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### Teacher resources
Nazi Germany poses two of the greatest questions of the twentieth century. How could an intelligent, well-educated, and Christian society, such as Germany, allow Hitler (an Austrian) to take control of the government of their country?

The second question is how could a society suddenly become responsible for the murder of millions of people and some of whose citizens tortured and imprisoned millions of innocent people. To outsiders it seemed that Germany was a country that accepted the Gestapo, the invasion of other countries, the setting up and running of the concentration camps, racial discrimination, and the Nazi anti-semitism. Finally how could the Germans still continue to believe in their Fuhrer even when it was obvious that the war was lost?

If these things could happen in Germany in the 1930s is it possible that they could happen again in a different “civilised” society?

What made the German people believe in and follow Hitler?

Albert Speer became one of those people, and one of the most successful and able members of Hitler’s government. His autobiography allows us to get inside the mind of a member of the Nazi elite.

Albert Speer was an intelligent, wealthy and well-educated man. He was not violent; he did not hate the Jews and was initially wary of the Nazis because of the violence of the SA. Speer was not one of the millions of disillusioned unemployed who turned to Hitler as he seemed the only solution to their misery. Speer was a peaceful architect – a builder and a creator – with no interest in politics. In 1931 he did not join the Nazis out of hunger or unemployment. Speer’s family was wealthy and had always lived a very comfortable lifestyle and they were apolitical.

Speer was converted by a speech he heard Hitler make in December 1930. Like any skilled politician Hitler crafted his speech to appeal to an well-educated upper class audience. He wore a suit and spoke softly of his plans to rebuild and revitalise Germany. To Speer Hitler offered hope, a defence against the spread of Communism, and an answer to the ineffectual Weimer Government. Once he did join the party Speer quickly rose through the ranks of the party until he was one of the inner circle of the Nazi elite.

At first Speer worked for the party on a voluntary basis. He realised that at a time when his career as an architect was at a dead end that it would be through Hitler and his grand plans to rebuild the cities of Germany that he could achieve his ambition of becoming a great architect. Hitler could offer wonderful opportunities to design not only buildings, but also whole cities.

Speer first came to the notice of the Nazi Party by his stage management of the Nuremberg rally. His design created an image of a strong and powerful Germany and it was immortalised in film by Leni Riefenstahl.

Albert Speer was selected by Hitler to be his personal architect and Speer developed a close working relationship with him. He was to build the great cities that would rival those of ancient Greece and Rome and which, Hitler believed, would ensure that future generations of Aryans would remember his name and would marvel at his works. With almost unlimited access to Hitler Speer often dined with him and the leaders of the Nazi Party. He was on equal terms with Goering and Goebbels and said himself “I should certainly have been one of Hitler’s close friends had he actually had any”. At one stage it seemed possible that Speer might be Hitler’s successor as the Fuhrer of Germany.

Speer’s career culminated in his becoming the Minister of Armaments and War Production and he was successful in

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1 The SA was the private army of the Nazi Party and was used to protect party members and attack their political opponents

2 Albert Speer Inside the Third Reich chapter 19
dramatically increasing the production of weapons and munitions. In doing this he may have been responsible for extending the war, and all of its suffering, by as much as a year. His position gave Speer almost unlimited power over the economy of Germany and the captured states. It also meant that he was dealing with, and attempting to control, the Gauleiters that ruled the new German Empire³.

As Minister, Speer was responsible for the control of, and allocation of, workers to factories. By 1945 he controlled a workforce of 14,000,000 that included forced labourers from the occupied countries, prisoners of war, and Jewish slave workers. He collaborated with the SS when it provided concentration camp prisoners for his factories.

Towards the end of the war Speer opposed Hitler’s orders to destroy Germany’s entire infrastructure⁴ before the advancing allied armies could capture them. In doing so he risked his life. In his autobiography he tells that he even planned to assassinate Hitler to prevent further pointless fighting. However, he still retained a sense of loyalty and gratitude towards Hitler and risked his life to fly to Berlin during the last few weeks of the war to pay his last respects to Hitler.

In 1945 Speer was arrested and was put on trial at Nuremberg. He was charged with
• having plotted to wage aggressive war
• of participating in war crimes
• of committing war crimes
• of crimes against humanity.

Speer adopted a unique and dangerous form of defence. He accepted these charges and seemed to come face to face with himself and the nature of the state that he had helped to create. He accepted the accusation that he had served as a minister in a criminal state. He took full responsibility, as a leader in the Third Reich, for the crimes of the Nazis and the death of six million Jews. He said that his guilt was that he should have known what was happening but he chose to remain ignorant – “I closed my eyes”.⁵ However, he denied all knowledge of, and personal involvement in, the Final Solution.⁶

The court found Speer innocent of the first two charges, but guilty on the remaining two charges. He was sentenced to 20 years in jail and while there he wrote the draft of his autobiography which he called Inside the Third Reich.⁷ This autobiography became essential reading for a disillusioned populace and sold almost a million copies in Germany alone.

In his memoirs Speer attempted to explain his actions and motives. He appeared to be contrite⁸ for his actions. He appeared to be the backroom technical expert who was so involved in what he was doing that he was blind to what was happening around him. In his book he acknowledges what went wrong, of what was lacking in his personality, of how he was so involved in his technical tasks that he ignored the unpleasant facts of the Nazi regime that he supported. He was considered to be “the good Nazi” as he could see the truth about himself and what he had done.

For many years historians accepted that account as an accurate interpretation of Albert Speer. However, some historians now believe that he lied and deliberately manufactured a false impression of himself in order to save his life at the Nuremberg trial.

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³ The term German Empire was used at this time to describe Germany and the conquered or occupied states.
⁴ This included all homes, hospitals, factories, bridges, power plants – everything needed by any modern society.
⁵ Speer Inside the Third Reich p 376
⁶ The Nazi plan to kill all of the Jews living in Europe
⁷ He also wrote Spandau – the secret diaries and The Slave State (about the SS) but neither added much to what is known about his life and career.
⁸ Genuinely sorry for what had happened
Until the publication of his memoirs *Inside the Third Reich* in November 1966 Speer, who considered himself to be the second-most important person in Nazi Germany, received surprisingly little attention from historians.

The most likely explanation for this is that

- his evidence at the Nuremberg Trials was not questioned
- compared to the other Nazis on trial Speer appeared to be an educated upper class gentleman, rather than a violent criminal
- he appeared to be contrite and repented for the crimes he had not committed, but believed that he should have known about if he were not so absorbed in his career
- he was not as sensational as the other leading figures in the Nazi Government.

W Shirer *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1960) makes only passing reference to Speer and his involvement in events towards the end of World War Two and does not mention his name in the first 1,100 pages of his book. He believes that Speer told the truth at the Nuremberg Trials and that he had admitted that he was partly guilty for the crimes of the Nazis. He believes Speer’s explanation for flying to Berlin to see Hitler on 23rd April was to say farewell to him and to confess that he had sabotaged his scorched-earth policy and that Speer did this expecting to be arrested for treason and to be shot. Shirer also accepts that Speer did attempt to put poison gas into the air ventilation system of Hitler’s bunker.

A Bullock *Hitler a Study in Tyranny* (1962) considers Speer to be one of the few good appointments that Hitler ever made. Bullock gives Speer credit for cleverly increasing German armaments production while being totally uninvolved in politics. He also believes that Speer showed courage in doing all that he could to prevent the destruction of German industry in 1945 despite Hitler’s clear warning that he would severely punish anyone who disobeyed him. To Bullock Speer was the apolitical technocrat who was detached from many of the decisions and events of the Third Reich.

Joachim Fest *The Face on the Third Reich* (1970) examines the role of Hitler’s main officials such as Goering, Goebbels, Hess, and Speer. Largely as a result of this book the publishers of *Inside the Third Reich* employed Fest to edit Speer’s 1,800 pages of documents into the final version of his memoirs.

Fest expanded the basic theme of Speer’s defence at Nuremberg writing that no modern totalitarian state can exist without the support of the skilled bureaucracy such as police and teachers and technical experts such as engineers, scientists and architects. These experts are often only interested in their specialised field and often have the ability to ignore the actions of their political masters. Such people concentrate entirely on their limited professional tasks and are totally involved in their job. They never give a thought to the impact of their actions on the lives of others.9

When Hitler came to power in 1933 hundreds of thousands of technical specialists accepted and assisted his rule. They enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle which they justified to themselves by saying they were only doing their duty as nonpolitical technocrats and that they had no involvement in, or responsibility for, the actions of their political masters. This allowed them to ignore Hitler’s clear statements that he intended to persecute the Jews and to invade Russia.

