HSC Modern History

Personality Study: Albert Speer

Historians and their Perspectives

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Principal focus: Through the study of Albert Speer, students gain an understanding of the role of this personality in a period of national or international history.

Students learn about:

1  Historical context
   – rise of the Nazi party and the personal charisma of Adolf Hitler
   – development of the Nazi state after 1933
   – Nazi war effort to 1945
   – Nuremberg War Crimes Trials

2  Background
   – family background and education
   – introduction to Nazism and his reasons for joining the Nazi party

3  Rise to prominence
   – early work for the Nazi party
   – appointment as ‘First Architect of the Reich’
   – the ‘Germania’ project and the new Reich Chancellery
   – work as Armaments Minister

4  Significance and evaluation
   – relationship with Hitler
   – involvement with anti-Semitic activities in connection with the Germania project
     - the question of the ‘Jew-flats’
   – use and abuse of forced labour
   – knowledge of and links with the concentration camp system
   – reaction to Hitler’s ‘scorched earth’ policy in 1945
   – the significance of Speer’s work as Minister for Armaments and War Production to the overall German war effort
   – evaluation: for example, the ‘Good Nazi’?
About the Authors

Schmidt

Dr. Mathias Schmidt is an associate professor at the Friedrich-Meinecke Institute for Historical Research in West Berlin. For more than four years, Albert Speer has been the main subject of his research. He is presently at work on a biography of Heinrich Himmler.

Sereny

Gitta Sereny was born in Vienna in the 1920s. She is one of the most distinguished journalists in Europe. The bulk of her journalistic work has been for the Daily Telegraph Magazine, the Sunday Times, The Times and the Independent. She has also written extensively for the New York Times, the New York Review of Books, Die Zeit, Le Nouvel Observateur and Sweden’s Dagens Nyheter. Previous books include the masterful international success Into that Darkness, on Franz Stangl, commandant of the Treblinka death camp, which has been adapted for the stage. She has two children and two grandchildren. She and her husband, the photographer Don Honeyman, live in London. Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth is one of the most celebrated books to be published in recent years. It was the winner of both the 1995 James Tait Black Biography Prize and the 1995 Duff Cooper Award, and was shortlisted for the 1995 Whitbread Biography Prize and the 1995 British Book Awards Book of the Year.

van der Vat

Dan van der Vat’s earliest memories are of the Nazi occupation of his native Holland; his father narrowly escaped forced labor for Speer, and his English mother lived in fear of imprisonment as an enemy alien. From 1972 to 1977 he was German correspondent to the The Times of London, for which he interviewed Speer in 1976, ten years after his release from Spandau Prison. The author of four distinguished works on Anglo-German naval history, Mr. van der Vat lives near London, on an island in the River Thames.
In February 1942, however, Hitler had the luck to make one of the few good appointments he ever made. Albert Speer, whom he chose as Minister for Armmaments and Munitions in the place of Dr Todt (killed in an air accident), was a young architect who had attracted Hitler’s attention and had been set to complete the new Reich Chancellery. Disinterested as well as able, he soon showed himself to be an organizer of remarkable powers and was entrusted with one job after another until he became virtual dictator of the whole of German war production. Finding himself faced with great difficulties in the way of procuring manpower from the obstruction of the Gauleiters, Speer shrewdly suggested that one of them should be made responsible for increasing Germany’s labour force. This led in March 1942, to the appointment as Plenipotentiary-General for Manpower of Fritz Sauckel, a former sailor and a Party Member since 1921, who was Gauleiter of Thuringia. These measures, in particular the powers given to Speer and the use he made of them, produced a sensational rise in German war-production in 1942 and 1943 without which Hitler could never have continued the war at all.

Speer only came into prominence in the spring of 1942, when Hitler suddenly nominated him as Minister for Armaments Production, but his rise in the next two years was rapid. By August 1944 he was responsible for the whole of German war economy, with fourteen million workers under his direction. It was Speer who, by a remarkable feat of organization, patched up the bombed communications and factories, and somehow or other maintained the bare minimum of transport and production without which the war on the German side would have come to a standstill. Without Speer Hitler would have lacked the power to stage his fight to the finish.

The Fuhrer was generous in his praise of Speer’s achievement, put increased responsibilities on him, and showed a warm personal regard for him. For his part Speer was not unaffected by the spell Hitler was still able to cast over those near him, but he stood apart from the contest for power which absorbed the energies of men like Bormann. He was interested far more in the job he had to do than in the power it brought him. Preserving a certain intellectual detachment, he disinterested himself in politics. A long illness kept him away from the Fuhrer’s Headquarters from February to June 1944, but on his return he became disquieted at the price which Germany was being made to pay for the prolongation of the war and - more disquieting still - realized that Hitler was determined to destroy Germany rather than admit defeat.

Having arrived at this conclusion, Speer systematically set about frustrating Hitler’s design, and eventually, early in 1945, planned an attempt to kill Hitler and the men around him by introducing poison-gas into the ventilation system of his underground bunker. The plan had to be abandoned for technical reasons. Thereupon Speer continued his efforts to thwart Hitler’s orders and to salvage something for the future. Yet he never again attempted to remove the man who was the author of the policy he opposed. The reason is interesting. Speer did not lack the physical courage to make a second attempt, but, as he admitted later, in the conflict of loyalties which divided his mind, he could not rid himself of the belief that Hitler was, as he claimed to be, the only leader who could hold the German people together, that he was, in von Brauchitsch’s phrase at the Nuremberg Trial, Germany’s destiny, and that Germany could not escape her destiny.

Here, in the self-confessed failure of the one man among the Nazi leaders who retained the intellectual independence to see clearly the course on which Hitler was set
and the integrity to reject it, is the clearest possible illustration of the hold which Hitler kept until the end over the regime he had established and the Party he had created.

Speer, 1970, Inside the Third Reich

Forward

“I SUPPOSE YOU’LL BE WRITING YOUR MEMOIRS NOW?” SAID ONE OF THE first Americans I met in Flensburg in May 1945. Since then twenty-four years have passed, of which I spent twenty-one in a prison cell. A long time.

Now I am publishing my memoirs. I have tried to describe the past as I experienced it. Many will think it distorted; many will find my perspective wrong. That may or may not be so: I have set forth what I experienced and the way I regard it today. In doing so I have tried not to falsify the past. My aim has been not to gloss over either what was fascinating or what was horrible about those years. Other participants will criticize me, but that is unavoidable. I have tried to be honest.

One of the purposes of these memoirs is to reveal some of the premises which almost inevitably led to the disasters in which that period culminated. I have sought to show what came of one man’s holding unrestricted power in his hands and also to clarify the nature of this man. In court at Nuremberg I said that if Hitler had had any friends, I would have been his friend. I owe to him the enthusiasms and the glory of my youth as well as belated horror and guilt.

In the description of Hitler as he showed himself to me and to others, a good many likable traits will appear. He may seem to be a man capable and devoted in many respects. But the more I wrote, the more I felt that these were only superficial traits.

For such impressions are countered by one unforgettable experience: the Nuremberg Trial. I shall never forget the account of a Jewish family going to their deaths: the husband with his wife and children on the way to die are before my eyes to this day.

In Nuremberg I was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment. The military tribunal may have been faulty in summing up history, but it attempted to apportion guilt. The penalty, however poorly such penalties measure historical responsibility, ended my civil existence. But that scene had already laid waste to my life. It has outlasted the verdict of the court.

January 11, 1969

ALBERT SPEER

The Jews and Forced Labour

Pages 18-20

Quite often even the most important step in a man’s life, his choice of vocation, is taken quite frivolously. He does not bother to find out enough about the basis and the various aspects of that vocation. Once he has chosen it, he is inclined to switch off his critical awareness and to fit himself wholly into the predetermined career.

My decision to enter Hitler’s party was no less frivolous. Why, for example, was I willing to abide by the almost hypnotic impression Hitler’s speech had made upon me? Why did I not undertake a thorough, systematic investigation of, say, the value or worthlessness of the ideologies of all the parties? Why did I not read the various party programs, or at least Hitler’s Mein Kampf and Rosenberg’s Myth of the Twentieth Century? As an intellectual I might have been expected to collect documentation with the same thoroughness and to examine various points of view with the same lack of bias that I had learned to apply to my preliminary architectural studies. This failure was
rooted in my inadequate political schooling. As a result, I remained uncritical, unable to deal with the arguments of my student friends, who were predominantly indoctrinated with the National Socialist ideology.

For had I only wanted to, I could have found out even then that Hitler was proclaiming expansion of the Reich to the east; that he was a rank anti-Semite; that he was committed to a system of authoritarian rule; that after attaining power he intended to eliminate democratic procedures and would thereafter yield only to force. Not to have worked that out for myself; not, given my education, to have read books, magazines, and newspapers of various viewpoints; not to have tried to see through the whole apparatus of mystification—was already criminal. At this initial stage my guilt was as grave as, at the end, my work for Hitler. For being in a position to know and nevertheless shunning knowledge creates direct responsibility for the consequences—from the very beginning.

I did see quite a number of rough spots in the party doctrines. But I assumed that they would be polished in time, as has often happened in the history of other revolutions. The crucial fact appeared to me to be that I personally had to choose between a future Communist Germany or a future National Socialist Germany since the political center between these antipodes had melted away. Moreover, in 1931, I had some reason to feel that Hitler was moving in a moderate direction. I did not realize that there were opportunistic reasons for this. Hitler was trying to appear respectable in order to seem qualified to enter the government. The party at that time was confining itself—as far as I can recall today—to denouncing what it called the excessive influence of the Jews upon various spheres of cultural and economic life. It was demanding that their participation in these various areas be reduced to a level consonant with their percentage of the population. Moreover, Hitler’s alliance with the old-style nationalists of the Harzburg Front led me to think that a contradiction could be detected between his statements at public meetings and his political views. I regarded this contradiction as highly promising. In actuality Hitler only wanted to thrust his way to power by whatever means he could.

Even after joining the party I continued to associate with Jewish acquaintances, who for their part did not break relations with me although they knew or suspected that I belonged to this anti-Semitic organization. At that time I was no more an anti-Semite than I became in the following years. In none of my speeches, letters, or actions is there any trace of anti-Semitic feelings or phraseology.

Had Hitler announced, before 1933, that a few years later he would burn down Jewish synagogues, involve Germany in a war, and kill Jews and his political opponents, he would at one blow have lost me and probably most of the adherents he won after 1930. Goebbels had realized that, for on November 2, 1931, he wrote an editorial in the Angriff entitled “Septemberlings” concerning the host of new members who joined the party after the September election of 1930. In this editorial he warned the party against the infiltration of more bourgeois intellectuals who came from the propertied and educated classes and were not as trustworthy as the Old Fighters. In character and principles, he maintained, they stood abysmally far below the good old party comrades, but they were far ahead in intellectual skills: “They are of the opinion that the Movement has been brought to greatness by the talk of mere demagogues and are now prepared to take it over themselves and provide it with leadership and expertise. That’s what they think!”

In making this decision to join the accursed party, I had for the first time denied my own past, my upper-middle-class origins, and my previous environment. Far more than I suspected, the “time of decision” was already past for me. I felt, in Martin Buber’s phrase, “anchored in responsibility in a party.” My inclination to be relieved of having to
think, particularly about unpleasant facts, helped to sway the balance. In this I did not
differ from millions of others. Such mental slackness above all facilitated, established,
and finally assured the success of the National Socialist system. And I thought that by
paying my party dues of a few marks a month I had settled with my political obligations.

How incalculable the consequences were!
The superficiality of my attitude made the fundamental error all the worse. By
entering Hitler’s party I had already, in essence, assumed a responsibility that led
directly to the brutalities of forced labor, to the destruction of war, and to the deaths
of those millions of so-called undesirable stock—to the crushing of justice and the
elevation of every evil. In 1931 I had no idea that fourteen years later I would have to
answer for a host of crimes to which I subscribed beforehand by entering the party. I did
not yet know that I would atone with twenty-one years of my life for frivolity and
thoughtlessness and breaking with tradition. Still, I will never be rid of that sin.

Pages 112-113

During the years after my release from Spandau I have been repeatedly asked what
thoughts I had on this subject during my two decades alone in the cell with myself; what
I actually knew of the persecution, the deportation, and the annihilation of the Jews;
what I should have known and what conclusions I ought to have drawn.

I no longer give the answer with which I tried for so long to soothe the questioners,
but chiefly myself: that in Hitler’s system, as in every totalitarian regime, when a man’s
position rises, his isolation increases and he is therefore more sheltered from harsh
reality; that with the application of technology to the process of murder the number of
murderers is reduced and therefore the possibility of ignorance grows; that the craze for
secrecy built into the system creates degrees of awareness, so it is easy to escape
observing inhuman cruelties.

