legal heirs of the Jews. Here, too, due respect was paid to legal forms. In the Lodz Ghetto, for example, the Director of Administration of the Ghetto was legally recognized as the heir to all Jewish claims in the Reichsgau Wartheland under his jurisdiction. These debts whether owed by Germans or Poles were duly collected. Of course it is not the legal basis of these proceedings that interests us here but the attitude of the Germans. The terminology used to

describe these actions in themselves are worthy of special research.

Another peculiar aspect of Nazi style was its sentimentality. The Nazis of course, had little regard for logic and rational processes. They preferred credulity and sentiment. It was these that Hitler stimulated and it was upon them that he relied in his speeches. The same tone, it is interesting to note, was retained in official phraseology, in official reports—in direct contrast to established practice in other countries and in other periods. Dry, succinct formality is not typical of Nazi documents. Those responsible for the drafting of such documents preferred to introduce a personal note. They do not enumerate and describe actions performed in keeping with a formal obligation; they give expression rather to “a labour of love”, to paraphrase a statement made by a high-ranking SS officer.⁹ Whatever the nature of the duty performed, the tone of the report reflects work done not only with a will but with positive enthusiasm, as the notorious General Stroop testified, even in his account of the liquidation of some sixty thousand Jews.¹⁰ Quite frequently we come across expressions in official letters like, “I am very happy”—the subject is the despatch of a transport of Jews, “I am grateful”—for the receipt (for private use) of goods, formerly the property of Jews (already exterminated). Of a piece with that happy spirit is the “optimism” reflected in the following: In the autumn of 1941 the liquidation of eight thousand Serbian Jews was planned. Two alternative plans were considered—deportation to one of the islands in the mouth of the Danube, or mass murder in Serbia. The diverse German authorities—the Army, the German Embassy, the SS—could not reach agreement on the matter, and the Foreign Ministry had to send one of its officials, Rademacher, to Belgrade for this purpose. After investigating the situation

⁹ “Die Lust am Handwerk” — SS-Obergruppenführer von dem Bach-Zelewski.

¹⁰ “Einsatzfreudige Arbeit,” “Einsatzfreudigkeit” (PS-1061).

Rademacher reported back that those dealing with the Jewish population “regarded the local solution of the problem optimistically”¹¹. The significance of this statement is reflected by documents relating to this matter. The “optimism” to which reference is made derives from the economy of slaughtering Jews on the spot, in preference to deporting them. In this context we must also place on record the “humorous” names given to houses and locations, such as “the blithe flea,” “the happy nightingale” or “the rose garden”—the name given to the square facing one of the gas-chambers in the Maidanek Camp. These names were not intended merely as a camouflage or to deceive the Jewish victims, but in order to maintain the morale of the German soldiers and guards, and to divert the attention of the latter from the “unpleasantness” of their duties.

A number of examples of the word Jew in the Nazi terminology is of interest. It is, of course, unnecessary to repeat that “Jew” indicates an inferior being who must be fought and destroyed. A Jewish physiognomy¹² or Jewish kin are sufficient to serve as a disqualification. Those coming into any contact with Jews are for that reason suspect of a “Jewish infection”, while whoever is reluctant to subscribe to the Nazi doctrine in regard to the Jews is “Jew-blind”.

This style of discussion was regarded as fit and proper in relation to all persons and under all circumstances, even Einstein’s Theory of Relativity being disqualified on the grounds that its author was a Jew.

The Jew was not considered a human being but rather an inferior animal. For that reason the word “Jew” could be used

¹¹ See the reproduction of his letter in: *Zločini fašističkih... protiv Jevreja u Jugoslaviji*, Beograd -952, p. 206.

¹² The story told by Hitler of a German aristocrat is highly instructive (Hitlers Tischgespräche, no. 154, 1.1.1942). Hitler was astonished at the man’s Jewish features. An investigation revealed that three hundred years before one of his ancestors had been a Jewess. This was sufficient to brand him as a “pure Jew.”

as a suffix to describe any material. Of course the view that Jews could not be classified as human beings facilitated execution of the policy the Nazis pursued. In this spirit we must understand the expressions that recur in official correspondence such as "a stock of Jews," "a store of Jews," "Jewish material." Jews are deported in "instalments." An extreme expression of this attitude is given by a German who after fashioning a pocket knife from human bone, engraved upon it "genuine Jew," (a token of quality like "genuine pearl" or "genuine ivory").