These experts did not wear a uniform, many were not members of the Nazi Party, and they did not kill, arrest or persecute anyone. Technically they did not break any laws. However, they had the ability to ignore the fact that the Nazi system could not exist without their support.

9 An example of this would be Wernher von Braun who headed the team that developed the V2 rocket. He later worked for the USA and its rocket program
Fest regards Speer as being a classic example of this attitude. He believes that Speer was an intelligent man whose personality was such that he was indifferent to political issues and he did everything he could to avoid the world of politics. He regards him as an educated and intelligent outsider among Hitler’s henchmen and he was not like the rest of them. He believes that Speer was the only Nazi leader who remained true to his beliefs and maintained his personal integrity throughout the entire Nazi era.

Fest, like many other historians, accepts Speer’s claim that while he always had a sense of loyalty towards Hitler, he reversed his attitude of unquestioning support while he was ill in 1944 and had time to reflect on what was taking place. He then decided to assassinate Hitler and to resist his orders to destroy Germany’s economy.

In his 700-page book *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1973) Raul Hilberg devotes only seven pages to the involvement of Albert Speer in the Holocaust.

He discusses

- Speer’s plans with the SS to create huge armaments factories within the concentration camps.
- His agreement to having the SS expert on manpower Obersturmbannführer Maurer being placed in the office of Schieber, Speer’s own manpower expert in order to expedite this plan.
- Speer’s visit to Mauthausen camp and his letter to Himmler saying that conditions for the inmates were too good and should be more “primitive”.
- In 1944 because of a labour shortage a strict system of allocation of workers to factories was established. All requests for workers had to be sent to Speer’s ministry for approval. This meant that Speer should have known about the “turnover” in Jewish workers due to the high death rate.

Despite these very clear indications that Speer must have known about what was happening to the Jews Hilberg does not question Speer’s claim to be unaware of the Holocaust. He does not comment on the decision of the Nuremberg Trials that Speer was not involved in any anti-Jewish activities.
Historians’ evaluation of the life and personality of Albert Speer underwent a dramatic change with

- A comprehensive and detailed questioning of many of Speer’s statements by Matthias Schmidt. Schmidt was the first historian to search for evidence from other sources to prove or to disprove many of Speer’s statements.
- The discovery of a new source of information unavailable to earlier historians in the form of a chronicle (or detailed collection of original documents) of Speer’s career kept by Rudolf Wolters.

**Rudolf Wolters**

While studying architecture Speer met Rudolf Wolters who was to become his best friend. As a student Speer was wealthy enough to be able to lend Wolters money and may have even paid him to do some of his drawings. Wolters was a meticulous recorder of events and always kept a detailed personal diary.

When Speer became Hitler’s architect he employed Wolters, and it was Wolters who suggested in 1940 that he start a chronicle of the GBI and its reconstruction of the city of Berlin. All the heads of departments of the GBI gave Wolters documents, which became a reliable account of Speer’s career as

- It was compiled by someone other than Speer
- Wolters was at the centre of the events
- It was intended for private and not public use
- It contained original documents from a number of individuals
- Wolters always kept a very detailed personal diary and the chronicle can be checked against his diary.

Wolters remained Speer’s closest friend and supporter during his years in prison and raised money to assist his family. However, Speer and Wolters drifted apart after Speer’s release from prison.

**Wolters**

- Found that Speer, on his release from prison, treated him coldly – more like a servant than a loyal long-term friend
- He was highly offended by Speer’s statement that Hitler was evil and a criminal and that all of the Germans who followed Hitler were naive and being manipulated by Hitler. He found his statements in *Playboy* and his letter to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies especially distressing. Wolters urged Speer “to concentrate … on what really happened leaving aside what the world thinks of it now.”
- He believed that Speer was more interested in protecting his reputation than in telling the truth. When referring to Speer’s memorandum to Hitler dated 30th January 1945 (my role is entirely nonpolitical) Wolters said “there is … no doubt that a pragmatist like Albert was building himself up systematically for the post war period … nobody can persuade me to the contrary. I know him too well.”

Wolters believed that Speer was a hypocrite.

In 1969 Speer was using the chronicle of 1943 to check some facts. When he had finished he sent it to the German Federal Archives where the British historian David Irving discovered it. Irving noticed that this was different from a copy he had found in the Imperial War Museum (the reason was that Wolters had cut out sections) and he wrote to Speer seeking an explanation. Alarmed by this Speer wrote to Wolters suggesting that the remaining chronicles be culled of any damaging references.

In 1979 Matthias Schmidt interviewed Speer (Speer was always very willing to

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10 The organisation set up to completely rebuild Berlin

11 See the discussion on the Final Solution in third section
12 Van der Vat *The Good Nazi* p334
13 Van der Vat *The Good Nazi* p336
assist anyone who was interested in his life). At the end of the interview Speer referred Schmidt to Wolters. Wolters apparently liked Schmidt and allowed him to see a part of his copy of the chronicle on the condition he did not publish anything without Wolters’ permission. Schmidt then returned to Speer to confirm some of the details. Alarmed by this Speer had his lawyers write to Wolters in 1980 asking him to acknowledge that Speer held the exclusive copyright to all of the documents in Wolters’ possession or face legal action. Wolters decided to retain the chronicles as an accurate historical account of the events as the relationship between the two men had become very bitter and he wanted the truth to be known.

Speer died in 1981 and his widow wrote to Wolters on 29th September 1981 saying

You were Albert's friend in his Spandau years, his only and best, This close attachment helped him to endure those years. We all know what you did for us. I should like to say, also on behalf of our children, who asked me to do so, how painful it is for us that this friendship was broken off. For me there remains the memory of you as our helper in all the emergencies and sorrows of twenty-one years. It is also thanks to you that the children developed without a father into upright and effective people.14

After Wolters death in 1983 his copy of the original chronicle was sent, on his instructions, to the Federal Archives.

These chronicles revealed Speer’s hypocrisy in denying all knowledge of the persecution of the Jews while, at the same time, trying to cover up evidence of his own involvement in the Final Solution. They have allowed historians to come to a new interpretation of his life and actions.

Therefore in examining the life of Albert Speer it is necessary to read critically and to also make use of all of the skills of an historian in evaluating the reliability and validity of the source material.

14 Van der Vat, The Good Nazi p 364
Matthias Schmidt
Matthias Schmidt completed a thesis on Speer in 1979 and this was then extended and published as the book *Albert Speer – The end of a Myth* in 1982. He was the first historian to question the personality that Speer had created for himself systematically. Up until this book was published all historians had based their views on information gained from Albert Speer – either by personal interview or from his books. Schmidt made a detailed examination of the inconsistencies contained in Speer’s book and was the first historian to research his statements thoroughly by making cross references to other sources. He also had access to some of the Wolters chronicles.

Schmidt believes that Speer was a genius with only one motive – his overwhelming ambition to become a historical figure. In doing this he created three careers – as an architect, as Minister for Armaments, and third as a writer accepted as a reliable source of information about the Third Reich. Schmidt believes that Speer was a contriving master planner who was able to change his personality in order to manipulate any situation He also believes that his autobiography contains little historical truth and called it “the most cunning apologia by any leading figure of the Third Reich.”

Dan van der Vat
Dan van der Vat was a Dutch correspondent for the *Times* and is the author of *The Good Nazi – the life and lies of Albert Speer* (1997). In this new interpretation van der Vat was able to draw upon the full chronicle of Rudolf Wolters (Schmidt saw sections of it). Van der Vat believes that Albert Speer managed to prevent his personal war crimes from emerging during his lifetime and did everything he could to stop their inevitable revelation from ever being made.

Van der Vat discusses the central unanswered question about Speer. Did he know what was happening to the Jews during the rule of Hitler?

He argues that Speer admitted that his personal sense of collective responsibility for the crimes of the Nazis was indistinguishable from guilt. He admitted that he knew more about the Holocaust than he had let on at Nuremberg and that his continual confession of guilt and claims of repentance were only a sham.

Van der Vat believes that Speer only escaped the death penalty at Nuremberg because he was a good liar.