I no longer give any of these answers. For they are efforts at legalistic exculpation.
It is true that as a favorite and later as one of Hitler’s most influential ministers I was
isolated. It is also true that the habit of thinking within the limits of my own field
provided me, both as architect and as Armaments Minister, with many opportunities for
evasion. It is true that I did not know what was really beginning on November 9, 1938,
and what ended in Auschwitz and Maidanek. But in the final analysis I myself determined
the degree of my isolation, the extremity of my evasions, and the extent of my
ignorance.

I therefore know today that my agonized self-examinations posed the question as
wrongly as did the questioners whom I have met since my release. Whether I knew or did
not know, or how much or how little I knew, is totally unimportant when I consider what
horrors I ought to have known about and what conclusions would have been the natural
ones to draw from the little I did know. Those who ask me are fundamentally expecting
me to offer justifications. But I have none. No apologies are possible.

Pages 369-371

After Hitler had become excited over the V-2 project, Himmler entered the picture.
Six weeks later he came to Hitler to propose the simplest way to guarantee secrecy for
this vital program. If the entire work force were concentration camp prisoners, all
contact with the outside world would be eliminated. Such prisoners did not even have
any mail, Himmler said. Along with this, he offered to provide all necessary technicians
from the ranks of the prisoners. All industry would have to furnish would be the
management and the engineers....

By conferring such ranks Himmler of course meant to gain influence and thrust his
way into areas not yet under his command. My suspicions proved only too justified:
Himmler promptly made every effort to push his way into the field of armaments production. He readily offered countless prisoners and as early as 1942 began placing pressure on a number of my assistants. As far as we could make out, he wanted to turn the concentration camps into large modern factories, especially for armaments, with the SS continuing to have direct control of them. General Fromm at the time called my attention to the perils of this for orderly production of armaments, and Hitler made it clear he was on my side. After all, we had had certain dismal experiences before the war with such SS projects, which had promised us bricks and granite. On September 21, 1942, Hitler ruled on the matter. The prisoners were to work in factories under the direction of the industrial armaments organization. Himmler’s expansionist drive had been curbed for the present, at least in this field.

At first the factory managers complained that the prisoners arrived in a weakened condition and after a few months had to be sent back, exhausted, to the regular camps. Since their training time alone required several weeks and instructors were scarce, we could not afford to train a new group every few months. In response to our complaints the SS made considerable improvements in the sanitary conditions and rations of the camps. Soon, in the course of my rounds through the armaments plants, I saw more contented faces among the prisoners and better fed people.

Our hard-won independence in matters of armaments was broken by Hitler’s order to erect a large rocket-production plant dependent on the SS.

In a lonely valley in the Harz Mountains a widely ramified system of caves had been established before the war for the storage of vital military chemicals. Here, on December 10, 1943, I inspected the extensive underground installations where the V-2 was to be produced. In enormous long halls prisoners were busy setting up machinery and shifting plumbing. Expressionlessly, they looked right through me, mechanically removing their prisoners’ caps of blue twill until our group had passed them.

I cannot forget a professor of the Pasteur Institute in Paris who testified as a witness at the Nuremberg Trial. He too was in the Central Works which I inspected that day. Objectively, without any dramatics, he explained the inhuman conditions in this inhuman factory. The memory is especially painful, the more so because he made his charge without hatred, sadly and brokenly and also astonished at so much human degeneracy.

The conditions for these prisoners were in fact barbarous, and a sense of profound involvement and personal guilt seizes me whenever I think of them. As I learned from the overseers after the inspection was over, the sanitary conditions were inadequate, disease rampant; the prisoners were quartered right there in the damp caves, and as a result the mortality among them was extraordinarily high. That same day I allocated the necessary materials and set all the machinery in motion to build a barracks camp immediately on an adjacent hill. In addition, I pressed the SS camp command to take all necessary measures to improve sanitary conditions and upgrade the food. They pledged that they would do so.

Pages 374-6

The prisoners themselves, as I sometimes had a chance to observe, also feared Himmler’s growing economic ambitions. I recall a tour through the Linz steelworks in the summer of 1944 where prisoners were moving about freely among the other workers. They stood at the machines in the lofty workshops, served as helpers to trained workers, and talked unconstrainedly with the free workers. It was not the SS but army soldiers who were guarding them. When we came upon a group of twenty Russians, I had the interpreter ask them whether they were satisfied with their treatment. They made gestures of passionate assent. Their appearance confirmed what they said. In contrast to
the people in the caves of the Central Works, who were obviously wasting away, these prisoners were well fed. And when I asked them, just to make conversation, whether they would prefer to return to the regular camp, they gave a start of fright. Their faces expressed purest horror.

But I asked no further questions. Why should I have done so; their expressions told me everything. If I were to try today to probe the feelings that stirred me then, if across the span of a lifetime I attempt to analyze what I really felt — pity, irritation, embarrassment, or indignation — it seems to me that the desperate race with time, my obsessional fixation on production and output statistics, blurred all considerations and feelings of humanity. An American historian has said of me that I loved machines more than people. He is not wrong. I realize that the sight of suffering people influenced only my emotions, but not my conduct. On the plane of feelings only sentimentality emerged; in the realm of decisions, on the other hand, I continued to be ruled by the principles of utility. In the Nuremberg Trial the indictment against me was based on the use of prisoners in the armaments factories.

By the court’s standard of judgment, which was purely numerical, my guilt would have been greater had I prevailed over Himmler and raised the number of prisoners in our labor force, thus increasing the chances of more people for survival. Paradoxically, I would feel better today if in this sense I had been guiltier. But what preys on my mind nowadays has little to do with the standards of Nuremberg nor the figures on lives I saved or might have saved. For in either case I was moving within the system. What disturbs me more is that I failed to read the physiognomy of the regime mirrored in the faces of those prisoners—the regime whose existence I was so obsessively trying to prolong during those weeks and months. I did not see any moral ground outside the system where I should have taken my stand. And sometimes I ask myself who this young man really was, this young man who has now become so alien to me, who walked through the workshops of the Linz steelworks or descended into the caverns of the Central Works twenty-five years ago.

One day, sometime in the summer of 1944, my friend Karl Hanke, the Gauleiter of Lower Silesia, came to see me. In earlier years he had told me a great deal about the Polish and French campaigns, had spoken of the dead and wounded, the pain and agonies, and in talking about these things had shown himself a man of sympathy and directness. This time, sitting in the green leather easy chair in my office, he seemed confused and spoke falteringly, with many breaks. He advised me never to accept an invitation to inspect a concentration camp in Upper Silesia. Never, under any circumstances. He had seen something there which he was not permitted to describe and moreover could not describe.

I did not query him, I did not query Himmler, I did not query Hitler, I did not speak with personal friends. I did not investigate—for I did not want to know what was happening there. Hanke must have been speaking of Auschwitz. During those few seconds, while Hanke was warning me, the whole responsibility had become a reality again. Those seconds were uppermost in my mind when I stated to the international court at the Nuremberg Trial that as an important member of the leadership of the Reich, I had to share the total responsibility for all that had happened. For from that moment on, I was inescapably contaminated morally; from fear of discovering something which might have made me turn from my course, I had closed my eyes. This deliberate blindness outweighs whatever good I may have done or tried to do in the last period of the war. Those activities shrink to nothing in the face of it. Because I failed at that time, I still feel, to this day, responsible for Auschwitz in a wholly personal sense.

Pages 515-517
When I went to the witness stand, I had stage fright. I hastily swallowed a tranquilizing pill the German doctor had prudently handed to me. Opposite me, about ten paces away, Flachsner stood at the defense attorney’s desk; on my left, at a higher level, sat the judges.

Flachsner opened his thick manuscript. Questions and answers began. At the outset I stated: “If Hitler had had any friends, I would certainly have been one of his close friends” — by which I was trying to explain something that up to this point not even the prosecution had asserted. A vast number of details referring to the documents presented were discussed. I corrected misunderstandings but tried not to sound apologetic or evasive. In a few sentences I assumed responsibility for all the orders from Hitler which I had carried out. I took the position that in every government orders must remain orders for the subordinate organs of the government; but that the leadership on all levels must examine and weigh the orders it receives and is consequently co-responsible for them, even if the orders have been carried out under duress.

What mattered more to me was to assert my collective responsibility for all the measures of Hitler, not excluding the crimes, which were undertaken or committed in the period from 1942 on wherever and by whomever. “In political life there is a responsibility for a man’s own sector,” I said to the court....

During the past several weeks Flachsner had tried in vain to reason me out of accepting responsibility for things that had happened outside my Ministry. To do so, he said, could have fatal consequences. But after my admission I felt my spirits lightened. I was glad I had not tried to dodge the issue. Having made this matter clear, I believed I could now launch into the second part of my testimony which dealt with the last phase of the war. I believed it important to present these data, chiefly for their effect on the German people. If they learned of Hitler’s intentions to destroy the very basis of life for the German people after the loss of the war, it would help the nation turn its back on the past.* Here was strong evidence to counter the creation of a Hitler legend. But when I said these things, I encountered stiff disapproval from Goering and other defendants.

Pages 523-524

Today, a quarter of a century after these events, it is not only specific faults that burden my conscience, great as these may have been. My moral failure is not a matter of this item and that; it resides in my active association with the whole course of events. I had participated in a war which, as we of the intimate circle should never have doubted, was aimed at world dominion. What is more, by my abilities and my energies I had prolonged that war by many months. I had assented to having the globe of the world crown that domed hall which was to be the symbol of new Berlin. Nor was it only symbolically that Hitler dreamed of possessing the globe. It was part of his dream to subjugate the other nations. France, I had heard him say many times, was to be reduced to the status of a small nation. Belgium, Holland, even Burgundy, were to be incorporated into his Reich. The national life of the Poles and the Soviet Russians was to be extinguished; they were to be made into helot peoples. Nor, for one who wanted to listen, had Hitler ever concealed his intention to exterminate the Jewish people. In his speech of January 30, 1939,’ he openly stated as much. Although I never actually agreed with Hitler on these questions, I had nevertheless designed the buildings and produced the weapons which served his ends.

During the next twenty years of my life I was guarded, in Spandau prison, by nationals of the four powers against whom I had organized Hitler’s war. Along with my six fellow prisoners, they were the only people I had close contact with. Through them I learned directly what the effects of my work had been. Many of them mourned loved ones who had died in the war—in particular, every one of the Soviet guards had lost...
some close relative, brothers or a father. Yet not one of them bore a grudge toward me for my personal share in the tragedy; never did I hear words of recrimination. At the lowest ebb of my existence, in contact with these ordinary people, I encountered uncorrupted feelings of sympathy, helpfulness, human understanding, feelings that bypassed the prison rules…. On the day before my appointment as Minister of Armaments and War Production I had encountered peasants in the Ukraine who had saved me from frostbite. At the time I had been merely touched, without understanding. Now, after all was over, I once again was treated to examples of human kindness that transcended all enmity. And now, at last, I wanted to understand. This book, too, is an attempt at such understanding.

“The catastrophe of this war,” I wrote in my cell in 1947, “has proved the sensitivity of the system of modern civilization evolved in the course of centuries. Now we know that we do not live in an earthquake-proof structure. The build-up of negative impulses, each reinforcing the other, can inexorably shake to pieces the complicated apparatus of the modern world. There is no halting this process by will alone. The danger is that the automatism of progress will depersonalize man further and withdraw more and more of his self-responsibility.”

Dazzled by the possibilities of technology, I devoted crucial years of my life to serving it. But in the end my feelings about it are highly skeptical.

Response the Hitler’s Scorched Earth Policy
Pages 400-1
In September 1944 the generals at the front, the industrialists, and the Gauleiters of the western regions expected the American and British armies to exploit their superior power and roll right over our almost unarmed and worn-out troops in an offensive that would never pause.7 No one any longer counted on being able to stop them; no one who had preserved any sense of reality believed in anything like a “Marne miracle” in our favor.

Preparations for the demolition of industrial installations of all lands, at home and in the occupied territories, lay within the jurisdiction of my Ministry. During the retreats in the Soviet Union, Hitler had already given orders to negate whatever territorial gains the enemy made by following a scorched earth policy. As soon as the invasion armies began advancing from their bridgehead in Normandy, he issued a similar order. At the beginning, rational operational considerations underlay this policy of destruction. The idea was to make it difficult for the enemy to establish a foothold, to draw his supplies from the liberated country, to make use of technical repair services as well as electricity and gas, or in the longer run to build up an armaments industry. As long as the end of the war remained a distant eventuality, such actions seemed to me justified. But they lost all meaning the moment ultimate defeat drew inescapably close.