It must be mentioned that this terminology was also used in regard to non-Jews. For example in the Auschwitz Camp detainees who have remained of a transport already despatched for poisoning and cremation are referred to as "preserved monuments." Indeed testimony can be found in many books of the period—even in literature of a "scientific" character—to the effect that the Slavs and particularly the Russians must be regarded as creatures devoid of all feeling or intellect, impervious even to blows, and for that reason for them no punishment other than death can be effective. Even the Führer himself in discussing the various races, and the qualities distinguishing them, compares the inferior races such as the Negroes etc., to animals which can be trained but never taught. From the Führer this doctrine seeped through various strata down to every individual German, both in the fatherland and beyond.

The nouns denoting directly or indirectly the work done by National-Socialism in exterminating individuals and peoples, constitutes another category of words. This branch of their vocabulary was particularly prolific. Let us take a glance at some of the terms used specifically to describe this branch of their activity. We shall not enumerate them all—this would require a special lexicon; we shall confine ourselves to the words occurring in two pages of an official report submitted by General Commissar Kube to Reich Commissar Lohse, namely, by one branch of the civil administration to that immediately

superior to it. The document is dated 31st July 1942. In these two pages we meet the word "liquidated" five times, "liquidation" once, "destroyed" once, and also passages like "systematic destruction... the Slutzk zone has been rid of several thousands of Jews... radical measures are awaited in Baranovitch... to liquidate Jewry finally... an unambiguous attitude towards Judaism... to bring new transports of Jews... to their destination".¹³ This is no more than a small selection from a single official letter. Both the writer and the addressee were not officially concerned with the extermination of Jews. What is to be said, therefore, of official documents dealing directly with the destruction of Jews?

The terms referred to above specifically refer to acts of murder. But what of the more euphemistic terms, the figures of speech used to denote these same actions? Words and expressions of this category can be found in their hundreds. What word utilized by Nazi leaders cannot be included in such a list? In this respect one passage of the judgment delivered at the Nuernberg trials is of interest. The passage reads as follows: "The conditions under which they (i.e. the inmates of the concentration camps) worked made labour and death almost synonymous terms".¹⁴ This passage, however, is drafted in very careful terms; it is qualified by use of the term "almost." We know for a fact that this was indeed the explicit intention of the Nazi regime. This is the real meaning of the forced labour which the Jews and others were compelled to perform.

Another category is the group of opprobrious terms and expressions, which every Nazi in authority commonly used. These words were common currency under the Nazi regime, but there was also room for private initiative in coining new expressions, as those who have survived the horrors of a German camp will testify. The purpose of these expressions was of course to

¹³ A facsimile of the letter appears in M. Weinreich, *Hitler's Professors*, New York 1946 pp. 188-190.

¹⁴ IMT vol. XXII p. 478, English edition.

humiliate and to abuse. Surely it is not fortuitous that the word "Scheisse" (excrement) appears so frequently in the Nazi vocabulary. This term was used to refer to both the living and the dead—even death constituted no barrier for Nazi foul-mouthedness. On the contrary the Nazis were conscious of a need to prove that they feared nothing and respected nothing. Their curses and execrations were devised ultimately to stimulate themselves, and to assuage their own consciences—if such still existed. By the use of such terms they humiliated their enemies and raised themselves to a higher level.

The term "Scheisse" constituted the root for a series of hybrid expressions, such as "Scheisskommando"—the name given to the labour corps in Auschwitz and in other camps.

Many other expressions and groups of expressions could be cited in this context but it is not our purpose to enumerate them all. We shall, however, deal with certain linguistic characteristics typical of the Nazis. At the same time we wish to stress the importance of more detailed research into these linguistic phenomena, which has not been carried out up to the present. Diverse approaches are, of course, possible, to this subject of research. It can, for example, be examined as a normal phenomenon of language, from its phonetic, semantic and other aspects. The investigator can confine himself to formal enquiry and seek only the grammatical and stylistic distortions, or special characteristics. This, in our view, is not a method suitable for our purpose. For Jews only one method exists—to investigate the Nazi-language as an instrument to implement a policy of murder and first of all to stupefy, to confuse and to deceive the victim, and to conceal from him the real meaning of the expressions used. We regard the Nazi-language, primarily, as one of the most important tools used by the Germans in the physical extermination of the Jewish people. It was not directed solely against the Jewish people, though we shall discuss it exclusively from this angle. This attitude may be regarded as one-sided and partial which may