Henry King
Henry King, the author of *The Two Worlds of Albert Speer* (1997) was a member of the USA legal team that prosecuted Speer and the other Nazis at Nuremberg and is now a Professor of Law at an American university.

King presents a very different picture of Speer and strongly disagrees with Schmidt’s interpretation. He believes that because of his upbringing Speer was incapable of resisting the magnetic personality of Hitler. It was only when Hitler ordered the destruction of all of Germany’s industries that Speer underwent a conversion of personality and was then able to make decisions, based on his moral beliefs (this explains the title of his book). He believes that Speer was the only Nazi leader who showed real courage in standing up to Hitler.

What follows is a recount of Speer’s story based on his 1966 autobiography *Inside the Third Reich*.

15 Matthias Schmidt *Albert Speer The end of a Myth* p 204
THE STORY OF

ALBERT SPEER
Speers early life

Albert Speer was born in 1905, the second of three sons. Their father was a very busy architect in Mannheim, a booming industrial town and one of the few people to own a motor car before World War One. In fact his father had two cars - a touring car for summer and a sedan for winter. His father invested most of his money in property and land, so that, in 1923, he was able to avoid the disastrous inflation. Albert’s mother was independently wealthy and took great pride in being among the social elite of Mannheim. Although Albert Speer describes himself as being from the upper middle class he lived in an impressive 14-roomed house, surrounding a courtyard, and it was one of the top twenty houses in the whole town. The family had its own cook, kitchenmaid, chambermaid, butler, chauffeur, nanny, and a governess.

Speer’s parents were Lutheran Protestants and convinced liberals, although politics were not discussed.

Albert felt that he was inferior to his brothers, and he believed that they considered him to be inferior to them, implying that they bullied him. His relationship with his parents was poor and as a child he felt that his parents had little time or love for him. Speer wrote that his governess was the only person who had shown him warmth.

Having had a very sheltered upbringing, when Albert’s governess took the siblings out they had to be well dressed and were forbidden to play on the street or in the public parks. Before he was old enough to go to school Albert’s favourite playmate was the daughter of the concierge to whom he was attracted partly because of her close and loving family. He went to an exclusive primary school where he mixed with the children of the leading families in the town. His parents were horrified when he made friends with a student from a poor family, and then used his pocket money to buy himself a soccer ball.

Albert Speer was not physically strong and had dizzy spells and often fainted. He was diagnosed as having “a weakness of the vascular nerves”. He wrote that these weaknesses developed in him the ability to deal with problems and difficult people. His health gradually improved as he spent a large amount of time at his parents’ holiday house in the country. He hiked, cycled, and was a member of a rowing club.

Meeting Margarete Weber when he was 17 Albert was soon spending more time at her parents’ house than at his family home. He fell in love with her and they decided to marry as soon as he finished university. As a result he applied himself to his studies and his marks improved dramatically. His parents objected to his friendship with someone from a lower class and the relationship between Speer and his parents was so poor that when he and Margarete married in 1928 he sent his parents a telegram saying, “Married today. Love Albert and Gretel”. His parents had never met his bride.

At 18 when he left school in 1923 he wanted to become a mathematician but his father talked him into becoming an architect. He studied at the Institute of Technology in Karlsruhe transferring in 1924 to the Institute at Munich. Although Munich is where Hitler staged his beer hall putsch in 1923 Speer stated that he had no interest in Hitler or his political party. Albert’s father was wealthy enough to give him an allowance of 300 marks a month. This was equal to his monthly salary in his first job, so as a student he was “totally free of cares and could live splendidly.”

In 1926 Speer transferred to the Institute of Technology in Berlin and studied under Professor Tessenow whom he greatly

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16 Speer make no reference in the index of his 525-page autobiography to his parents, his brothers, his wife, or his six children

17 Speer and the Weber family always called her ‘Gretel’

18 Speer Inside the Third Reich p10
admired and under whom he wished to work when he graduated. When he finished his studies in 1927 at the age of 23 he applied for, and was given, the position of Tessenow’s assistant at the Institute. He hoped to supplement his income by working as an architect in his free time, however, the only commission he gained was to design a house for Gretel’s parents.

At this time Albert Speer was greatly influenced by the philosophical writings of Oswald Spengler whose book *Decline of the West* convinced him that Germany was going through a period of moral decay similar to that which occurred towards the end of the Roman Empire. Looking around him Speer saw inflation, a decline in moral values, and an ineffectual government.

While Speer was studying at the Institute he met a fellow student Rudolf Wolters who was to become his loyalest friend. Rudolf later worked for Speer and he always kept a detailed chronicle of all that he and Speer did during the war years. It was this chronicle that would eventually destroy the image Albert Speer was to create for himself at the Nuremberg trials of 1945 to 1946.
Why did Speer join the Nazi party?

Although Speer worked at an Institute that was the centre of student political activity for both the Nazi and the Communist parties he described himself as being disinterested in politics.

I was allergic to any political commitments. That continued to be so, even though I felt strong nationalistic feelings – as for example at the time of the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923.19

He wrote that his father had serious reservations about the Nazi party because of the socialist aspects of their 25-point program.

To understand why he joined the party in 1931, long before Hitler came to power, it is necessary to understand the typical voter that supported Hitler.

The percentage of votes gained by each group of parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group of parties</th>
<th>1928</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1932</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nazi</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant Middle class</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic parties</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left wing parties</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Nazis were not popular with all Germans. They appealed to Protestant middle class voters and were most popular in the country and smaller cities. The communists tended to dominate the larger industrial cities.

Some historians believe that many Nazi voter had lost faith in the existing system and believed that their status and position in society was under threat. The Nazis portrayed themselves as being both revolutionary (destroying the Republic) and reactionary (promising a return to the glory of the days of the Kaiser). For many middle class and professional voters, as well as farmers, the events of 1929 to 1933 were only the culmination of a series of disasters since 1918. These included the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, the French occupation of the Ruhr of 1923, the uncontrollable inflation, the political instability of the Weimar Republic and finally the depression of 1930. These voters wanted a return to stability.

Hitler appeared to offer an escape from the economic crisis that threatened to destroy them and a return to respectability and to normality. He projected the image of a strong man who was the leader of a united party – a man who was very different from the other failed politicians.

Speer attends his first Nazi meeting

The Institute of Technology, Berlin had become a centre of National Socialism activity and Speer’s students often debated politics with him. He wrote that the idealism of Hitler appealed to his students, projecting an image to them of a strong leader with the ability to carry out his ideas. Speer’s students convinced him to attend one of Hitler’s speeches being held in a local beer hall on the 5th of December 1930. He mentioned that a number of professors were also present at this speech.20

A few weeks after this meeting some friends took Speer to hear a speech by Joseph Goebbels at the Sportpalast. He described this audience as being a roaring crowd that Goebbels whipped into a frenzy. He saw how Goebbels understood the feelings of ordinary people and could play on their emotions. As compensation for their misery, unemployment and hopelessness Goebbels vilified the Jews and gave ordinary people something to hate. Speer described the crowd as setting the pace rather than the speakers and as them being able to forget their own unhappiness for a few hours. After the meeting the crowd left the building and the mounted police forced them onto the footpath. Although no one was injured Speer felt some sympathy towards the crowd and an opposition to authority which had nothing to do with his political beliefs.

20 See Document 1

19 Speer Inside the Third Reich p 9
The following day, on the 1st of March 1931, he applied for membership in the National Socialist Party and became member number 474,481. Once Speer’s career within the party blossomed he spent very little time with his wife and seldom saw his children during the war. He gave up the opportunity to spend Christmas with his family for an inspection tour of Finland in 1944. He stated that he was completely under the influence of Hitler and gave up the real centre of his life – his family. He became an absentee father.

It was an utterly undramatic decision. Then and ever afterward I scarcely felt myself to be a member of a political party. I was not choosing the NSDAP, but becoming a follower of Hitler, whose magnetic force had reached out to me the first time I saw him and had not, thereafter, released me. His persuasiveness, the peculiar magic of his by no means pleasant voice, the oddity of his rather banal manner, the seductive simplicity with which he attacked the complexity of our problems – all that bewildered and fascinated me. I knew virtually nothing about his program. He had taken hold of me before I had grasped what was happening...

It must have been during these months that my mother saw a SA parade in the streets of Heidelberg. The sight of discipline in a time of chaos, the impression of energy in an atmosphere of universal hopelessness, seems to have won her over also. At any rate, without ever having heard a speech or read a pamphlet, she joined the party. Both of us seem- to have felt this decision to be a breach with a liberal family tradition. In any case, we concealed it from one another and from my father. Only years later, long after. I had become part of Hitler’s inner circle, did my mother and I discover by chance that we shared early membership in the party.