In view of the hopeless situation, I very naturally assumed that we wanted to end this war with the least possible devastation of the kind that would hamper future reconstruction. For I was not imbued by that special mood of total doom which was now beginning to spread visibly among Hitler’s followers. Hitler himself was more and more ruthlessly determined to bring on total catastrophe. But I was able to outwit him with his own arguments, and this by a simple trick. Since in hopeless situations he also always insisted that the lost territories would soon be reconquered, I needed only to repeat this premise of his and point out that I would need the industries of these areas to maintain arms production as soon as we had reconquered them.

Just after the beginning of the invasion—on June 20, when the Americans had broken through the German defensive front and encircled Cherbourg – I used this
argument to good effect. This is the basis for Hitler’s pronouncement that “in spite of the present difficulties of transportation at the front, abandonment of the industrial capacities there is out of the question.” This new directive allowed the military commander to evade a previous order of Hitler’s which called for a million Frenchmen working in the restricted factories to be transported to Germany in case of a successful invasion.

Now Hitler was once again talking about the necessity for sweeping destruction of French industry. In spite of this I succeeded on August 19, when the Allied troops were still northwest of Paris, in making him consent to our merely paralyzing rather than destroying the industrial and power installations about to fall into enemy hands. But I could not obtain any fundamental decision from Hitler; I had to work from case to case, on the pretense that all retreats were only temporary. As time passed, that argument gradually came to seem more and more ridiculous.

Pages 433-7

My work toward the end of the war, and especially after abandoning my plan to assassinate Hitler, was directed almost exclusively toward saving the industrial substance, in defiance of all difficulties and without ideological or nationalistic bias. But since this was the very reverse of official policy, it led me further along the course of lies, deception, and schizophrenia on which I had already embarked.

At a situation conference in January 1945, Hitler handed me a foreign press report. “You know I ordered everything in France to be destroyed. How is it possible that French industry is already approaching its prewar production only a few months later?” He glared indignantly at me.

“Probably it’s a propaganda report,” I replied calmly. Hitler knew all about false propaganda reports, and the affair was dismissed.

In February 1945, I once again flew to the Hungarian petroleum region, to the remaining coal area of Upper Silesia which we still held and to Czechoslovakia and Danzig. Everywhere I extracted pledges from the local representatives of my Ministry to follow our line. The generals too, indicated their sympathy with my efforts….

In the middle of March, I sent Hitler another memorandum in which I again frankly expressed my opinion on the measures that must be taken at this stage of the war. The memorandum violated all the taboos he had set up in recent months, as I well knew. But only a few days before I had convoked my industrial associates to a meeting in Bernau and told them that I would risk my head to keep the factories from being demolished, no matter how much the military situation deteriorated. At the same time I once again sent out a circular letter to all my branch offices ordering them to avoid destruction on principle.

To coax Hitler into reading my memorandum at all, the first pages began in the usual tone with a report on coal production. But by the second page I was presenting a list in which the armaments factories were already ranked last. I gave civilian needs precedence: food, gas, electricity. Abruptly, the text went on to say that “the final collapse of the German economy” could be expected “with certainty” within four to eight weeks, and that afterward the war “could not be continued on the military plane.” Then, appealing directly to Hitler, I wrote: “No one has the right to take the viewpoint that the fate of the German people is tied to his personal fate.” The primary obligation of leadership in these last weeks of the war must be “to help the people wherever possible.” I concluded the memorandum: “At this stage of the war it makes no sense for us to undertake demolitions which may strike at the very life of the nation.”

Until then I had opposed Hitler’s policy by a pretense of optimism in conformity with the official line, arguing that factories should not be destroyed because we would
want to put them back in operation quickly after the reconquest. Now, on the contrary,
I declared for the first time that the material substance of the nation had to be
preserved “even if a reconquest does not seem possible. … It cannot possibly be the
purpose of warfare at home to destroy so many bridges that, given the straitened means
of the postwar period, it will take years to rebuild this transportation network. . . .
Their destruction means eliminating all further possibility for the German people to
survive.”

I did not dare hand this memorandum to Hitler without preparation. He was too
unpredictable, and an instant order to have me shot was quite conceivable.

Pages 476-480

These were the reasons that took me to Berlin for the last time. But the far more
powerful magnet behind these reasons was Hitler. I wanted to see him one last time, to
tell him good-bye. Now I felt as if I had stolen away two days before. Was that to be the
end of our many years of association? For many days, month after month, we had sat
together over our joint plans, almost like co-workers and friends. For many years he had
received my family and me at Obersalzberg and had shown himself a friendly, often
solicitous host.

The overpowering desire to see him once more betrays the ambivalence of my
feelings. For rationally I was convinced that it was urgently necessary, although already
much too late, for Hitler’s life to come to an end. Underlying everything I had done to
oppose him in the past months had been the desire to prevent the annihilation that
Hitler seemed bent on. What could be greater proof of our antithetical aims than the
speech I had recorded the day before, and the fact that I was now awaiting his death
impatiently? And yet that very expectation brought out once again my emotional bond to
the fallen ruler were growing stronger and stronger. Perhaps many of Hitler’s followers had
similar emotions during these last days. On the one hand there was sense of duty, oath
of allegiance, loyalty, gratitude — on the other hand the bitterness at personal tragedy
and national disaster — both centered around one person: Hitler.

To this day I am glad that I succeeded in carrying out my intention to see Hitler one
last time. It was right, after twelve years of association, to make this gesture in spite of
all antagonisms….

That day he said nothing more of an imminent turning point or that there was still
hope. Rather apathetically, wearily and as if it were already a matter of course, he
began speaking of his death: “I too have resolved to stay here. I only wanted to hear
your view once more.” Without excitement, he continued: “I shall not fight personally.
There is always the danger that I would only be wounded and fall into the hands of the
Russians alive. I don’t want my enemies to disgrace my body either. I’ve given orders
that I be cremated. Fraulein Braun wants to depart this life with me, and I’ll shoot
Blondi beforehand. Believe me, Speer, it is easy for me to end my life. A brief moment
and I’m freed of everything, liberated from this painful existence.”

I felt as if I had been talking with a man already departed. The atmosphere grew
increasingly uncanny; the tragedy was approaching its end.

During the last months I had hated him at times, fought him, lied to him, and
deceived him, but at this moment I was confused and emotionally shaken. In this state, I
confessed to him in a low voice, to my own surprise, that I had not carried out any
demolitions but had actually prevented them. For a moment his eyes filled with tears.
But he did not react. Such questions, so important to him only a few weeks before, were
now remote. Absently, he stared at me as I faltered out my offer to stay in Berlin. He
did not answer. Perhaps he sensed that I did not mean it. I have often asked myself
since whether he had not always known instinctively that I had been working against him
during these past months and whether he had not deduced this from my memoranda;
also whether by letting me act contrary to his orders he had not provided a fresh
example of the multiple strata in his mysterious personality. I shall never know.

Schmidt, 1984, Albert Speer: The End of a Myth

Introduction
Page 14-17

However, if we investigate several important aspects of Albert Speer’s life, if we
consult files, documents, and eyewitness accounts, we cannot accept the cliché-ridden
myth of Hitler’s master builder and armaments organizer. Speer does not emerge as an
architect with purely artistic ambitions. He was not an apolitical technocrat in a narrow
specialization. Speer was Hitler’s loyal paladin and minister, and he masterfully
manipulated the instruments of power politics in the National Socialist state.

A few more things must be noted in regard to the documents on the Speer “case.”
A critical study of this material alone will impugn the credibility of the best-selling
author....

One Speer document from the Nazi period deserves special attention. It is the so-
called Speer Chronik (cited here as “Journal”). As a daily office log of a government
minister of the Third Reich, it is one of a kind. Its incredible background story is typical
of many documents from the Nazi period. Furthermore, it demonstrates a specific
instance of Speer’s tampering with the historical record.

When Speer was Inspector General of Buildings, his friend Wolters was his main
division chief for Berlin and also his press and public relations officer. In late 1940,
Wolters suggested to his superior that he, Wolters, keep a journal of all the important
events in Speer’s ever-widening area of jurisdiction.” Speer okayed the idea, and
Wolters began his Journal on January 1, 1941. The Inspector General of Buildings issued
a ukase to all department heads, ordering them to send regular reports to the
chronicler.

Wolters selected facts and data that struck him as important for the Journal. He
added his “own insights and knowledge from conversations and personal experiences.”
The Journal entries were then initialed by Speer, who never altered or revised them in
any way.

Wolters kept up the Journal until September 1944. He then had to limit himself to
a few diary entries because the general situation in Germany was getting worse by the
day. At the end of the war, there were several copies of the Speer Journal, but only one
complete copy seems to have survived....

In 1964, Wolters reread the Journal. He decided that “it was necessary to copy the
entire text, and to correct grammatical and stylistic errors and remove several
irrelevant and foolish things, especially a few passages that might incriminate Speer or
one or two members of his staff, because the Ludwigsburg Central Agency for ‘War
Criminals’ was still in operation.”

Ultimately, the pagination was considerably altered. There were two reasons for
this change. First of all, Wolters had made substantial, sometimes radical deletions.
Second, the original Journal had been typed not only on different typewriters, but also
with different line spacings. The edited version, however, was typed on a single
typewriter, and the spacing was consistent throughout.
After Speer’s release from prison, Wolters gave him the “cleaned-up” version for his evaluation. (The Journal must have been useful to Speer when he wrote his memoirs.) Upon delivering the Journal to Speer, Wolters pointed out minor changes in the original copy. In 1969, after finishing his memoirs, Speer turned the sanitized manuscript over to the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz without first notifying Wolters.

The Bundesarchiv then made a photocopy of this typescript and gave the copy to the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich. Both archive directors were aware that this was a retyped version of the Journal. But neither knew about the deletions.

The Journal, now available at these locations, was indispensable material for historians dealing with Speer or with the history of armaments and construction in the Third Reich. Scholars used the Journal as a primary source, never suspecting that it could, strictly speaking, be called a forgery because of the numerous deletions.

In 1969, the English historian David Irving, who is regarded as an enfant terrible by many of his colleagues, found a year’s worth of entries of the original Journal at London’s Imperial War Museum. He noticed that the text sometimes differed from the Koblenz and Munich versions. Irving wrote to Speer, sending him a photocopy of the original text that he had found and asking him to comment on it. An astonishing correspondence then developed between the former Minister of Armaments and his chronicler Wolters.

The Jews and Forced Labour
Pages 181-189

“I shall never forget the account of a Jewish family going to their death: the husband with his wife and children on the way to die,” writes Albert Speer in his memoirs. “[They] are before my eyes to this day.” He claims he knew nothing about the truth and the details of the Final Solution, although he does admit that “one could have known if one wanted to know.” Speer explains, “I had only a vague notion.”...

After “Reich Crystal Night,” on November 9, 1938, the government’s anti-Jewish measures intensified. A new law gave the Nazi authorities an instrument, created at the highest level, to forge ahead with the separation of Jews from Germans of Aryan blood. On April 30, 1939, the government promulgated the so-called Law Concerning Rental Situations of Jews. One of the signatories was Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler....

The passage of this dryly worded law was followed by a forced resettlement of Jews within German cities; their relocation was carried out by the regional housing authorities. It soon took on such vast proportions that these agencies had to set up special “resettlement divisions.”

But not in Berlin. Here, the housing offices did not have to assume the burden of resettling Jews. The task was performed by an agency that evidently hoped to profit from the action; this agency was the office of the Inspector General of Buildings for the Reich Capital.

Speer’s office created a “Main Resettlement Division” as early as spring 1939; it was headed by Dietrich Clahes, former prime minister of Brunswick. The task of this division was to register all apartments occupied by Jews within the Reich capital, to evict the Jewish tenants, and to allocate these apartments to non-Jewish tenants who would lose or had already lost their own apartments because of Speer’s urban renewal project.

The scope of this relocation was such, however, that no single office in the Speer agency could implement it, for, at that time, Berlin had over 23,000 Jewish apartments and over 82,000 Jews. And then there was another problem: Official measures against Jews were actually under the aegis of the SS, in this case its Secret State Police, or
Gestapo. Consequently, Speer and the Gestapo had to coordinate their activities in the “Jewish Apartment Eviction Actions.”...