indeed be the case. Onesideness, however, need not imply the absence of a scientific or objective approach. It will be performed *sine ira et studio* especially in view of the fact that this Nazi-Language was directed primarily against the Jews. Clearly this enquiry cannot be exclusively theoretical. It may be put to practical uses. To make this clearer we may cite a number of examples. Let us examine one of the most-frequently-used synonyms of the words "murder", namely "Sonderbehandlung" (SB: 'special treatment'). This term was first discovered following the liberation of the Auschwitz Camp, when a large part of the archives of the Camp, which the Germans had not been successful in destroying before their flight, was found. Among other documents daily reports giving precise information on the number and movements of internees from day to day were revealed¹⁸. The last mentioned are divided into "incoming" persons—namely new internees, "transit-Jews", for whom no personal index card need be prepared as they are merely passing through the Camp, and "transfers", namely persons brought to Auschwitz from other camps.

The report refers to a single day and to only one section of the Camp. To calculate how many internees were in the Camp on the following day due allowance must be made for the "departures" which are classified into those who died of natural

¹⁸ <i>Stärkemeldung:</i>			
<i>Stärke am 5.10.1944:</i>	42961	Häftlinge	
<i>Zugänge am 5.10.1944:</i>			
Einlieferungen	5		
Durchgänge Jd. [Juden]	157		
Ueberstellungen	41	= 203	
			43164 Häftlinge
<i>Abgänge am 5.10.1944:</i>			
Gestorben nat. Todes	6		
S. B. [Sonderbehandelt]	2056		
Ueberstellungen	2553		
Entflohen	3		4620
			<hr/> 38544 Häftlinge

causes—the number of these was small—and those given “special treatment”, viz. who were cast into the gas-chambers or transferred to other camps. The number of those in each of these category exceeds two thousand.

These reports, which were transmitted daily to the Chief Security Bureau of the SS in Berlin were highly confidential. Only those directly concerned (the director of the crematorium, the commandant of the camp, the director of the competent department of the Security Office) were permitted to know of their existence and contents. For a time the view was current that only these criminals made use of terms such as “special treatment”. Of course the entire operation of transporting human beings to the gas-chambers was “Geheime Reichssache” (a top State secret). It transpires, however, that other German authorities, too, made use of this term. These authorities had no direct connection with the extermination operation—this at least was assumed—and were considered to have been completely ignorant of it. The destruction of the Jews came under the authority of the “Reichsführer SS”, Heinrich Himmler, who carried out his task with the aid of his henchmen and aides of the SS. Now it has come to light that other authorities, too, made use of the term. To cite the verdict in the proceedings taken against senior officials of the German Foreign Ministry, “the term ‘special treatment’ had a well-recognized meaning in Nazi Germany. It meant execution or at best confinement in a concentration camp, the latter in most instances denoting the substitution of a lingering death for a quick one”.¹⁶ This represents the very circumspect opinion of an objective body. It does not mention a single office, but refers to a well-known term, which was in common use throughout Nazi Germany.

To quote another example: The true connotation of the expression “auf der Flucht erschossen” (‘shot while trying to

¹⁶ Trials of War Criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals... vol. XIV, p. 546.

escape’) is well-known both from German documents and from testimony given on various occasions. This term served when the Nazis wished to rid themselves of a detainee or when an SS trooper sought extra leave,—as a prize three days extra leave were given for the killing of a prisoner in these circumstances. The SS men utilized this arrangement and decided among themselves which of the prisoners was to be shot, whose turn it was to do the shooting—in other words whose turn it was to get extra leave. It would be mistaken to assume that these arrangements were kept from the commandant and officers of the camp. Officially the flight of the prisoner was given as a reason for the killing, which had to be approved by a court—the SS and police court. It now becomes clear that this pretext was used by persons who according to our concepts should have been far removed from this sort of atrocity such as civilian officials, jurists, who may not even have been members of the Nazi Party. It is clear that they were German-Nazi jurists. We refer here specifically to the murder of the French General Mesny, who was deliberately shot from the front. When preparations were being made to carry out the murder the question arose how to conceal the crime from the eyes of the world and especially from the protector-state (Sweden). Various proposals were submitted of which one was approved. It was put forward by the Legal Department of the German Foreign Ministry. This Department suggested that the murder be committed in such a fashion as would make it possible to declare that the General was killed while trying to escape.¹⁷ Here we have an example of how crimes of this category spread from the troopers of the SS to the highest authorities in a Government Ministry, conducting negotiations with foreign Governments and representing their country vis-à-vis other countries.