Speer then explained that

- Hitler had made an almost hypnotic impression on him and he joined Hitler’s party as distinct from the Nazi party.
- His decision to join the Nazi party was made without any research into the ideology of the party owing to his political naiveté
- He was aware of a number of “rough” spots in the doctrine of the party but assumed that they would be corrected
- He believed that he had to choose between a Nazi Germany or a communist Germany
- Hitler seemed to be becoming more moderate and respectable in his attempt to form a government
- Hitler’s alliance with the old-style nationalists of the Harzburg Front seemed to show that he was changing his more extreme attitudes.
- Speer believed that the Nazis intended to reduce the number of Jews in key occupations to a level consistent with their percentage of the population of Germany rather than persecuting them
- After joining Speer continued to be friends with Jews. There was never a trace of anti-semitism in any of his speeches, letters or actions
- He stated that if he had known that Hitler intended to start a world war, kill all of the Jews and his political opponents then he, and many others, would have resigned from the party. He also wrote that the Nazis were aware that many of the new party members thought this way and Goebbels had even written an editorial in the November 1931 edition of Angriff warning that the new middle class intellectuals joining the party held very different attitudes from the long term party members.

Speer then made a statement of his guilt as a party member:

*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.*

*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.*

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21 Speer *Inside the Third Reich* p 15 - 17

22 The Nazi party newspaper
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.23

This acceptance of guilt meant that many early writers saw Albert Speer as an honest and contrite man who was judging himself more harshly than the Nuremberg court had.

23 Speer Inside the Third Reich p 19
Speer the party member

Speer clearly stated that in 1931 his main interest at this time was his career as an architect and that he had little interest in politics. Speer’s only contribution to the party was to drive party members in his car on official business. He was never a member of the SA and was not involved in their violent activities. Despite his seeming disinterest in the Nazi party he may have already regarded it as a vehicle through which to achieve his ambitions as an architect. In the beginning of his third book The Slave State he stated that even before 1933 he was surprised by the low intellectual level of the members of the party.

The party struck me as an organised troop that was easy to lead precisely because the lower level leaders had no leadership qualities.

He meet Karl Hanke at the party headquarters and Hanke assisted Speer with his career in the party. In an ungrateful comment Speer described Hanke as a “young journeyman miller.” In reality Hanke may have started as an apprentice miller but he became an engineering teacher and the State Secretary in the Ministry of Propaganda that Goebbels headed. Hanke became a key supporter of Speer, and a loyal friend. By the end of the war Hanke was the Gauleiter for Upper Silesia (the site of Auschwitz) and Speer considered him to be his best friend.

In September 1930 Hanke offered Speer the task of redecorating the headquarters of the district branch of the Nazi party on an unpaid basis. He painted the vestibule bright red and the offices a strong yellow. Speer said that this met “with a divided reception”.

In 1932 Speer’s salary as an assistant professor of architecture was reduced as a part of the government’s cost-cutting program, a result of the depression. Unable to now support his family and with no chance of private employment because of the lack of building projects during the depression he decided to resign. He and his wife Gretel, returned to Mannheim where he managed the buildings owned by his parents. Albert Speer must have found this a very difficult decision because of his poor relationship with his family. He attempted to find work, but his only architectural project was to rebuild a store owned by his parents. His attempts to win competitions resulted in his gaining third place. His career seemed to be going nowhere.

In July 1932 Speer and Gretel Speer went to Berlin for a few days to assist in the election. As a car owner his role was once again to act as a courier for the party. Hanke was now the organiser of the Berlin district and the following day he offered Speer the job of redecorating Goebbels’s headquarters. Speer had booked tickets to go on holidays with his family the next day but he immediately cancelled his plans. Speer described this as “the luckiest turning point of my life”. He compared his life to a train that has always run on the same rails but which has now come to a junction and a small change in direction could set in off on a new course.

Speer’s task was to repaint the walls and to make some minor alterations. He worked day and night as he was determined to make a good impression going over budget. As the party funds had been all used on the November 1932 elections the workers – who were all party members – had to wait to be paid. Hitler inspected the building and Speer was told that he liked the finished result.

The work done, Speer returned to Mannheim where his career continued to go nowhere. He seemed to be disinterested in politics as he describes the Nazi party in Mannheim as being a ‘bowling club’.

24 The SA was the private army of the Nazi party and was commanded by Ernst Roehm. Its role was to protect the members of the party and to attack the party’s political opponents.
26 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p: 21
27 Governor.
When he read on 30th January 1933 that Hitler had become chancellor that day he said that it did not affect him.

In March 1933 Hanke, now a district organisation leader, again rang and invited Speer to Berlin. Speer immediately packed his bags and drove all night in order to be in Berlin the next day. On his arrival he was given the commission to redecorate Goebbels’ new ministry building. Speer noted that the people he saw in the streets seemed more vigorous and optimistic. Apparently Goebbels did not like his work as an architect and he had the building redecorated again after Speer had finished.

Hanke was now Goebbels’ secretary and while Speer was talking to him he saw the plans of the 1st May night rally to be held at the Tempelhof Field. Speer said, “Those look like the decorations for a rifle club meet” and Hanke replied “If you can do better, go to it”29. Speer created a setting designed to impress the audience that would look up at the speakers on a large raised platform. Behind them were two huge black, white, and red banners, each taller than a 10-storey building with a third swastika banner between them. They were illuminated by the powerful searchlights that lit up the sky. This design was accepted and became the basis of party rallies and Speer commented, “I had moved a step ahead”.

The Nazis – including Hitler – loved Speer’s work and he was made “Commissioner for the Artistic and Technical Presentation of Party Rallies and Presentations.”

A few weeks later Speer was given the chance to redecorate Goebbels’ home and to add a new hall. He promised to finish within two months. As both Hitler and Goebbels did not think this time frame was possible Speer may have done this in order to impress his political masters. He had the tradesman work three shifts day and used huge fans to dry the plaster. The building was finished and handed over on the specified day. Goebbels was impressed with his work but when Hitler inspected it he insisted that Speer replace the pictures, as they were “degenerate”.

In July 1933 Speer was given the assignment of designing the first party rally of 500,000 supporters at Nuremberg as the local architect could not come up with a setting that expressed the victorious attitude of the party. Speer proposed a gigantic eagle with a 30-metre wingspan towering over the field. The local party leader was unwilling to make such an important decision and told him to report to Rudolf Hess with his plans. Hess then said that they needed the personal approval of Hitler. Hitler examined the sketches and gave his approval without talking to Speer.

In 1933 Hitler commissioned Paul Troost, his main architect, to refurbish the chancellor’s residence in Berlin as quickly as possible. As Troost came from Munich he needed a building supervisor who had experience in working with the Berlin tradesmen. Hitler remembered Speer’s work on Goebbels’ home and appointed him to the position of Troost’s assistant. Hitler took a personal interest in this project and visited the site nearly every day. Speer accompanied him on his tours of inspection and answered all of his questions. Their conversations were relaxed and informal and only concerned with the details of the reconstruction. After about 30 of these inspections Hitler unexpectedly invited Speer to eat with him. The other guests included Goebbels, who noticed that Hitler had lent him one of his own jackets as Speer’s was covered in plaster.30 Over dinner Hitler realised for the first time that Speer had designed the May 1st and Nuremberg decorations. He then asked Speer about his career but did not ask if he was a member of the party.

This was the beginning of Speer’s career within the Nazi party and he was

29 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p: 26

30 In an interview with Sereny he said ‘here I was 28 years old, totally insignificant sitting next to him at lunch, wearing his clothes and virtually his sole conversational partner. I was dizzy with excitement’ page 103
determined to achieve his ambitions. As he said

After years of frustrated efforts I was wild to accomplish things ... for the commission to do a great building I would have sold my soul like Faust. Now I had found my Mephistopheles. 31

At first Hitler did not give Speer major assignments and he was only one of a number of architects whom Hitler employed. He made rushed alterations to the chancellery for Hitler; designed barracks with decent kitchens and washrooms for the workers on the autobahns; and redesigned Goering’s house. Speer was also given the task of designing the setting for the funeral ceremony of Hindenburg at Tannenberg.