Since the outbreak of the war, British airplanes had also been bombing civilian homes. As a result, Speer’s Resettlement Division had to do more than reassign formerly Jewish apartments to Gentile tenants who had lost their homes because of Speer’s urban renewal. Now the apartments occupied by Jews were “vital to the war effort.” Speer made them available for emergencies. Bombed-out Aryans in Berlin could, if they were lucky, move into formerly Jewish apartments. But this necessitated a preliminary measure—as described in the original Speer Journal during the period of January 1 to April 15, 1941. “At the beginning of the year, [we] began to increase the rate of evacuating areas slated for demolition and to move the inhabitants of those areas into Jewish apartments. The Jewish apartments rented by those resettled tenants were cleared and the Jewish tenants crammed into Jewish housing owned by Jews.”

There was more and more evicting and cramming, as the holes left by enemy bombs in civilian residential blocks grew bigger and bigger. From January to mid-April 1941, the Inspector General of Buildings took advantage of his Jewish apartment potential to “allocate some thousand rooms for the war effort” to fifty agencies and government offices. But then the Fuhrer requested that one thousand apartments be made available to “Germans who have lost their homes.” And Speer ordered more evictions. The evicted Jews were “assigned housing with other Jews by the Jewish Congregation Office.” And just six weeks later, the Speer Journal could report that Speer had carried out the Fuhrer’s wish one hundred percent. The entry of May 31, 1941, said: “As a result of the Jewish Apartment Eviction Action, 940 apartments were made available to the city of Berlin for emergency purposes, i.e., for lodging members of the German nation made homeless by air raids.”...

On October 18, 1941, the first trainload of Berlin Jews left Grunewald Station and headed east. Countless trains were to follow. The Propaganda Minister’s deportation plans, which had been merely discussed in his office seven months earlier, had now become a reality.

Speer too was informed of the evacuations. Moreover, he profited from them. “From October 18 to November 2, some 4,500 Jews were evacuated from Berlin,” says the original Speer Office Journal. “As a result, one thousand more apartments for bombed-out [Germans] are vacant and are being made available by the Inspector General of Buildings.” Evidently, these places were quickly occupied—often by Party members who asked Speer to get them large apartments. Indeed, more and more people were given Jewish apartments by Speer, since, at Hitler’s orders, he had “to find housing for people who had been seriously injured in the war, and for highly deserving soldiers of this war.”

In any case, Inspector General of Buildings Speer needed more housing. While trainloads of Jews were rolling from Berlin to Lodz, Minsk, Kaunas, and Riga, Speer “initiated the third major eviction [of Jews] from the Jewish apartments at the end of November.” The results of this action were considerable: three thousand apartments.

In his last book, Speer claims he had little knowledge of what was happening to the Jews of Berlin: “When I recall the fate of the Jews of Berlin, I am overcome by an unavoidable feeling of failure and inadequacy. Often, during my daily drive to my architectural office and, after February 1942, en route to my ministry on the city highway, I could see ... crowds of people on the platform of nearby Nikolassesee Railroad Station. I knew that these must be Berlin Jews who were being evacuated. I am sure that an oppressive feeling struck me as I drove past. I presumably had a sense of somber events.”
These lines do not express merely an apologia by a man who evaded the truth because he simply did not care to know it. Clahes had seen to it that Speer was informed of the activities of his Resettlement Division. Speer’s later claims that he had no precise knowledge of those things sound hollow when we read a document submitted to him in November 1942. Clashes was resigning from the Resettlement Division because of overwork, and this was his final report to his superior. It states among other things that “a total of 23,765 Jewish apartments have been vacated. ... Of these Jewish apartments, 9,000 have been reassigned. The number of resettled persons runs to 75,000.”

Pages 189-191

When he was Minister of Armaments, Speer’s jurisdiction became so vast that he must have had more than hearsay knowledge about the places to which the Jews were being sent and where these prisoners—in part—helped manufacture armaments items. He must have had direct knowledge since he kept himself informed about the conditions of the concentration camps. His interest, it seems, was prompted by his dismayed observation when he personally inspected the Mauthausen concentration camp on March 30, 1943. Here, where the inmates were laboring for his armaments machinery, housing and other constructions were being built with a generous use of material. Yet, since construction material was growing ever scarcer because of the war, Speer was having terrible problems getting hold of material for agencies whose construction projects were vital to the war effort. Hence, the generous use of construction material at Mauthausen struck him as sheer waste.

Minister Speer instantly notified SS-Reichsfuhrer Himmler: “We now have a shortage of not only iron and wood but also manpower for building armaments factories for the immediate needs of the front lines; yet, on the occasion of my inspection of the Mauthausen concentration camp, I was forced to see that the SS is implementing projects that strike me as more than lavish under present-day conditions.” He certainly did not — Speer went on — underestimate the task assigned to the concentration camps within the framework of the war effort. But he felt that the SS could not continue its constructions along the same lines. “We must therefore carry out a new planning program for the construction of concentration camps in terms of utmost efficiency, the use of the least possible amount of [material and labor], and the greatest success for the present-day demands of the armaments industry; i.e., we must immediately switch to a primitive construction method.” In order to learn about the situation in the other concentration camps, Speer proposed that one of his assistants, together with a representative of Himmler’s, “should inspect all concentration camps in situ.”

Speer’s letter to Himmler also passed through the hands of SS-Obergruppenfuhrer Oswald Pohl, who, as manager of the SS-factories, was an ambitious competitor of the Minister of Armaments. Pohl regarded Speer’s letter as “a bit much.” The agitated Pohl went on: “Reich Minister Speer is acting as if we were building on a large scale in the concentration camps without his knowledge and without any awareness of the times. He is concealing the fact that every construction project in the concentration camps has been registered in accordance with regulations and that he himself issued his authorization on February 2, 1943. . . . The SS-Reichsfuhrer can therefore see that Reich Minister Speer has been informed in detail about all construction projects and that he has also authorized them.” Pohl felt it would be a big mistake to adopt primitive building methods. With 160,000 prisoners, they were already struggling against epidemics and a high mortality rate “because the housing for inmates, including sanitary facilities, is completely inadequate.”
There is no telling what negative consequences the more primitive constructions would have had for the prisoners. In any event, Speer issued an edict in March 1943, ordering that no more permanent structures were to be put up. The inmate housing had to be makeshift. The outer and inner walls were to be lightweight, and there was to be no plastering inside or outside.

However, Speer changed his mind when he read the report on Auschwitz by his two assistants, who must have found catastrophic sanitary conditions there. Speer quickly wrote to Himmler and made building material available—iron, cast-iron pipes, water pipes, and round bar steel—especially for construction at Auschwitz. However, conditions in other concentration camps must have been presented to him in a more favorable light. For, in a handwritten addendum to his letter to Himmler, Speer remarked: “I am delighted that the inspection of the other concentration camps resulted in a highly positive picture.”

**Reaction to Hitler’s Scorched Earth Policy**

Pages 122-3

Speer was using all means at his disposal to continue producing armaments as the war situation kept making his task more and more difficult. Even though he was making this all-out effort to enable his Fuhrer to keep fighting the war, Speer was dismayed to note that Hitler himself—following his Scorched Earth Policy—wanted to destroy the industrial installations that would fall into the hands of the advancing enemy. This was a frightening thought for Speer, since the manufacturing plants were the foundation of his power.

In September 1944, a distraught Speer asked Hitler whether they could reckon with a speedy German reoccupation of the lost territories. Hitler said they could. The Armaments Minister concluded that if the lost areas were indeed reconquered, then the demolished industrial installations would be worthless to him since it would take months to get them running again. He therefore ordered only “crippling” of the factories: Important machine units were to be removed in case the enemy drew near, so that he could not utilize the factories for his own armaments production.

These actions were carried out according to Speer’s policy of “crippling instead of destruction.” There is no telling whether his chief motives were highly moral, whether he was moved primarily by ethical impulses—by the obligation to preserve these places of work for his workers. One thing is certain, however: He had a very strong personal interest in preventing the destruction of these bastions of his power. And it is equally certain that although Speer gave the necessary orders, the factories could be crippled only with the assistance of most of his staffers.

Pages 128-31

But no sooner had the Armaments Minister driven off [March 19, 1945] than the dictator signed the infamous order known as “Scorched Earth.” All military installations for transportation, communication, industry, and supplies that were located within the territory of the Reich and that could possibly be used by the enemy to continue the war were to be destroyed, with no consideration for the population. The agencies that Hitler put in charge of implementing this order were the military-command authorities, the Reich defense commissars, and the Gauleiters. Thus, Hitler had virtually deprived Speer of all his power and possibility of ordering “crippling” instead of “destruction.”

Hitler’s attack on his Armaments Minister did not lessen the artist/politician’s personal feelings for his minion. When Speer returned to Berlin on March 21, Hitler went
over to his driver after the conference on the situation and shook both his hands. “He thanked me over and over again for bringing back his minister... safe and sound.”

A few days later, Hitler pleaded with Speer, even begged him to state that he at least still hoped that the war was not lost; otherwise, Hitler told him, he would have to send him on sick leave. Speer refused to comply. But twenty-four hours later, he demonstrated his loyalty to Hitler. With the words, “Mein Fuhrer, I stand unreservedly behind you,” he announced his submission. Hitler rewarded this declaration of allegiance: He signed a decree that put Speer in charge of implementing Hitler’s destruction edict. With the Fuhrer’s signature, his Minister of Armaments regained his power and could once again “cripple” instead of “destroy.”

On April 11, Speer wanted to give a speech in order (he says in his memoirs) “to call upon the public in general to avoid senseless destruction.” However, these appeals constituted the smallest part of the address. Generally, the speech appears to have been written by a man who still — or once again — failed to realize that the motor of his armaments machinery would spin only a few more times and then come to a halt....

On April 23, 1945, the Armaments Minister, who had been traveling through the as yet unoccupied territories almost all month long, flew once again to the beleaguered capital. In his autobiography, Speer lists several reasons for his return. He says he wanted to obtain the release of his friend Dr. Karl Brandt, who was imprisoned in a suburban villa. He also wanted to talk another friend into going west in order to flee the Russians. “But the far more powerful magnet behind these reasons was Hitler. I wanted to see him one last time, to say good-bye.”

There may have been an even more compelling reason, however. On April 22, Martin Bormann, who still had direct Teletype contact with the Gauleiters, sent a telex from the underground rooms of the Fuhrer’s bunker. Along with directives and information for the Gauleiters, the telex asked: “Where is Speer?”

Speer was staying with Karl Kaufmann, Gauleiter of Hamburg. Here, he must have read Bormann’s call for him. Perhaps Speer feared that Hitler or Bormann had told SS-killers to liquidate the Minister of Armaments for sabotaging the Scorched Earth orders. So on April 23, 1945, Speer took the bull by the horns. In his usual casual way, he entered the bunker vault and greeted the stunned secretaries: “I guess you didn’t expect to see me again.”

According to Speer’s memoirs, when he then faced Hitler, he confessed that he had failed to carry out his destruction orders. For Hitler, this must have been tantamount to admitting treason — but there were no consequences. The Fuhrer would later repudiate Goring and Himmler for treason; but he forgave his friend and protégé for his breach of loyalty. The object of Hitler’s “unrequited love” could leave the bunker unhindered.

Sereny, 1995, Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth

Introduction
Page 14-5

Many of the people I spoke with in the course of preparing this book - Speer family members, key colleagues on his team during his twelve years with Hitler, prison staff at Spandau and friends, observers and enemies of his later years - liked and admired Speer for the consistent modesty he displayed even at the zenith of his power, for his achievements and for the courageous actions he took on behalf of the German people in the last months of Hitler’s rule. But none of those who had worked with him under Hitler had questioned the morality of Hitler and his creed, any more than Speer himself had
done until the end approached, and some of their statements now, as they appear in this book, will undoubtedly jar.

The principal aim of this book, throughout, was to learn to understand Speer. It would have been impossible to achieve this if I had only viewed him in isolation, out of context with the environment in which he lived. It was thus necessary to find out how and why some other essentially decent and often talented men and women could become so subject to Hitler and his ideas that no doubt of him could be allowed to intervene. And here, while in such encounters it is essential never to pretend agreement with the unacceptable, moral indignation for its own sake is an unaffordable luxury. As this search turned into the written word, it seemed important to me, even while of course aware of the outrageousness of some statements, not to interrupt the flow too often with critical comments, but rather to trust the reader to see each claim, each admission and each denial as one more necessary detail in a mosaic which in the end might provide a comprehensive whole.