The conclusion we may draw is that this terminology must

¹⁷ IMT, PS-4059.

be investigated not solely on the basis of a small number of documents. We must establish the scope, the currency given to the term in question, and both the place and the circle in which it was utilized. This is no theoretical exercise in philology, to determine the geographical limits of words and expressions. More than the determination of objective scientific fact is required here. Certain conclusions must be drawn—the identity of the persons responsible for what was done must be established, whether responsibility was confined to executive institutions or must be shared by administrative and party departments, and whether some share of this responsibility must not be shared by more extensive strata of the German people. An investigation into the terminology of the period will place at our disposal adequate material to draw the necessary conclusions—even though this latter task may be left to others.

One example is illustrative of this point. During the investigation of General-Oberst Heinz Guderian regarding the complete destruction of the city of Warsaw, for which as Chief of the German General Staff he was responsible, he—like other German war-criminals—disclaimed all connection with the operation. When asked about the explicit instructions given by the Führer regarding the destruction of the city,¹⁸ Guderian replied that he had understood the expression used merely as a figure of speech. Closer investigation must establish whether the term cited could be used in the period of Nazi domination as a figure of speech or as a simple statement of fact.

These expressions like all others emanating from the Nazi vocabulary—with the possible exception of conjunctions!—possessed no simple meaning. Every precaution must be taken not to fall foul of the use and common connotation of the

¹⁸ "Warschau noch während des Krieges dem Erdboden gleich zu machen"; cf. Jerzy Sawicki: *Zburzenie Warszawy*, 2nd ed., 1949; Karol Małcuzyński: *Szkice warszawskie*, Warszawa 1955, pp. 7-37 (a facsimile of the telegram is reproduced).

Nazi terminology. Even historians have not been successful in avoiding this pitfall. In the absence of the closest scrutiny little confidence can be placed in Nazi documents.

The historical facts which we seek to establish may assist us in clarifying another problem, which though not in the sphere of linguistics is nevertheless related to it. A number of examples will serve to illustrate this aspect. Transports of Jews *en route* to the Treblinka Death Camp stopped at a railway station, equipped with a ticket office over which was a large sign "In transit to Bialystok" and a clock indicating the time when the train would leave. This station, however, was no more than a dummy. The tracks did not lead further. Treblinka was the final stop. The purpose of the station was to deceive the transportees that they had arrived at a labour camp, and that before they continued their journey they must undergo disinfection etc. Verbal deceit was not sufficient. The reception at Treblinka must be staged.

Another example. To Jews from Greece being despatched to the Auschwitz Death Camp, plots and shops in the Ukraine were sold beforehand. In a number of other places the Germans informed the Chairmen of the Councils of Jews prior to deportation that in their new places of domicile they would continue to serve in their present capacity, as they had proved their ability and loyalty. Mordechai Haim Rumkowsky, Jewish "Elder" of the Lodz Ghetto was given a "recommendation" prior to deportation. The shower-baths in which the Jews were poisoned not only bore the inscription "Baths and Inhalation Institute", but were equipped with water pipes and showers, while the condemned Jews were given cakes of soap as they entered the chambers.

The examples cited are sufficient to prove that the borders distinguishing the linguistic vocabulary and the real-vocabulary ("Real-Lexikon") were blurred over. The two are closely related, so closely, that one cannot be investigated without entering into the bounds of the other, if we wish to lay bare the

depths to which Nazi criminal hypocrisy descended. Often it is difficult to decide into which category some phenomenon must be classified. For instance: In Auschwitz-Birkenau the asphyxiating gas was delivered in vans of the Red Cross¹⁹.

A field of linguistic research, which though it must be kept clearly separate from that dealt with above, nevertheless possesses a direct connection with it, is provided by the terms and expressions developed by the subjugated peoples to denote various aspects of Nazi criminality. Such terms abound particularly in Yiddish. The word "death" is the base of a whole series of terms such as "death-wall," "death-house," "death-camp," "death-bridge," "death-waltz."

The term "konter-aktsia"²⁰ (counter-operation), denoting opposition to the operations to which the Germans gave the name "Aktion", and coined in the Bialystok Ghetto belongs to this category. Research in this field cannot, of course, separate these parallel terms.