Hitler visited his main architect Paul Troost in Munich every few weeks as a rule and usually took Speer with him. Speer wrote that Hitler showed great respect towards Troost as Hitler felt that at heart he was an architect first, his second career being politics. He respected the work of Troost as being that of a superior professional and Speer assumed that Hitler wanted Speer to develop his skills by learning from Troost.

Speer’s most impressive production was his design the 1934 Nuremberg rally which was filmed by Leni Riefenstahl as Triumph of the Will. This almost became a Nazi icon. Speer organised the rally to take place at night (mainly because so many of the Nazi leaders had poor physiques) with thousands of flags and with Speer’s characteristic 130 searchlights shining into the sky as a “cathedral of light”.

31 Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* p 31
Hitler’s architect

From 1933 Speer was in constant and close contact with Hitler. He often ate lunch and dinner with him and the other party leaders. He would watch movies with Hitler after dinner and was soon one of Hitler’s intimates. Hitler often rang Speer late at night to invite him to accompany him on an outing to café Heck, a favourite of his from his early Munich days, and they often stayed there until two or three in the morning. Speer wrote:

There were very few persons besides myself who had been so favoured. Hitler had undoubtedly taken a special liking to me.32

Hitler tended to avoid any social ties with the leaders of the party such as Goering or Hess and he seemed to be suspicious of any friendship between them. Hitler preferred the company of his comrades from the ‘old days’ and those who were not his intellectual superiors. Hitler often spoke honestly about events to his small inner group and Speer became used to mixing with the most influential men in Germany as an equal.

Speer usually went with Hitler to his house at Obersalzberg as Hitler mostly spent only two or three days in Berlin before driving to “the mountain”. There he became friends with Eva Braun and he joined Hitler and his small group in all of their social activities including Hitler’s walks through the mountains. In 1935 Speer was given his own house there. The only others with their own house were Hitler, Bormann and Goering. He said that he achieved little during these days in the mountains and wasted much of his time. He found this time in the mountains boring and full of trivialities, however, it was important for him to be with Hitler in order to raise his prestige and to remain aware of what Hitler was thinking.

He summed up their relationship by saying:

Only a few months before I had been carried away by the prospect of drafting and executing buildings. Now I was completely under the Hitler’s spell, unreservedly and unthinkingly held by him.33

In Berlin Speer had unlimited access to the chancellery and usually ate there with Hitler each day. The policeman on the gate was so used to him that he automatically opened the gate on seeing Speer’s car. When Speer arrived with a set of new plans Hitler would interrupt what he was doing and spend hours going over them with Speer. At one stage Hitler’s assistants asked Speer not to bring any more plans, as Hitler would be preoccupied with them for days and would neglect his other tasks.

You and your goddamned plans! Couldn’t they keep? The Fuhrer didn’t close an eye last night, he was so excited. Next time have the goodness to ask me first.34

Hitler felt that he could confide in Speer and on one occasion he looked pensively out of the window and said to Speer:

There are two possibilities for me; to win through with all my plans, or to fail. If I win I shall become one of the greatest men in history. If I fail, I shall be condemned, despised and damned.35

At the Nuremberg trial in 1946 Speer said:

If Hitler had actually had friends, I would certainly have been one of his close friends.

He then qualified this by saying that Hitler never had any friends as he always put up a wall between himself and others and he seldom revealed his feelings.

In 1934 when Paul Troost died Speer, aged 28, became Hitler’s personal architect.36 He soon realised that Hitler saw imposing buildings as being his monument for the future generations of Germans, a lasting symbol of his greatness and glory. He believed that all that remained to remind the world of the past great leaders of history were their

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32 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 38
33 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 49
34 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 67
35 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 101
36 Speer was only one of a team of 10 to 12 architects that Hitler employed. Each architect was placed in charge of a specified project.
buildings. Together Hitler and Speer designed buildings so that in even a thousand years time their ruins (like those of Rome) would show the greatness of the men who built them. When Hitler met Gretel Speer for the first time he said:

Your husband is going to erect buildings for me such as have not been created for a thousand years. 37

It was in 1934 that Speer was responsible for building a permanent site for the Nuremberg rallies. When he showed Hitler a plaster model of his design Hitler examined it from all angles and simply said “Agreed”. Hitler usually rejected the first draft of his architects but he did not interfere with Speer’s work and Speer said he was treated as an architect “as if I were his equal”.

Speer also noticed that Hitler always treated him with respect and would accept any modifications that he might make. This contrasted with the domineering attitude he took with his political associates. Speer always felt that Hitler treated him differently from everyone else around him because he was an architect. He assumed that Hitler was projecting on to him his own youthful hopes of becoming a great architect. 38

Speer designed a huge complex capable of holding 400,000 spectators, 39 a field for military exercises, a large stadium and a hall for Hitler’s addresses and concerts. It would cost three billion marks. It was to be larger than Persepolis; the Great Pyramid of Cheops, and the Circus Maximus and to have a central statue 15 metres higher that the Statue of Liberty. He said that Hitler wanted to “beat” the great buildings of history in order to glorify his rule and to magnify his pride and he became excited when Speer could show him that he had “beaten” one of the great buildings of the world. Speer even had drawings prepared to show Hitler what the buildings would look like as a ruin in hundreds of years time with the walls crumbling and covered in ivy. Many in Hitler’s entourage regarded it as blasphemous that Speer could imagine a time when National Socialism would be in decline, however, he understood Hitler well enough to know that he would accept this idea. At the laying of the foundation stone of the Nuremberg Stadium Hitler said to Speer “this is the greatest day of your life”.

Speer also worked with Robert Ley in 1934, the head of the Labour Front, to improve the presentation of mines and factories. The owners were encouraged to modernise their offices, to plant lawns and gardens, and to set up workers’ canteens to improve working conditions.

In 1936 Hitler gave Speer his greatest architectural assignment – to completely rebuild the city of Berlin saying, “we must surpass Paris and Vienna”. His new city was to be the capital of the new German Empire 40, a place that the subject races would be allowed to visit occasionally and look at in awe and wonder. 41

Hitler had started to develop his master plan for Berlin in the 1920s. He planned a central avenue five kilometres long; a meeting hall several times the size of St Peter’s Cathedral in Rome; and an Arch of Triumph larger than that in Paris (Hitler had drawn up sketches of this arch 10 years previous). Hitler impressed Speer with the careful study of the architectural plans of Vienna and Paris he had made in the 1920s long before there was any possibility of him achieving political power. This clearly shows not only that Hitler’s first love was architecture, but also his belief that his great cities would be his lasting legacy to the Aryan people.

37 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 58
38 Bormann was extremely jealous of this relationship and saw it as a threat to his position.
39 Hitler intended that this stadium would not only be used for the annual party rallies, but from 1944 onwards the Olympic Games would be permanently held at Nuremberg.
40 The term German Empire was used at this time to describe Germany and the conquered or occupied states.
41 This alone should have told Speer that Hitler was planning a series of wars of conquest.
On 30th January 1937 Hitler placed Speer in charge of the project with the title of “Inspector General of Construction for the Reich Capital” (GBI). Speer was given extensive power and became Hitler’s direct subordinate and was exempted from having to inform the government of Berlin and the party of his plans. The Minister of the Interior, the mayor and Goebbels, who was the Gauleiter of Berlin, had no control over him.  

In his discussion of this project Speer stated that the redevelopment involved moving the railway lines and the destruction of the central part of the city so that it could be enlarged to accommodate double the existing population. There would be new government buildings, a university, hospitals, museums, and new public parks. However, at no time does he mention what would happen to those people whose homes were to be destroyed to allow for this rebuilding.

Speer also redrew the plans of the 1936 Olympic stadium as Hitler considered the original plan of a concrete and glass structure to be too modern. He also designed the German pavilion at the Paris World Fair in 1937 and delighted Hitler by building an imposing structure that dwarfed the next-door Soviet pavilion.

In January 1938 Speer was given the task of building a new chancellery and Hitler insisted that it be finished by 10th January 1939. He wanted a building that would be a proper background for his position as one of the greatest men in history. Hitler demanded a building that would impress visitors and diplomats and that would also act as the headquarters of a new powerful Reich. The cost was not important. It was a building that contained 420 rooms and involved the organisation of 8,000 workers. Not only was Hitler impressed with the completed building but also Speer gained the reputation of being a great organiser by having finished it two days ahead of schedule.