A few of those who had been on Speer’s architectural or ministerial teams expressed admiration for his stand at Nuremberg and afterwards, but many more felt uncomfortable, some profoundly angry about it: angry above all, I think, because his publicly expressed derogation of Hitler cast a reflection on their own moral impotence.

I have spent much of my life studying this moral impotence in Hitler’s Germany. Hitler was obsessed by the Jews, and among his murders of millions - Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran Christians, Gypsies and Jews - it was the killing of the Jews in the gas chambers of occupied Poland which struck deepest into the conscience and remained in the consciousness of the world. It is the one action which those who admired Hitler fifty years ago, and those whose nationalist and racist aims today resemble and indeed are modelled on his, are desperate to deny.

The fate of Europe’s Jews, so central to Speer’s life after Nuremberg, inevitably plays a great part in this book, but it is not its subject. Hitler’s evil, I believe, went far beyond even this madness, and my aim here is to put into context all of the crimes against humanity which Hitler initiated, which continue to threaten us today, and of which Speer, who was in many ways a man of excellence, sadly enough made himself a part.

The Jews and Forced Labour

Pages 220-1

Most of this early resettlement work, whatever its consequences on various groups, including Berlin Jews, was purely administrative and it is unlikely that Speer himself, by now heading an organization of thousands, knew much about the details involved. This benefit of the doubt, however, cannot be extended to him for the next stage involving the Berlin Jews, two years later, in early 1941.

On 20 March 1941, by which time British bombing had begun to bite and Speer’s responsibilities were considerably extended, a meeting was called at Goebbels’s Ministry of Propaganda to discuss the problem of the remaining sixty to seventy thousand Jews in the capital. It was attended by both Adolf Eichmann and Clahes.

Leopold Gutterer, State Secretary at the Ministry of Propaganda, representing Goebbels, informed the group of a meeting between Hitler and Goebbels that week at which Hitler, though he had not yet decreed that the capital should be immediately cleared of Jews (mainly because about twenty-six thousand Jews were still working for armament production there), had “convinced Dr Goebbels that the Fuhrer will eventually be open to constructive suggestions about their evacuation”.

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Speer’s representative, Clahes, remarked that twenty thousand apartments hi Berlin still used by Jews “are needed for additional rehousing after further preparatory work on the urban renewal of Berlin and... as a reserve in case of major bombing damage”. At the end of the conference, Eichmann was asked to work out a proposal for Goebbels for the evacuation of all Jews from Berlin. It is impossible that Speer was not informed of the substance of this meeting—the eviction of the Jews from Berlin. It is clear from his testimony at Nuremberg that there was no doubt in his mind that the sixty to seventy thousand remaining Jews in Berlin mentioned in this conference included the wives and children of the 26,000 men working in armament production. Under cross-examination on 21 June 1946 by the American Chief Prosecutor, Justice Robert Jackson, Speer pointed out that working in armament factories in 1941-42 enabled Jews “to escape the evacuation that was already in full swing. These Jews,” he said, “were still completely free and their families still lived in their apartments.”

At Speer’s Nuremberg trial, his organization’s (and his) involvement with this aspect of the persecution of the Jews never came up, and it might have remained buried for ever if attention had not been thrown upon it forty-odd years later by the publication of a doctoral thesis by the young German historian Matthias Schmidt. In his End of a Myth, published in 1982 (the year after Speer’s death), the author, making no claim to historical objectivity, frankly set out to prove Speer’s iniquity, above all in his denial of knowledge about the fate of the Jews. He tried to achieve this by providing a selective account of the arrangements about the Berlin apartments belonging to Jews and the changes in the Chronik, claiming (with the information then available to him) that Speer had laundered the record about this event. He then concluded that these actions, although not legal evidence, were psychological proof of Speer’s early knowledge of the planned murder of the Jews.

Although one can sympathize with the passionate conviction that engenders such a book, I am convinced that although Speer certainly knew by 1941 that the Berlin Jews were being deported, it is virtually certain he had no idea they were going to their death....

What Speer didn’t know at the time of the correspondence with Wolters, or even years later when he tried to prevent the publication of Schmidt’s embarrassing book, was that three notebook pages, on which he jotted down questions to raise in meetings with his staff, had somehow slipped among the thousands of pages of documentation which Wolters eventually bequeathed to the Federal Archives, and would establish his personal knowledge of the Jewish-owned flats beyond a shadow of a doubt.

The first, page 48, bears a date of 20 January 1941 and contains, besides two notes for the architect Hans Stephan, one for Dietrich Clahes, Chief of Resettlement Department: “Cl: Couple action on the 1,000 Jewish flats with preparation for emergency quarters for people made homeless through bomb damage.” The other two pages are undated, both appearing merely to be reminders to himself to ask Clahes for reports: “Cl.” he jots down, “Report about 1,000 Jew flats,” and adds in the next line, still directed to Clahes, “& various other things I haven’t heard anything more about.” The third page note is only “Clah. Report about 1,000 Jew-flat action.”

Speer had one more shock that year of 1943. On 10 December, four months after the rocket factories at Peenemünde had been destroyed by Allied bombs, he travelled to the Harz Mountains, not far from Buchenwald, to visit the underground installations (called “Dora”) where Wernher von Braun’s V-2 rockets were being produced.
It is astonishing that Speer was ever allowed to see this. “I virtually forced my way in after my ministry’s medical director told me it was Dante’s Inferno,” he told me. It is to his credit that in this case, not having been able to bring himself to write about it in the “Spandau draft” (of course addressed to his friend Wolters, who was already showing discomfort at Speer’s constant criticisms of Hitler), he finally decided to write about it in *Inside the Third Reich*.

In Nuremberg Speer was to tell the court that he had never visited a labour camp, and this, possibly the most hellish of any, was apparently the only one he ever saw. (Mauthausen, of course, was a concentration-come-labour camp.)...

“It was a cold day in December when I went there,” Speer told me. “I was entirely unprepared; it was the worst place I have ever seen.”

It was the morning after our conversation about 6 October. Again Margret had gone skiing; again we sat at that comfortable kitchen table; again, immediately and impossible to fake, his face went pale; again he covered his eyes for a moment with his hand. “Even now when I think of it,” he said, “I feel ill.” The prisoners, he said, lived in the caves with the rockets; it was freezing cold, humid.

Jean Michel described it in his book, *Dora*:

> The missile slaves ... from France, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Russia, Poland and Germany... toiled eighteen hours a day . . . for many weeks without tools, just with their bare hands ... ammonia dust burnt their lungs ... they slept in the tunnels in cavities which were hollowed out: 1,024 prisoners in hollows on four levels which stretched for 100 yards

“I was outraged,” Speer told me. “I demanded to see the sanitary provisions”

> No heat, no ventilation, not the smallest pail to wash in: death touched us with the cold, the sensation of choking, the filth that impregnated us.... The latrines were barrels cut in half with planks laid across. They stood at each exit from the rows of sleeping cubicles.

“I walked past these men and tried to meet their eyes,” Speer said, despair in his voice. “They wouldn’t look at me; they ripped off their prisoners’ caps and stood at attention until we passed.”

“I demanded to be shown their midday meal,” Speer said. “I tried it; it was an inedible mess.” After the inspection was over he found out that thousands had already died. “I saw dead men ... they couldn’t hide the truth,” he said. “And those who were still alive were skeletons.” He had never been so horrified in his life, he said. “I ordered the immediate building of a barracks camp outside, and there and then signed the papers for the necessary materials” Michel in *Dora*:

> It was not until March 1944 that the barracks were completed. At Dora, the work was as terrible as ever, but we could at least leave the tunnel for the six hours of rest allowed...

When I asked Speer what he had felt at Dora, it was the only time he admitted feeling something for the slave workers. “I was appalled,” he said. “Yes,” he repeated, almost as if in retrospect he was surprised at having given way to feeling. “Yes, there I was appalled.”

Pages 463-5

The closest Speer came in *Inside the Third Reich* to confessing knowledge about the fate of the Jews came after a passage discussing his guilt feelings about his own disregard of the human beings enslaved by the system he served. In the summer of 1944, he wrote, his friend Karl Hanke, Gauleiter of Lower Silesia, had come to see him in Berlin and, sitting “in the green leather easychair in my office”, appearing confused and
speaking “falteringly with many breaks”, had advised him never, under any circumstances, to accept an invitation to inspect a concentration camp in Upper Silesia, which Speer said he later realized was Auschwitz.

When we talked of this first, in 1978, I asked Speer if he was really saying that for Hanke the fact that Jews were being killed in Auschwitz was shocking news in the summer of 1944? After all, as Gauleiter of Lower Silesia (the Jews of Breslau, its capital, had been deported to Auschwitz in March 1943, making the old city officially “Jew-free”), Hanke had certainly attended the Posen conference in October 1943.

“I can only cite what he said to me,” Speer answered, his voice both edgy and weary, as it always became when this subject arose. “What more could I do in the book, or at Nuremberg, than accept responsibility for all of it?”

This was a response almost impossible to argue with. On the face of it, he had voluntarily accepted a moral responsibility for all crimes committed by the government he had served. What more could he have done? Nobody else had done it, no individual in legal history, before or afterwards, had elected to declare himself guilty in principle, even for criminal acts in which he had had no part and of which, by implication, he had had no knowledge.

My sceptical question about Hanke’s knowledge, I decided later, was perhaps unfair. It was possible that Hanke could have received a shock in Auschwitz that early summer. For although he would certainly have been familiar with this nearby installation, Germany’s largest labour-come-concentration camp, it is very probable that he had never seen Birkenau, Auschwitz’s death camp, which was certainly not on the program for visiting VIPs. And although the smell of burning bodies spread “for miles around”, all labour camps had a great many dead bodies to deal with, and crematoria to burn them. It is also conceivable that Hanke, while aware of the murder of Jews by shooting, working and starving them to death, had not known about that unspeakable horror that not even Himmler could pronounce: the gas chambers....

In this situation it is entirely possible that Gauleiter Hanke, on a routine visit to Auschwitz during those weeks, could indeed have received the kind of shock that Speer described. He was not, after all, a brute-Speer said elsewhere that Hanke “had shown himself a man of compassion and directness”. Below was also a friend, and wrote, “I valued Hanke ... we had talked together a great deal over the months, and I was aware of the profound seriousness of his mind.”

But questions still arose. Why would Hanke suddenly warn Speer against a situation at Auschwitz most people would assume he already knew about? And finally, why did Speer bring up this painful subject at this point, when we had been focusing on the period between the Allied invasion and the 20 July coup attempt?

It was when I neared the end of my research, long after Speer’s death, that I realized that this story, and Speer’s way of presenting it, went to the heart of what Casalis had called his “inner torture” about the Jews. It was Speer’s own despairing knowledge that for the “different man” he had wanted to become under Casalis’s guidance in Spandau, his generalized acknowledgement of a moral mandate had only been an elegant ploy; behind it lay a nightmare of unavowed knowledge, a mine field of unalleviated guilt. In that paragraph in his book, he had tried to say so: “I still feel, to this day, responsible for Auschwitz in a wholly personal sense.”

Pages 706-8

In a review Speer once brought out to show me, Lucy Dawidowicz had written, “What his Diaries do not mention are any sleepless nights ... or dreams about Auschwitz.”
“But that is exactly what does give me sleepless nights,” he said, sounding very weary. This was the last day of our original three weeks together.

“I think I know what you knew about the Jews,” I said. “But could you yourself not go a little further?”

He had known that this question would come up that day. “I can say,” he said slowly, “that I sensed that dreadful things were happening with the Jews” This was no longer the man I had found glib, smooth and almost theatrically charming when we first met. Deadly serious, deeply tired, there was not a shred of glibness left.

But if you “sensed”, I said, “then you knew. You cannot sense or suspect in a void. You knew.”

He was silent for a long moment, then got up, went to his study and came back with a piece of paper. “Read this. Do as you wish with it; and then let us speak of it no more.”

In April 1977, Speer received a letter from D. Diamond, director of the South African (Jewish) Board of Deputies, asking him to assist the Board in their legal action against the publishers and distributors of the pamphlet Did Six Million Die? The Hoax of the Twentieth Century to prevent its distribution in South Africa.

The request to Speer was that he should affirm on oath that: a) contrary to what the pamphlet claimed, there had indeed been a plan to exterminate the Jews of Europe; b) that he had heard of this plan and could testify that it existed; c) that it was implemented and how he knew that it was implemented.