There is another aspect to this question, which perhaps does not belong to research into Nazi terminology, though it too was directly a product of it. These are the words originating in this terminology absorbed into the languages spoken by the subjected peoples. The Jews, for example, used a large number of such Nazi words and expressions for the simple reason that they lacked the basic concepts of the horrible tortures invented and perpetrated by the Germans. Another question is how much of this terminology still remains and is destined to remain in the future. To a very considerable extent these terms and expressions have become so deeply-rooted in memories of that period that they can no longer be excised. They have become integrated into both Hebrew and Yiddish and into the history of our culture.

In the present article we have endeavoured to draw attention

¹⁹ Jan Sehn: Obóz koncentracyjny i zeglady Oświęcim. Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce, vol. I, p. 123.

²⁰ See facsimile in "Yediot Yad Vashem" no. 6-7, page 26.

to a number of problems connected with research into Nazi terminology—a subject which has remained virtually uninvestigated up to the present day. We have pointed out that it is a question that cannot be treated in isolation from its purely philological aspects. Comprehension of the Nazi terminology is largely dependent upon understanding of the period in which it was created. Thus research into Nazi terminology must constitute an introduction to historical research. This is necessary in order to avoid wholesale deception and confusion if the terms coined and used by the Nazis are taken at their face value. The problem, as we have stressed, is not purely an academic one; by divorcing it from its philological aspects we can determine the limits of use of this Nazi terminology among the German people. This terminology being the jargon of a criminal element, the question of the legal responsibility of those who used it, must be raised.

Our ability to express in words the wrong that has been done to ourselves and to the whole world, raises another question, which admittedly does not belong to the field discussed in the present article. A noteworthy statement has been made by a Czech writer²¹, who has said that there is no human tongue capable of conveying the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis.

²¹ "Wenn man meint, die *menschliche Sprache* habe sich entwickelt, sie sei seit den Zeiten der primitiven Menschen reicher geworden und... könne jeden Gedanken, jedes Gefühl und jede Nuance ausdrücken, so ist das ein Irrtum!... Weder das tschechische, noch irgend ein anderes Lexikon der Welt hat treffende Ausdrücke für das, was im III. Reich öffentlich und mit aufgeblasenem, hochmütigem Selbstbewusstsein geschieht. Es gibt keine Superlative, mit denen man die Vorgänge in Deutschland charakterisieren, geschweige denn erklären könnte. Jedes Wort der Erbitterung und Aufregung ist zu schwach für all das menschliche Leid, die Niedertracht, das Grauen, den Terror und die Brutalität!... Sadismus, Perversität, Bestialität, Wahnsinn—das alles sagt noch nichts, es sind, gemessen an der Wirklichkeit, Worte ohne Klang und Inhalt." Helena Malirova, in: *Deutsche Frauenschicksale*, London 1937, p. 15 f.

Interestingly enough this view was expressed already in the year 1937. What must we say after the bitter years of the Second World War? Certainly no language that can express the horrors, the atrocities, of this period has yet been devised.

*The Activities of Central Jewish Organizations following Hitler's Rise to Power**

By NATHAN FEINBERG

THE ENACTMENT of the first of a series of anti-Jewish laws and decrees by the rulers of the Third Reich in April 1933 destroyed the position of one of the most stable and important of the European Jewish communities. The basic rights of 550,000 human beings were suddenly revoked, solely because of their Jewish origin. The legal basis of any political regime—the equality of all citizens before the law—was violated. And the question was asked: Was such conduct conceivable in the modern era? Had the civilized world no means of compelling the guilty nation not to tread underfoot the fundamental rights and liberties of a section of its citizens? Were there no means of legal redress whatever? And most important of all: Was it not possible to take action through the League of Nations to which the Peace Conference had designed the task of implementing the international protection of minorities? Moreover, Germany, it was recalled, since its admission as member of the League, had constantly and vehemently demanded resolute action against any discrimination and violation of minority rights.

In a previous chapter¹ we reviewed the juridical situation and examined the relevant international documents to discover

* A chapter from the book *The Jewish Struggle against Hitler in the League of Nations (the Bernheim Petition)*, to be published in Hebrew on behalf of "Yad Washem."

¹ Entitled "Legal Aspects of the Protection of the Rights of the Jews of Germany."