Hitler was delighted with the building and often showed guests around it. Speer’s understanding of Hitler and the way that he thought was shown by the desk in his study, which had an inlay of a sword, half drawn from its sheath. Hitler was delighted and talked of the diplomats sitting in front of him and shivering.

Even at this time Speer knew that Hitler did not intend to remain in power for long. Since 1935 he constantly complained of stomach pains and he said that he “seriously feared” that he did not have long to live. He often spoke of retiring to Linz and said that when this did happen he would take no part in politics so his successor could gain personal authority.

The only person with whom Speer came into conflict at this time was Martin Bormann. Speer wrote that from the beginning he and Bormann disliked each other and although Speer treated him with formal correctness, he avoided Bormann as much as possible. Bormann was originally Hess’ secretary but by constantly being beside Hitler Bormann became an expert in manipulating Hitler. It was Bormann who organised the building of Obersalzberg, he controlled Hitler’s private finances, and he had set up the Adolf Hitler Endowment Fund of German Industry (it was made clear to the owners of businesses that they were expected to make a contribution).  

He was a hardworking, reliable, inconspicuous and indispensable secretary who was always obliging to everyone. By constantly being at Hitler’s side Bormann was close to the centre of power and so gradually built up his influence over Hitler. However, Speer described Bormann as a brutal, coarse, uncultured, and ruthless peasant.

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42 Hitler also agreed to Speer’s request to employ architects who were not party members as those who were party members had already been assigned positions.

43 One method of making Hitler wealthy was to put his face on all stamps and then charge a copyright fee.

44 Bormann gave a percentage of this fund to the party officials so building up a group within the party grateful to him.
Bormann had his own beliefs and agenda and would take every opportunity to push them. He had perfected the technique of undermining people in Hitler’s eyes. Speer told that on one occasion he had someone tell of a seditious speech made by of a member of the clergy. When Hitler became attentive and asked for more information Bormann would say that something unpleasant had happened but he did not want to talk about it. Despite Hitler's questions Bormann would pretend that he wanted to say nothing further about the matter. Finally Hitler would become angry and demand that Bormann tell him the truth. It was only then that Bormann would produce the incriminating documents.

Bormann always carried little cards in his pocket so that he could record Hitler's comments and then later use these comments to justify the decisions he himself made in accordance with the 'Fuhrer's wishes.'

Bormann most likely resented Speer's close relationship with Hitler, as he was able to approach Hitler independently of Bormann. Bormann may have seen Speer as a challenger to his growing position of power.

Bormann was eventually placed in charge of the Gauleiters. When Speer later came into conflict with these Gauleiters Bormann resented what he saw as an intrusion into his area of responsibility and this resulted in a long and bitter political feud with Speer.
Why did Hitler select Speer?

Why did Speer achieve such power and develop such a close relationship with Hitler?  

Speer suggests that:

- Hitler always wanted to be an architect and he said numerous times “How I wish I had been an architect.” He often borrowed a T square and drawing board to draw the designs he wished built.

- Speer implied that Hitler was realising his own architectural ambitions via him and projecting onto him his own youthful dreams of being a great architect:

  You attracted my notice during our rounds. I was looking for an architect to whom I could entrust my building plans. I wanted someone young; for as you know these plans extend far into the future. I need someone who will be able to continue after my death with the authority I have conferred on him. I saw you as that man.

- Speer, the architect, was not involved in any of the political manipulations that surrounded Hitler. He remained outside of the intrigues of Bormann, Goering, Goebbels and others for political power. Speer had very little involvement with the party and did not socialise with any other of the party leaders. Speer stated that he only wore a uniform because it was Hitler’s wish.

- Speer constantly remained by Hitler’s side even if he found being at Obersalzberg boring and a waste of time. He became his friend and colleague and gained his confidence.

Although he agreed that he was completely devoted to Hitler he also admitted that he became a workaholic and neglected his wife and family.

- Speer was young and did not have a high professional reputation and as a result Hitler did not feel inferior to him. Speer believed that Hitler felt himself to be an inferior architect compared with Troost. He wrote that Hitler seldom had people of a high intellectual standard among his immediate group, as he did not feel at ease with them.

- He did not attempt to change any of Hitler’s favourite projects – such as the rebuilding of Berlin and always gave him credit for the final plans. He was very much the Fuhrer’s man.

- He had joined the party in 1931. Those who joined after 1933 were often regarded as being second-class members who had only joined after the Nazis came to power as a means of advancing their career.

- Hitler did not believe that he had long to live and was in a rush to complete his legacy to the German people.

  I shall not live much longer. I always counted on having time to realise my plans. I must carry them out myself. None of my successors will have the force to. I must carry out my aims as long as I can hold up, for my health is growing worse all the time.

  Hitler believed that his great architectural projects would ensure that future generations would remember his name. This would be his form of immortality.

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45 Mitacherlich a German psychologist suggested that there was an erotic component to their relationship.

46 Schmidt believes that Hitler saw in Speer what he wished his life had been and he now saw the possibility of achieving his own plans by becoming Speer’s patron.

47 Speer *Inside the Third Reich* p: 31.

48 Other members of Hitler’s group commented that he was always relaxed and happy when he was with Speer. Hettlage who worked with Speer on the rebuilding of Berlin watched the two of them examining the model of Berlin and said, ‘you know what you are? You are Hitler’s unhappy love.’

49 Speer *Inside the Third Reich* p: 106
Hitler once said of Speer

He's an artist and so his soul is close to mine. I have the warmest human relationship with him because I understand him so well like me he's an architect, intelligent and modest, and has nothing in common with those bull headed military men. I never imagined he'd master his enormous job so well. He also has great gifts as an organiser; he's absolutely on top of his work. When I give Speer a plan to execute he considers it for a while and then says 'Yes sir I think it's feasible' but he sometimes also says 'No sir it won't work like this' and his arguments always hold water.
Was Speer non-political?

In his autobiography Speer stressed that while he was Hitler’s architect he had no interest or involvement in political events and Hitler did not discuss politics with him.

When discussing his school days Speer told of a conservative middle class education typical of Imperial Germany which stressed the unquestioning acceptance of the existing social and political system. At no time was he encouraged to consider the problems of society and he knew little of the world outside of Germany. This was reinforced at home where there was no discussion of politics. As Tessenow’s assistant he tells that his students often discussed politics with him and they could easily counter any comments he would make.

Speer believed that his Nazi education developed within him the ability to compartmentalise his mind and to ignore some events. Party members were taught that policy was too complex for them to understand and the system was designed to prevent any possible conflict of conscience. As a result party members never had to take personal responsibility for their actions. He also argued that under the Nazi system the professions were kept isolated from each other by their membership of the different professional organisations. This resulted in them living in closed-off areas and with time would have eventually resulted in a society of totally isolated individuals.

As an example he referred to the letter that he wrote to Hitler in 1944 in which he said:

The task I have to fulfill is an unpolitical one. I have felt at ease in my work only so long as my person and my work were evaluated solely by the standard of practical accomplishments

There are two very clear examples of this ability to ignore what his fellow Nazis were doing.

Speer was in Berlin during the Night of the Long Knives\textsuperscript{51} (30\textsuperscript{th} June 1934) and he was aware from the soldiers in battle gear camped in the Tiergarten that something was happening. The next day he visited Hitler and found him in a very excited mood. He described to Speer how he forced his way into the hotel where the leaders of the SA were holidaying and Speer was left with the very clear impression that Hitler thought himself to have been in great danger and that he had averted a disaster by his actions. He described Hitler as being overjoyed after his return from visiting Hindenburg. What impressed Speer the most was the army’s acceptance of the death of General Schleicher and the attitude of Hindenburg who made no objections to any of Hitler’s actions. Speer had always regarded Hindenburg as being the great symbol of authority, someone the German people held in reverence. Speer was very reassured by Hindenburg’s approval of Hitler’s actions.

Speer noticed that after the purge Hindenburg and the generals joined Hitler – not because they were anti-Semitic – but because the left wing of the Nazi party had been purged.

The SA, Speer realised, had sacrificed themselves in the past for the party in the expectation that some day they would receive some tangible compensation. When this was not given, anger and discontent built up. Speer believed that some sort of “second revolution” might definitely have happened if Hitler had not have acted.