Speer’s affidavit in reply, which I translated from his original German, consisted of three pages in which, point after point, he described the background to the exterminations and the devastating admissions of those directly implicated accused at the Nuremberg trial. After paying, as often before, a tribute to Nuremberg as an attempt to create a better world, he ended with the most revealing words he had ever written:

I still recognize today that the grounds upon which I was convicted by the International Military Tribunal were correct. More than this, I still consider it essential today to take upon myself the responsibility, and thus the blame in general, for all crimes which were committed after I became a member of Hitler’s government on 8 February 1942. It is not individual acts or omissions, however grave, which weigh upon me, but my conduct as part of the leadership. This is why I accepted an overall responsibility in the Nuremberg trial and reaffirm this now.

However, to this day I still consider my main guilt to be my tacit acceptance [Billigung] of the persecution and the murder of millions of Jews [author’s italics].

With those words, especially the hard-to-translate Billigung, Speer associated himself for the first time directly with the murder of the Jews. Three months later, when Die Zeit Magazin, the colour supplement of Germany’s influential weekly, obtained the German rights to my profile of Speer, the contract provided that the retranslation into German would be rechecked with Speer, and most specifically this last paragraph.

Just as he had not registered any objection when I had given him the English draft to read, here again he accepted the profile as written, except that in a handwritten note to Die Zeit he asked for a footnote to be added in which he explained the term “Billigung”, which I had translated as “tacit consent”, to mean “looking away, not by knowledge of an order or its execution. The first,” he wrote, “is as grave as the second.”
“Why did you say this so directly now, after denying it for so long?” I asked him. He shrugged. “For this purpose, and with these people,” he said, “I didn’t wish to-I couldn’t-hedge” (wollte ich nicht-komte ich nicht-handeln).

If Speer had said as much in Nuremberg, he would have been hanged.

Reaction to Hitler’s Scorched Earth Policy
Pages 472-3

“Speer was outraged by the Hitler orders to destroy everything,” Poser said. “He had always been a ‘direct action’ man, but as of that autumn, not only disobeying but specifically countermanding Hitler’s orders, he was quite literally taking over. Without making any attempt to hide his actions, every order he altered or gave was one more step undertaken to save what could be saved of Germany, for the people, for the future.”

I asked what he meant by “taking over”.

“The reins, responsibility…. He shrugged. “Call it what you will: leadership. There was nobody else to take it on.”

Speer’s (and later West German Chancellor Adenauer’s) financial adviser, Karl Hettlage, who had so astonished Speer in 1938 with his suggestion that he was “Hitler’s unhappy love”, was equally perceptive, fifty years later, I thought, in his analysis of Speer.

“I’m sure that in the last year of the war,” he said, “Speer felt morally in a void, with no firm ground under his feet. His decision finally to sabotage Hitler’s ‘scorched earth’ orders was, I am sure, an ultimate expression of his despair and disillusion. And from this also came his dream-for that is all it ever was-of killing Hitler. This was for him the point of no return-it simply couldn’t be allowed to go on. Others felt this, too, you know, but he was the only one who acted, and perhaps the only one who could act.”

Certainly, Speer was the only man in Hitler’s government who organized an active resistance to the “scorched earth” orders. But, besides his closest allies in this endeavour-Poser; Hupfauer; and his secretariat, Kempf, Cliever and Edith Maguira, Todt’s former secretary-there were many others who took enormous risks by following his lead. This applied not only to the army officers who did not carry out Hitler’s command to “reduce the land to ashes” as they retreated but equally to countless civilians-industrialists, factory labourers, fire fighters, and communications and public utility workers, all of them upon Speer’s orders issued with arms-who stood ready to oppose any attempts by the party to destroy their places of work and their land.

Pages 485-7

As Speer turned to leave after at least managing to get Hitler to agree to the compromise that he could take his own car, with Kempka sharing the driving, Hitler said icily, “This time you will receive a written reply to your memorandum. If the war is lost, the people will also be lost [and] it is not necessary to worry about their needs for elemental survival. On the contrary, it is best for us to destroy even these things. For the nation has proved to be weak, and the future belongs entirely to the strong people of the East. Whatever remains after this battle is in any case only the inadequates, because the good ones will be dead.”

Speer received Hitler’s written reply the morning of 20 March, during a late breakfast with Field Marshal Model, in a village inn in the Westerwald. Since 4 a.m. on the nineteenth, sharing the driving with Kempka as agreed, he and Poser had driven from Berlin to the Saar to see Kesselring and Stohr, the local Gauleiter, and then back to the Ruhr to negotiate with Model about the preservation of the railways. While
Kesselring refused to disobey Hitler’s orders, the political officer on his staff, the Gauleiter and, some hours later, the SS commander of the northern region of the Palatinate had agreed that an evacuation could not be carried out.

“This concerns you,” Model said to Speer, looking embarrassed, when an officer came to the inn and handed him a message.

“I don’t think I’d ever seen Speer as surprised as when he read that,” Poser told me. The order was that “all military, transport, communication and supply facilities, as well as all material assets in the territory of the Reich” were to be demolished. “It was point by point, deliberately and explicitly, the opposite of everything Speer had suggested in his memorandum,” Poser went on. “And if their orders had been carried out, then areas of Germany would have been ruined for years after the war. Furthermore, in this edict, Hitler stripped Speer of all authority in these matters, and revoked all his orders for the preservation of industry. It was a huge shock for him.

“We immediately started for Berlin,” Poser said. “I remember, at one point, during a rest stop, he [Speer] and I walked across some fields and climbed a hill. It was misty but sunny; we sat down, the earth around us smelling richly, and looked across the hills and that beautiful countryside. It was to be the only time I ever saw Speer give way to deep depression. ‘How can he do it?’ he said, drawing a semi-circle with his arm. ‘How can he want to make a desert of all this? It can’t be,’ he said then. ‘I won’t let it be.’ We got back to Berlin at dawn.”

Speer and Hupfauer were sharing the small flat in the half-destroyed Ministry. “I think it was 5 a.m. when he came into my bedroom,” Hupfauer told me. “He turned on the light and sat down on a chair next to my bed. At first he said nothing, just stared at the wall, looking bleary-eyed and played out. And then he said, ‘Hitler is a criminal.’

“That was somehow really shocking. You see, he didn’t say, The Fuhrer is a criminal—somehow that would have been, how shall I put it? more personal, less sharp, almost... warmer. But this ‘Hitler is a criminal’ was said by Speer, about whom one was never unaware that he was Hitler’s favourite, someone he almost looked upon as a son. Well, he’d woken me up out of a deep sleep; his appearance, the way he-whom I had never seen with a hair out of place – was slumped in the chair, unshaven, his uniform creased, his shirt grimy. What he said then really alarmed me. When I told him that he mustn’t be so brutal with me, he handed me the Hitler order, without saying anything. And then I understood. And I agreed - the man who had issued this order was a criminal.”

The document Speer drafted, an addendum to Hitler’s “scorched earth” decree, restored to him the sole authority to carry it out and thereby to block anyone else from acting. He merely added three points: “1) Implementation will be undertaken solely by the agencies and organs of the Ministry of Armaments and War Production; 2) The Minister of Armaments and War Production may, with my authorization, issue instructions for implementation;” and-an important concession; 3) Although bridges and other transportation installations must be destroyed to deny the enemy their use for a prolonged period, with industrial installations the same effect can be achieved by crippling [immobilizing] them.”

Speer continued, in Spandau,

Hitler signed the paper, in pencil, almost without discussion, insisting only that everything important-to be listed by me-had to be destroyed. Of course, I was deceiving him.... Indeed, there would never be such a list....
But then again, perhaps it wasn’t really deceit, as ... he signed in full knowledge that his orders for destruction would only be conditionally carried out. And I think he was finally relieved....

Speer’s next two weeks were even more hectic than the previous ones. Now, often splitting his team—he and Poser going in one direction, Hupfauer accompanied by Speer’s junior military liaison aide, Siebert, going in another—he attempted to prevent all “scorched earth” acts, or to stop them where they had already been started, for this process entirely disregarding Hitler’s order that each individual decision had to be approved by him....

Speer’s instructions to industry, the army and the party authorities, many of whom had now openly joined his efforts, were precisely opposite to Hitler’s of 19 March. They were to safeguard all industrial installations, public utilities and food plants. It was now that he dispatched over a dozen food trains “blind” into the already encircled Ruhr, as Manfred von Poser remembered; persuaded the SS general in charge of Wehrmacht clothing and food supplies to distribute all his reserves to the civilian populations; instructed his representative in Upper Silesia (which would shortly be entirely occupied by the Russians) to prevent the destruction of any of the remaining bridges; and in Oldenburg, on the Dutch frontier, met with Seyss-Inquart, the Reich Kommissar for the Netherlands.


Introduction
Pages 7-8

More by accident than design, therefore, I eventually found myself in a different position from all the others who have produced books about Albert Speer, his work for Hitler, the quality and/or quantity of his guilt and remorse and his place in history. Aware that Gitta Sereny had been working on him ever since her marathon series of interviews with him in 1978 and unable to catch up, let alone overtake, such a colleague, I decided to await her book and the new insights it would undoubtedly provide, treating it as an extra source and citing it as appropriate. To prove that I had independently, albeit amid other projects, put in a lot of work on Speer, I wrote a 4,000-word feature on him for the Guardian six months before her book appeared, pegged to the ninetieth anniversary of his birth in March 1995.

In 1978 Ms Sereny had persuaded Speer to confirm his admission, to Playboy magazine in 1971 and again to the Board of Deputies of South African Jews in 1977, that he had known at the time that ‘something frightful was happening to the Jews.’ He apparently understood that such an ‘admission’ would alter his public and historical reputation, ‘but it would be a relief.’ This concession undermined Speer’s consistent claim from Nuremberg onwards to have been the blinkered technocrat aware only vaguely if at all of what was going on outside his sphere. But it still did not amount to a confession of personal guilt, of crimes committed by him against the victims of Nazism, rather than the familiar acceptance of his share of the general responsibility of the Hitler regime for war crimes, a stance which had caused such a stir at Nuremberg, again on his release and when his memoirs appeared. Some, such as the American economist J. K. Galbraith, who interviewed him for a week on behalf of the US Strategic Bombing Survey just after the war, needed a fraction of the time to reach the conclusion that Speer was far blacker than he painted himself.
His concern for his reputation led him to show infinite tolerance to serious inquirers, whom he never turned away. I therefore feel I can describe this book as the first on Speer to rely, willy nilly, mainly on external sources.

The Jews and Forced Labour
Pages 95-6

Towards the end of 1940 Rudolf Wolters suggested to Speer that he start a ‘Chronicle’ of the GBI. Speer agreed, instructing heads of departments and sections to supply Wolters with raw material for this semi-official diary of the ‘Speer Dienststellen [offices]’. It is thus a rather more important, because more reliable, historical source for Speer’s governmental career than his memoirs. It was compiled by someone else, albeit an admirer (at the time), from his own and others’ firsthand contributions and it was not intended for public consumption. This is not to say that the Chronicle was written without posterity in mind - on the contrary. But it included risque material that would never have found its way into official records in the Third Reich, with its informer culture and its brusque way with dissidents. Before exploring Speer’s main work for Hitler, the three years when he ran the heart of the war economy (after all, the architecture was indifferent or else unbuilt castles in the air), we may pause to consider the Chronicle itself, at the moment in our story when it becomes a key source. There are at least three reasons for doing so.

Unlike the other main sources - the vast body of papers from Speer’s department, the protocols of his meetings with Hitler, other administration and party sources and Speer’s writings - the Chronicle was not intended for external eyes when it was written. Second, it was compiled by a man at the centre of the events it describes, from reports by those who made them happen and as an informal counterpoint to the official record, checked not only by contributors but also by Speer. Finally the Chronicle, and the abortive effort by Wolters and Speer to ‘sanitise’ it, together make the complete version the principal (though not the only) testimony to Speer’s hypocrisy as self-appointed ‘scapegoat of the nation’ at Nuremberg and ‘duty national penitent’ on his release from Spandau (both terms were coined by Wolters). The unexpurgated Chronicle is the centrepiece of the Wolters Bequest which, in its totality, proves Speer’s ‘penitence’ was false and shows he lied when he insisted at his trial and in his memoirs that he bore no personal responsibility for the Hitler regime’s crimes against humanity but only his share of collective responsibility as a Nazi leader of highest rank: nostra but definitely not mea culpa.

Here, for example, is what was erased from the Chronicle entry for April 1941 by Wolters on behalf of Speer, who let the passage stand at the time it was written but later endorsed the excision by handing over the cut version to the German Federal Archive. The damning paragraph, the first of many omissions, describes the work of the GBI’s Resettlement Department, formed in spring 1939 and led by Dietrich Clahes, former presiding minister of the state of Brunswick. It is translated by the present author and is quoted here in full:

The rate of clearance of the demolition areas and the resettling of local tenants in Jew-flats was increased from the beginning of the year. The Jew-flats rented from local landlords were cleared and the Jewish tenants were packed into Jewish living space on Jewish-owned land. The purpose of this clearance of the areas, vital for the war effort, was to make the cleared areas of flats in the Reich capital available for catastrophe purposes (air-raid damage). In the period from 1.1 to 15.4.41 a total of 366 tenants in areas 4, 9, 12, 14 and 25 were required to
resettle. Further, in the same period, about 1,000 rooms were allocated to some fifty offices and plants for purposes vital to the war effort.

Pages 98-9
But the GBI’s machinery for evicting Jews unashamedly bucked the anti-bureaucratic trend at this very period, as these passages from the Chronicle prove:

In accordance with Speer’s order, a further action was started to clear about 5,000 Jew-flats. The existing apparatus was appropriately enlarged so that the Jew-flats, despite the universal problems resulting from the war situation, could be made ready at top speed and filled with demolition tenants from the areas to be cleared most urgently. By these measures the Jew-flats were brought into use for their predetermined purpose and on the other hand further empty flats were made ready for catastrophe purposes [August 1941].

In the period from 18 October to 2 November in Berlin about 4,500 Jews were evacuated. Thus 1,000 more flats were cleared for bomb-damage victims and made available by the GBI. The flats were later readied for the accommodation of demolition tenants.

The third major action for the de-renting of Jew-flats was inaugurated at the end of November. After negotiations with participating authorities the GBI made available another 3,000 Jew-flats for the accommodation of possible bomb-damage victims [both passages from the entry for November 1941].

Pages 165-9
The fiends who ran the Final Solution to the Jewish Question did not advertise, any more than Hitler had his orders on the subject written down for the record. Those who transmitted such orders were wont to preface them with the phrase, ‘The Fuhrer wishes.’ The Fuhrer’s wish was universally regarded as synonymous with a Fuhrer order because Hitler’s name was not lightly taken in vain. The Nazi system depended on compartmentalisation and relied no less heavily on the ‘need to know’ rule. It was a truism of the time that to stay out of trouble, it was prudent to concern oneself exclusively with one’s own assigned sphere. Thus, when many Germans claimed after the war not to have known about the worst excesses of the regime, they were telling the truth, strictly speaking, though not necessarily or always the whole truth: many had guessed from what they did know that terrible things were happening beyond their limited horizons. They had kept their heads down and preferred not to know; they had ‘obeyed orders’ because they were fully aware of the alternative. These are reasonable mitigating arguments for rank-and-file individuals so long as they do not pretend they acted otherwise. Indeed those never subjected to dictatorship or foreign occupation have been over-eager to demand moral courage, a rare quality, of such people, sometimes retrospectively. The same lack of understanding was displayed by the West Germans towards the East Germans after the fall of Communism in 1989.

But these reservations could not apply to the main Nuremberg defendants such as Speer, who gave orders on Hitler’s behalf yet had influence over him and were capable on occasion (when it suited them) of undermining, subverting or disobeying his orders, a fact to which we shall return. To aid the will to ignorance, the death camps were on the eastern fringe of the Reich; Speer never visited one (although he was explicitly warned against going to Auschwitz, as will be seen); he did have direct personal knowledge of concentration and slave-labour camps, sometimes barely distinguishable from one another. Speer also disingenuously admitted that he could have found out more but...
chose not to. Exactly how much he knew at the time will never be known; the circumstantial evidence for his having lied at Nuremberg about the extent of his knowledge is overwhelming, and the Posen meeting of 6 October 1943 is central to such a conclusion....

The purpose of rehearsing these facts is to recall the scale of the phenomenon of which Albert Speer persistently denied knowledge; despite his admitted personal responsibility for the abuse of slave labour all over Europe; despite his frequent contacts with Himmler and his economic minions; despite the extra work of his railway subordinate, Theodor Ganzenimiller, in organising the cattle-truck trains even though they disrupted troop and supply movements; despite Gretel Speer’s best-friendship with Anni Brandt, wife of the ‘euthanasia’ supremo who also ran the unspeakable experiments on prisoners; and despite his proven presence at the Posen meeting, where Himmler spelled out what the Final Solution meant. This is part of what the SS-chief said:

...You will believe me [when I say] that I had great difficulties with certain economic institutions. I have cleared out large Jewish ghettos in the staging areas [of Poland]. In a Jewish ghetto in Warsaw we had four weeks of street fighting. Four weeks! We dug out about 700 bunkers there. So this ghetto made fur coats, clothes and suchlike. When we wanted to get at it earlier, it was said: Halt - you are disrupting the war economy! Halt - arms factory! Of course that has absolutely nothing to do with party-comrade Speer, you [Speer] can [do] nothing about it. It is the ... so-called arms-plants that party-comrade Speer and I will clean up in the next [few] weeks and months. We shall do it unsentimentally, as all things have to be done in the fifth year of war - without sentiment, but with great heart for Germany.

With that, I should like to have done with the Jewish question. Now you know the truth, and you [will] keep it to yourselves ... I believe it was better for us - all of us - to take on this responsibility (for a deed, not just an idea) on behalf of our people, and then to carry the secret with us to the grave.

Despite the fact that Himmler addressed Speer directly (with the formal second-person pronoun Sie) in the coda of this ghastly address (which none the less gave no details of precisely how the Jews were being murdered), Speer always insisted he was not present when it was delivered. Professor Erich Goldhagen of Harvard University disinterred the speech and used it as the basis of a devastating attack on Speer in a 1971 magazine review entitled ‘Albert Speer, Himmler and the Secret of the Final Solution’....

Speer made no reference in those memoirs to Himmler’s Posen speech but only to his own earlier the same day. The Goldhagen review, especially the cod quotation cited above, sent him scurrying to Koblenz, where he spent much of the ensuing year and a half looking for proof that he had not been there when Himmler referred to him. The short answer was, as ever when someone is trying to prove a negative proposition, that there was no proof of his absence at the material time. Unfortunately (for their author) his memoirs give the opposite impression. Speer wrote of the ensuing evening as if he had still been in Posen, describing the way many Gauleiters had got so drunk ‘that they needed help to get to the special train taking them to the Fuhrer’s headquarters that night’ - a distasteful display of which he vainly complained to Hitler the next day. Would he have complained had he not witnessed the scene? Would he have been offended enough to protest to the Fuhrer himself had he merely heard about it the next morning? Had the Gauleiters never got drunk before?
Himmler, ever ready to expand his economic empire, offered, at a meeting with Hitler and Speer on 22 August 1943, to provide the labour for the V2 from the concentration camps, leaving the details to the chill Kammler, blond, blue-eyed clone of the assassinated SD commander, Reinhard Heydrich. Speer was by this time accustomed to doing business with Kammler and his superior, Oswald Pohl, the SS economic chief. On 15 September 1942, for example, this trio had met to discuss the expansion of Auschwitz which, as we have noted, was a three-tier establishment: base camp, death camp and slave-labour camp. While the SS ran all three, Speer was responsible for the output of the last-named which included Buna or synthetic rubber, manufactured by an IG Farben process. Germany’s lack of access to real rubber made this plant more and more important as the war went on. That did not prevent the SS from working up to 30,000 slave workers to death at Auschwitz III, over and above the millions exterminated at Auschwitz II (both had been constructed by Kammler). At this meeting, Speer authorised extra materials for the construction of 300 new barrack blocks for 132,000 prisoners at III. He came to regret this after his visit to Mauthausen camp in spring 1943, where he concluded that SS construction methods were too lavish, as we saw; but in Speer’s defence it should also be mentioned that in his correspondence with the SS leaders he complained of the inefficiency of the slave-labour system as seen at first hand by him at the V2 plant.

Overall responsibility for the V2 however remained with Speer’s ministry through its technical chief, Karl Saur, as well as specific responsibility for materials and funding. It was at this time that Himmler offered Speer the exalted honorary rank of SS-Oberstgruppenführer (equivalent to full general), which was politely declined; Himmler none the less had Speer formally listed as an adviser on his personal staff, without the minister’s contemporary knowledge or consent. One result of the Speer-Kammler accord was Camp Dora (Dora stands for D in the German phonetic alphabet), also underground and alongside the factory. The workers were drawn mainly from the concentration camp at Buchenwald outside Weimar, near the Harz area. Conditions at Buchenwald however were measurably better. Concentration-camp prisoners from elsewhere had also been doing the heavy work at Peenemiinde from May 1942.

Dr A. Poschmann, chief medical officer of the Todt Organisation, was not quite the living mockery of his profession represented by so many other Third Reich doctors, including Speer’s friend Karl Brandt, for all of whom a special hypocritic oath should have been devised. The relatively good doctor had been to Dora a few days before his minister and warned Speer that the ‘camp’ - in fact a few tunnels with four levels of sleeping bays cut into them - put him in mind of Dante’s Inferno. The director of the complex was Gerhard Degenkolb, one of Kammler’s henchmen and Speer’s choice to head Special Committee A4 (codename for the V2). Major-General Walter Dornberger and Dr Wernher von Braun, those future masterminds and heroes of the United States ballistic-missile and space programmes, were on hand to supervise the complicated technical side of the manufacturing process; they had been working on the V2 since 1932. The prisoners, from a dozen countries, toiled up to eighteen hours a day and slept underground. There was no heating, ventilation or running water (except down the walls). Half-barrels were provided for ‘sanitation’ and dysentery was rife, the food was loathsome (Speer tried it) and the men saw the sky once a week at the Sunday roll-call.

Speer’s horrified reaction was immediate. The Chronicle records that some of his accompanying subordinates had to be sent on leave to get over the shock. He ordered the construction of barracks above ground for the workforce, releasing the necessary materials and supplies, and imposed a better diet. He forestalled the planned introduction of summary execution by the SS to discourage sabotage by the skeletal,
stinking workers. Speer freely conceded in later life that his motive was no more than enlightened self-interest: if the work was to be done, the workers needed to be in a condition to do it properly. The same motive led him earlier in the war to seek better rations for foreign labour, including Russians, elsewhere, a subject over which he quarrelled with Sauckel and others. Poschmann’s demands, after his and Speer’s visits, for basic sanitation, medical and dental attention were met. Sewage trucks were to remove the excrement which had informed the atmosphere of Dora. Speer even asked Dr Brandt to use his influence with SS colleagues to ensure the workers were better treated; the white-over-black-coated poisoner made a special exception for his friend and obliged.

But Kammler’s SS guards remained in charge; and the order for more humane treatment of the slaves was only grudgingly honoured. There were 11,000 men working at Dora when Speer visited it; by the end of the war 60,000 had passed through this hell on earth, of whom half sooner or later died of the experience. In the month of December 1943, 5.7 per cent of the workforce on hand died; in August 1944, the death rate had declined to 0.8 per cent per month. Speer told the Nuremberg court that he had never visited a labour camp; perhaps in his recollection he classed Dora, which he admitted visiting, as a concentration camp like Mauthausen. The distinction was a fine one, of little interest to the inmates.

Pages 217-8

Auschwitz was the unnamed subject of a conversation in high summer 1944 between Speer and his old party comrade and friend, Karl Hanke, Gauleiter of Lower Silesia, a man he admired for his ‘sympathy and directness’. Hanke, just returned from the neighbouring Gau of Upper Silesia, had often called by in the past to discuss his latest experiences with Speer:

This time, sitting in the green leather easy chair in my office, he seemed confused and spoke faltering, with many breaks. He advised me never to accept an invitation to inspect a concentration camp in Upper Silesia. Never, under any circumstances. He had seen something there which he was not permitted to describe and moreover could not describe.

I did not query him, I did not query Himmler, I did not query Hitler, I did not speak with personal friends. I did not investigate - for I did not want to know what was happening there. Hanke must have been speaking of Auschwitz. During those few seconds, while Hanke was warning me, the whole responsibility had become a reality again.

This Awful Warning lay immediately behind Speer’s acceptance at Nuremberg of his share of the overall responsibility for Nazi crimes, he wrote. In averting his eyes from the truth haltingly presented to him by his friend, he incurred indelible guilt. ‘Because I failed at that time, I still feel, to this day, responsible for Auschwitz in a wholly personal sense.’