With such arguments we soothed our consciences. I myself and many others snatched avidly at excuses; the things that would have offended us two years before we now accepted as the standard of our new environment. Any troublesome doubts were

\textsuperscript{50} Speer Inside the Third Reich p. 112. This document and it’s theme later became central to Speer’s defence case at the Nuremberg trials, however, historians now question Speer’s motives in writing that document.

\textsuperscript{51} Hitler decided to arrest or kill the leaders of the SA as he believed they were planning a rebellion. He also killed some of the politicians who had opposed him.
repressed. At a distance of decades I am staggered by our thoughtlessness in those years.

The following day Speer was told to remodel the offices of Von Papen the vice chancellor. The top leaders in the SA were to be based there so that Hitler could keep an eye on them. In one of the rooms Speer saw a large pool of dried blood where one of Von Papen’s assistants had been shot on Hitler’s orders.

I looked away and from then on avoided the room. But the incident did not affect me any more deeply than that.

This ability to ignore anything unpleasant was further illustrated by Speer’s brief treatment of Kristallnacht, the 10th November 1938 attack on the Jews, considering the significance of this event in the Holocaust.

Driving to the office I passed by the still smouldering ruins of the Berlin synagogues. Today this memory is one of the most doleful of my life, chiefly because what really disturbed me at the time was the aspect of disorder that I saw charred beams, collapsed facades, burnt out walls. Most of all I was troubled by the political revival of the “gutter”. The smashed shops offended my sense of middle class order.

Speer left prison with his memoirs of 1,800 pages already written. His editor Joachim Fest edited this down to 525 pages. However, Speer originally made no mention at all of Kristallnacht in his memoirs. Fest and the publishers had to insist that he make some reference to this event, as it was such an important step on the path to the final solution.

Speer claimed to be just an architect up until 1942 and someone who had no interest in events outside of his field. His autobiography shows that, because of his close association with Hitler, he was aware of the major political developments that led to World War II and the preparations for the invasion of Russia in particular.

In 1933 when he came to power Hitler had given little thought to the methods to be used to achieve his foreign policy objectives. He felt that an alliance between Germany and the largely Aryan Britain (that he believed was more interested in its empire than Europe) would be desirable. Speer was present in 1935 when Hitler was openly discussing the possibility of such an alliance with Britain. Hitler would have preferred an alliance with Britain rather than Italy but Speer stated that Hitler had doubts as to whether the British could be trusted and if he joined with the British Hitler knew that he would lose any possibility of an alliance with Italy. Hitler often spoke of giving a guarantee for Britain’s Empire in return for some colonial concessions for Germany. Speer also wrote that Hitler said that the British decision to impose economic sanctions on Italy after the invasion of Ethiopia forced him into signing an alliance with Italy.

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52 Speer Inside the Third Reich p: 53.
53 Speer Inside the Third Reich p: 53.
54 This attack was organised by the Nazi party.
55 Speer Inside the Third Reich p: 101.
In 1938 there was a crisis within Germany about the possibility of a union with Austria and Speer must have been aware of the importance of any major development involving Austria. On 9th March 1938 he was in Hitler apartment when Schaub, Hitler’s assistant, listened to, took notes about, and then informed Hitler of the Austrian chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg’s plebiscite speech. In this speech Schuschnigg offered the Austrian people the opportunity to vote for or against a union with Germany. If the Austrian people had voted against a union with Germany Hitler then would have had little chance of merging the two states.

Speer tells that soon after this speech Goering and Goebbels rushed in and went upstairs for what Speer described as a “mysterious conference” with Hitler. However, he then stated that he knew nothing about what was happening and only found out about the union of the two republics on 11th March 1938 from the newspapers. While there is no suggestion that Speer was in any way consulted about, or involved in, the German policy towards Austria and the Anschluss, his claim to be uninformed about the significance of what was happening could be questioned.

Speer was also present shortly after when Hitler made it obvious that his next target would be Czechoslovakia. He wrote that Hitler sent for a map and explained that Czechoslovakia was now surrounded and caught in a “pincer”. The implications of this statement are obvious – Hitler was planning military action against Czechoslovakia.

Speer had detailed advanced knowledge of the German plans to invade Russia. He was having supper with Hitler on 21st August 1941 when Hitler was handed a note. Hitler then excitedly announced to the group that he had received a telegram confirming that Germany had just signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. Hitler banged his hand on the table and said excitedly “I have them”. He then gave the telegram to Speer to read for himself. Considering Hitler’s excited reaction the importance of this alliance should have been obvious to everyone present. Afterwards Speer was present when Hitler discussed the military effectiveness of the Red Army.

Speer was at the dinner to welcome Foreign Minister Ribbentrop back from the Soviet Union on 29th September 1939. The two countries had just signed a treaty to divide Poland. He watched as Ribbentrop drew on a piece of paper the new border and he even witnessed an argument between Goering and Ribbentrop as to which of the two was entitled to the hunting estate presented to Germany by Stalin.

In addition Karl Hanke told Speer of the German intelligence reports on the effectiveness of the Soviet military equipment. Speer also wrote that he was aware of the long talks Hitler was having with his military advisers while trying to reach a final plan. Finally on 21st June (before the invasion of Russia) Hitler called Speer into his study and played him a few bars of Liszt’s music, saying that it was going to be the German victory fanfare in the coming Russian campaign.

Speer the architect was not yet one of the officers of the German ship of state and he had no role in the formation of Germany’s war plans. However, he was definitely on the bridge of the ship when its officers were discussing their plans and determining their course of action. It would have been almost impossible for Speer not to realise that a major world war was looming. The question is what else did Speer know about the major developments and plans of the government of Nazi Germany?
Speer becomes Minister for Armaments

In 1939 Speer had taken the initiative and organised a team of skilled construction supervisors that could, under his leadership, be used to rebuild damaged bridges and widen roads. His intention to play an active role is shown by his purchase of sleeping bags and tents and having his car painted field grey and then obtaining an army identification number. Hitler refused to allow him to work for the army and told him to continue working as an architect on his buildings, but Speer somehow managed to be placed in charge of the rocket construction site at Peenemunde.

Once World War Two had begun Speer, the architect, gradually assumed a greater role in Hitler’s inner circle and with it more power. He was given responsibility for the 26,000 workers needed to construct large buildings to meet the requirements of the army and air force, and he completed the building of three large aeroplane factories in less than eight months. He was also placed in charge of building air raid shelters in Berlin in the repair of buildings damaged by bombs. He said that these tasks gave him an insight into the power struggles within the leadership that greatly assisted him in the future.

After the defeat of France in 1940 Hitler was supremely confident and insisted that all construction work on Berlin and the other cities should continue. Encouraged by the Gauleiters he added 27 cities to the list of those to be reconstructed. Hitler took a deep interest in these projects and personally selected the painting to be hung in the Linz Gallery. Thousands of workers and millions of marks were allocated to these projects at the time when Hitler was preparing for the invasion of Russia in 1941.

The German invasion of Russia was originally scheduled to be completed within 20 weeks. As such the Germans had made limited preparations for stockpiling weapons, fuel, winter uniforms, or making preparations to repair the damaged Russian infrastructure. Considering that the military began planning this invasion in 1934 their lack of preparation is almost unbelievable.

The Russians adopted a scorched earth policy and destroyed everything that might be of value to the invading Germans. Speer learnt from the high officials in the German railway system that the Russians had damaged most of their railway system and that this was creating immense difficulties in transporting and supplying the German armies. Speer volunteered to organise the repairing the railway system and was allocated 30,000 men to complete this task. This special Speer Construction Staff was placed under the direction of Dr Fritz Todt who gave him the responsibility for the railway system in the Ukraine. Speer took this new responsibility seriously and flew to Russia on a tour of inspection during the winter. At one stage his life was in danger when the Russians unexpectedly counter-attacked and they were only 18 kilometres away.

Todt, a civil engineer, was a true technocrat and he was the head of the Nazi Government’s engineering and construction section. He was the founder of the Todt Organisation which employed more than a million men and was responsible for building autobahns, fortifications, U-boat pens, harbours, as well as the armaments factories and the

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56 This was the role of the Todt Organisation. When Bormann found out he sent Speer a rude letter about acting without orders.
57 Speer was an architect and not an engineer. Speer does not explain why he was given these responsibilities but, given his ambition, it would be reasonable to assume that he asked for them.
housing of the workers needed in those factories. Fritz Todt was highly respected by Hitler and was a loyal long-term member of the party. He played no part in the Nazi infighting and Speer described him as being

Modest unassertive a man you could rely on who steered clear of all of the intrigues.