In this disingenuous and sanctimonious passage Speer tried to suggest that he did not know about the death camp before Hanke’s undated ‘revelation’ of summer 1944, less than a year before the war ended. What destroys this pretence to earlier ignorance is the word ‘again’ at the end of the passage quoted above: ‘the whole responsibility had become a reality again.’ The only ‘responsibility’ referred to in the broad context of this revealing adverb is Speer’s own avowed share of the blame for Nazi atrocities of which, thanks to Hanke, he was reminded again - which in plain English (or German) means not for the first time. By his own admission here, Speer already knew of Auschwitz-Birkenau and its purpose. Hanke’s unsettling account (of what must have
been an unspeakably gruesome tour) told him nothing he did not know already. Speer
was, as he wrote, hearing it again.

Page 241
John Kenneth Galbraith eventually spent a week with Speer in Nurem
burg before
his trial.... In his own memoirs, Galbraith is equally scathing about Speer’s claims to have
frustrated Hitler’s scorched-earth decree almost single-handed and to have plotted to
gas him and his henchmen. These stories, Galbraith thought, had gained much in the
telling and contained ‘major elements of fantasy’. So, he felt, did Speer’s claims about
the German war economy, whose exponential growth had been from a very small base
and did not surpass a smaller Britain’s until 1944. All this, and Speer’s carefully nuanced
candour, were part and parcel of his ‘well-devised strategy of self-vindication and
survival’ - a conclusion reached by Galbraith not in his memoirs thirty-five years later
but as early as autumn 1945, before the Nuremberg trials, in an article written with
George Ball for Life magazine.

Pages 273-5
The chief prosecutor’s (Jackson) questioning (at Nuremburg) was of a butterfly-
minded nature, darting briefly from one topic, no matter how large or small, to another.
Jackson clearly had a shopping list of issues he wanted to raise but did it in random
order, returning more than once to topics from which he seemed to have moved on.
After eliciting Speer’s version of Hitler’s bitter reaction to Göring’s telegram claiming
the leadership during Speer’s last visit to the Berlin bunker, Jackson came back to the
conspiracy issue a third time and did not hesitate to ask one leading question after
another, a practice forbidden in Anglo-Saxon legal procedure; not a few of them enabled
the defendant to present himself in the best possible light unchallenged: ‘Is it not right
that there was perhaps nobody at all in Hitler’s entourage apart from yourself who had
the courage to say to his face that the war was lost?’ Speer did not find it unduly
difficult to respond positively to such uninhibited blandness, like a tennis player dealing
with a gentle lob.

Nor did he find Jackson’s questioning about Krupp, Germany’s leading arms maker
based at Essen in the Ruhr district, exactly burdensome: ‘I do not wish to suggest that
you were personally responsible for the conditions but only to point out to you what the
regime did, and I shall then ask you in what way these measures influenced your
production efforts.’ Speer had no knowledge, he said, of conditions and maltreatment of
foreign workers at Krupp, of which stark evidence had been supplied during the
prosecution case by a doctor, who had condemned the prolonged lack of basic facilities.
Bad working conditions generally, said Speer, were often the result of bombing raids and
lasted for a week or two.

Just how bad they could get Jackson chose to illustrate from a written statement
by a tank builder, who had worked for Krupp at Essen, on how his colleague Lowenkamp
treated foreign workers and stole their food:

Every day he mishandled eastern workers, Russian PoWs, French,
Italians and also other foreign civilians. He had a steel cage built that was
so small, one could hardly stand up in it. In this cage he locked the
foreigners, including females, up to forty-eight hours without giving the
people anything to eat. They were not released to relieve themselves.
Other people were forbidden to help or set free those locked up.

And so on. ‘I regard the affidavit as a lie ... It is not possible here to drag the
German people through the mud in this fashion,’ said Speer indignantly. He did not
believe the steel-cage story, obviously one of many exaggerations in postwar affidavits.
Looking at a photograph of the cage, Speer identified it as just an ordinary clothes locker found in any factory. What about the eighty steel rods handed out to the guards at Krupp? ‘That is nothing more than a substitute for a rubber truncheon. After all we had no rubber, and therefore the guard teams probably had something of that sort,’ said Speer: police had to have something to carry, but that did not mean they used it all the time, or at all. ‘That is the same conclusion as I drew from the document,’ said an obliging Jackson.

And so, hand in hand metaphorically speaking, prosecutor and defendant wandered through the documentation of the horror of being a foreign worker at Krupp. The SS were to blame for the condition of slave workers at nearby concentration camps which supplied the firm with labour; the Allied air forces were to blame for the shocking conditions that prevailed after bombing; but Speer claimed the credit for improving the nourishment and working conditions of air-raid victims. A long list of other authorities was collectively responsible for working conditions, whereas Speer was responsible for improving them whenever he could, he told the court. Nor could he be expected to know what went on in Krupp’s labour camps. Invited to expatiate on what he meant by accepting his share of responsibility for the Nazi regime, Speer said it was dual: specific responsibility for one’s own sphere and collective responsibility for overall policy, though not for matters of detail in the spheres of others.

Pages 364-8

Speer’s habit of rewriting history in his own interest is hardly unique. An anonymous observer once remarked of Churchill’s history of the 1914-18 war that ‘Winston has written an enormous book about himself and called it The World Crisis.’ A combination of romanticism and arrogance led Speer to ‘fine-tune’ the facts of his life-story from the very opening of his memoirs: the birth put back to high noon, the thunderstorm brought forward, the peal of bells from the unbuilt church. He reckoned without the thoroughness of a Matthias Schmidt when telling these intrinsically harmless white lies; but once discovered, they must make the reader wonder what else had been tidied up….

As a pragmatist and egocentric opportunist, Speer was as interested in office politics and party in-fighting (a matter of survival) as he was uninterested in ideology. But he was neither ‘apolitical’ nor a ‘technocrat’; nor was he ‘amoral’ but rather immoral, having flouted rather than ignored morality in his dealings with the Jews. He was not a technocrat in the strict sense at all; he had no expert knowledge except of a professional field which he had ‘chosen’ at his father’s behest in lieu of mathematics. His skill and output alike as Hitler’s architect were indifferent at best and monstrous at worst; his most effective work was as a stage designer at Nuremberg. He could play politics for keeps when he had to: he threatened people with the SS and concentration camp, he ruined Lord Mayor Lippert of Berlin, he tried to do the same to his architectural rival, Hermann Giesler, and he manipulated Hitler himself by ‘bombing’ him with experts or presenting him with faits accomplis….

But the ‘gas in the bunker’ plot was enough to help save his neck when he returned as a prisoner to Nuremberg, scene of his most spectacular productions at gatherings of another kind. Goring’s hiss of ‘treason’ at him on hearing of it was a backhanded seal of approval which clearly impressed chief prosecutor Jackson. And it heightened the contrast between the thug element in the dock and the personally modest, studious-looking, patrician Speer with his bold readiness to bow to the doctrine of collective responsibility for an evil regime known to have been dominated by the will of one man. Overlooking the fact that this concession was made under pressure, enough of the judges were impressed by Speer’s self-deprecating self-incrimination to take his
admission of shared responsibility, coupled with denial of commission or even knowledge of specific crimes, at its face value. They therefore spared him from the hangman to whom his slave-driving colleague, Fritz Sauckel, was consigned for meeting his requirements above all. Only the Russians, to whom he exhibited a degree of arrogance almost as risky as his nostra culpa ploy, did not accept Speer at his own valuation.

But then a prisoner on a capital charge can hardly be blamed for making the best possible case for himself, especially when the evidence against him is overwhelming. Perjury by the guilty is not only to be expected but is well-nigh unavoidable; lies are no less bound to be told in mitigation of punishment. Least of all can the accused be expected in such circumstances to own up to crimes with which he has not even been charged. Speer was accused and convicted of using forced and slave labour. He was not accused of evicting the Jews of Berlin from their homes because the prosecution had not found the Wolters Chronicle and did not know about it. Nor was he going to enlighten them, especially after the frightful courtroom shows of film from the death camps during the trial: he was neither suicidal nor a saint.

There was no occasion for surprise therefore when, after escaping execution but serving twenty years, enough to break the spirit of most people, Speer teasingly conceded, first that for the collective ‘responsibility’ he admitted at Nuremberg one could read shared ‘guilt’ and then that he had known rather more of ‘what was happening with the Jews’ than he ever acknowledged in court. Yet did he not stump the country after his release, owning up ad nauseam?

But this book, as no other, sets out in detail the evidence that Albert Speer was not an absent-minded, eyes-averted, amoral non-spectator of Nazi anti-Semitism but an active participant in ruining the lives, to put it no more strongly, of 75,000 Berlin Jews by having them evicted. Further, ever the opportunist, he sought to exploit the caution of Wolters in pruning the Chronicle of his wartime office by sending the sanitised version to the German Archive; when caught out, he sought to correct matters by deceit; and when he realised the implications of the Schmidt-Wolters connection, he threatened the scholar and the man who had so loyally discharged his ‘unremunerated task for a friend’ with legal action.

The eviction of the Jews does not put Speer on the bridge of the SS Holocaust or even in the engine room; but he was in the first-class saloon, driving steerage passengers out into the gathering storm. And he was in the captain’s cabin when their subsequent fate was discussed over coffee and cake, as his memoirs deny but the diaries of Goebbels confirm. All the ‘repentance’ in the world cannot make up for the hypocrisy of Speer’s claim to a share of the moral high ground on the basis of a ‘confession’ which throughout his life concealed his real crime by a lie of omission.

Of course he showed remorse. But remorse, regret for past actions, is not synonymous with contrition, true repentance deriving from knowledge of one’s guilt and a desire to atone. There can be no repentance without remorse; but there can certainly be remorse without repentance. Anyone responsible for errors and omissions that earned him twenty years in jail would wish to have done otherwise. If Speer was sorry, it was for himself.

For absolution in the Christian sense, however, a full confession, true contrition and atonement by penance are required. On the historical evidence presented here, Albert Speer fulfilled only the last of these requirements. In the freely chosen role in his later life of public penitent number one, he did not tell the truth, certainly not the whole truth, and therefore he did not repent because he could not. In fact, on mature reflection, he thought he had done rather well in life after all. He therefore does not qualify for the absolution of history.
The International Military Tribunal gave Speer credit in its judgment on the main Nazi war criminals for resisting Hitler’s scorched-earth policy, in the occupied western countries as well as Germany, ‘at considerable personal danger to himself. Initially he did it by using Hitler’s own promises that all enemy advances would soon be hurled back to argue that it would be counter-productive to destroy facilities which would quickly return to German hands. Speer was instrumental in preserving a large slice of French industry in August 1944 by persuading Hitler to accept its immobilisation rather than destruction as the Allies advanced across northern France. He achieved the same result for coal and steel in Alsace-Lorraine, the French region bordering Germany, which was about to change hands for the fourth time in sixty-four years. Although some French mines were dependent on electricity from the German Saar region, the current was not cut off and the all-important water-pumps preserved the viability of the pits.

German industrialists were naturally opposed to the destruction of their plant for political or military reasons; fortunately, so were at least some of the Gauleiters, who as Defence Commissioners were responsible for such demolition behind the lines but fully understood the implications for an area and its people. As the prospect of recovering lost ground diminished, so Speer shifted his argument from future to immediate need: it would be a self-inflicted wound, he argued, to destroy factories near to the front but capable of supplying its German defenders with ammunition and other necessities to the very last minute. If power stations were demolished in the face of the enemy, the troops trying to keep him out would lose their telephone lines. Speer was entitled as minister to direct the Gauleiters on these matters and ordered them not to destroy but only to immobilise threatened plants. But Speer failed to persuade Hitler to issue a general decree preferring paralysing to destroying and had to work, not always successfully, on a case-by-case basis...

The other irony in his rising defiance was that Speer could circumvent Hitler’s scorched-earth policy only by virtue of enjoying the sentimental benevolence of a waning dictator determined to take much of Europe with him as a blazing backdrop to his personal Gotterdammerung. In vain did Speer try to persuade Hitler to visit the area threatened by the advance from the west. All Speer could do was to send a stream of teleprinter messages undermining ‘scorched earth’ by ordering immobilisation rather than destruction of endangered factories, power stations and other economic assets. Even Bormann concurred in this disobedience, telling his Gauleiters to obey Speer.5

For Speer the long illness at the beginning of 1944 had brought disenchantment with Hitler personally. This was closely allied to a general disillusion that was patchy (interspersed as it was with theatrical declarations of loyalty and calls for one last push to win a war he knew was already lost) but grew stronger as reality crowded in. Next came active disobedience, in the form of Speer’s well-attested, effective resistance to Hitler’s scorched-earth policy, accompanied by open dissent as he sent Hitler challenging memoranda and abdicated his day-to-day responsibility for arms production to Saur.
Bibliographical Details