In 1940 Hitler made Todt the Minister for Weapons and Munitions. Todt found that the system of manufacturing weapons was chaotic. The military were used to ordering a small number of each type of weapon, and they constantly demanded the development of new models and variations. The result was a very slow and inefficient system with bottlenecks, waste and delay which could not hope to match the output of the mass-production line system used in other countries.

Todt’s solution was the basis of Speer’s success and involved:

- Limiting the number of models of each weapon.
- Making each factory autonomous and as long as it met the required production target he did not interfere with its internal administration.
- Using a small number of experts to run the system rather than the traditional large bureaucracy.

Despite this Todt believed that Germany could not compete with the industrial might of the USA combined with the almost unlimited resources of Russia. The night before he died he and Speer were at a meeting with Hitler and at this meeting Todt attempted to convince Hitler that the war could not be won. Speer’s whole career path underwent a sudden change the following day when Todt was killed in a plane accident on 7th February 1942.

Speer had stayed the night at Hitler’s headquarters and was awoken the next morning by a telephone call telling that Todt had just been killed when his plane crashed after take-off. At breakfast the topic of discussion was who would replace Todt? Hitler had already told Speer in 1939 that if anything ever happened to Todt he would be placed in charge of his construction work and so when Hitler summoned him at one o’clock Speer assumed that he would be given a part of his role. He wrote that he was thunderstruck when Hitler said to him

Herr Speer I appoint you the successor to Minister Todt in all his capacities.

At first he thought that he had misheard Hitler and he had been given only a part of his role but Hitler repeated:

No in all his capacities, including that of Minister of Armaments. I have confidence in you. I know you will manage it. Besides I have no one else. Get in touch with the Ministry at once and take over!

As Speer left the room Goering, who was in charge of the Four-Year Plan for the German economy, was announced. He said that on hearing Goering’s name Hitler looked sulky and displeased. Goering rushed in and offered to take over Todt’s entire role:

Best if I take over Dr Todt’s assignments within the framework of the Four Year Plan. This would avoid the frictions and difficulties we had in the past as a result of overlapping responsibilities.

It is possible that the primary reason why Hitler appointed Speer so quickly was to avoid any confrontation with Goering.

Speer was politically astute enough to realise that his appointment would meet opposition – he described Goering’s

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58 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 106
59 Speer had arranged to travel with Todt in his plane the next morning. Speer however was talking to Hitler until three am the night before. As the plane was to depart at nine am the next day he told Todt to leave without him. If he had not changed his plans he would have been on that plane.

60 Speer does not mention what he was doing in the hours before Hitler’s announcement. The possibility that he was manoeuvring to gain this position can’t be supported or denied. Speer was now in charge of all road building, all waterways and power plants, was the head of the Todt Organisation, in charge of all technical organisations, and as well the minister for armaments and munitions.
61 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 195
62 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 195
reaction to his appointment as being “stunned and alarmed cold and ill humoured”\textsuperscript{63}. However Speer immediately realised that Hitler would fully back him in his future battles with Goering. Speer knew that Goering and he had to come to some sort of working arrangement because as Minister of Armaments Speer now had to issue orders to the arms manufacturers while Goering had responsibility for running the entire war economy. It would be reasonable to assume that many in Todt Organisation might also resent his appointment. Therefore he insisted that Hitler issue a command that he replace Todt. This command was a useful political weapon when dealing with his subordinates in the Todt Organisation and with the Generals.

Speer wrote that he realised that Todt’s associates would regard him as an intruder and because of that on his first day in Todt’s headquarters, he visited each of his officials in their offices rather than asking them to come to his office. He then ordered that nothing be changed in Todt’s office and gave a speech at his funeral.

Speer was invited to his first conference on 13\textsuperscript{th} February 1942 with thirty representatives of the three branches of the military and the industrialists. Those there included the manager of the Todt Organisation, General Leeb the Chief of Army Ordinance, Admiral Witzell the Armaments Chief for the Navy, General Thomas the Armaments Officer of the OKW,\textsuperscript{64} Walter Funk the Minister of Economics, General Fromm the Head of the Army Reserve, Field Marshal Milch the secretary of the Air Ministry and the top officials from the Four Year Plan. Speer knew that this would be a test of his power and before the meeting he briefed Hitler and ensured that he would have his full support. Hitler said:

> If any steps are taken against you, or if you have any difficulties, interrupt the conference and invite the participants to the Cabinet Room. Then I’ll tell those gentlemen whatever is necessary

Both the industrialists and the military spoke of the production problems caused by the competing armaments demands of the three services and disputes about priority levels. They had already agreed on the need to appoint a single individual to coordinate production. Funk suggested that General Milch be appointed to this position. Speer realised that all of this had been pre-arranged and he knew that if Milch was given this position it would seriously undermine his own status as it was obvious that Milch had been selected by Goering as Milch was his assistant. Speer ended the meeting saying that he wished to talk to Hitler about the proposal and said that the meeting would resume in the Cabinet room.

After Speer had explained the situation to him Hitler entered the Cabinet room and spoke for an hour about the need to increase arms production and then stated that he thought Goering could not handle the task:

> This man can not look after armaments within the framework of the Four-Year Plan.\textsuperscript{65}

He said that he had made a deliberate decision to separate armaments production from the Four Year Plan and to turn it over to Speer as up until now it had been mismanaged. Asking them to give Speer their full cooperation and to “treat him like a gentleman”. This gave Speer Hitler’s total backing and almost unlimited power.\textsuperscript{66} All present at the meeting realised the implications of what had happened as it was clear that Speer could approach Hitler on any issue and receive his full personal support and in the future both Milch, who became one of his greatest supporters, and Funk, remained loyal to him. Speer said that Hitler’s speech meant that from then on he received very little opposition and that he could do almost anything he pleased.

\textsuperscript{63} Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 195.
\textsuperscript{64} The High Command of the Armed Forces.
\textsuperscript{65} Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 201
\textsuperscript{66} Both Speer and Hitler avoided any reference to him having control of the production of weapons for the Luftwaffe in order not to offend Goering.
After the meeting Hitler suggested that he use the industrialists rather than government officials to reorganise the armaments industry. Speer then seized the opportunity and asked Hitler to also agree to his using people who were not party members and immediately asked Hitler to instruct Bormann not to interfere in his use of these people.

That night Speer had a long discussion with Milch the Secretary of the Air Ministry and gained his agreement to end the rivalry between the air force, army and the navy over the production of armaments. The two remained close lifelong friends. Speer refused to implicate him during the Nuremberg trials when Milch was accused of authorising medical experiments on Jewish concentration camp inmates.

On 18th February 1942 Speer again met with these top officials who accepted all of his plans and policy decisions and then agreed to him having full authority over his ministry. All present (including Goering’s representatives) signed papers to this effect.

Speer showed great political skill in defusing the hostility Goering felt towards him. On 19th February 1942 Speer was summoned by Goering to visit him at his hunting lodge. Goering bitterly complained that he was neither invited to the 18th February meeting, nor consulted about the document everyone, including his own staff, had signed. In anger he said that this paper humiliated him and had immense implications for his control of the economy and finally he threatened to go to Hitler to resign. As Speer knew that Hitler would not allow Goering to resign and that he would probably make a compromise that Speer may not like, he decided to restore Goering’s prestige, assuring him that his own appointment would in no way affect Goering’s control of the German economy.

Speer offered to sign a document stating that he was Goering’s subordinate and his “Chief Representative for Armaments within the Four Year Plan”. However, the document which Speer prepared for Goering to sign on 22nd February 1942, was worded in a way that he gave himself almost total autonomy. When he released a statement to the media about his appointment he deliberately included an old photograph of Goering, delighted with Speer’s design of Goering’s office, congratulating him.

In a final move Speer realised that Goering’s affluent lifestyle was being financed by money he received from the industrialists. Assuming that he might be concerned about a possible reduction in funds Speer suggested that he called a meeting of the chief industrialists and Speer declared to them that he was Goering’s subordinate. He wrote that Goering’s good humour was instantly restored. To prevent any encroachment on his position by Goering on 21st March he had Hitler sign a decree stating that:

The requirements of the German economy as a whole must be subordinated to the necessities of armaments production.67

Referring to a vaguely worded statement like this allowed Speer to interpret it in different ways in different situations and so gave him more power than a precisely worded legal document. As Speer himself said this decree gave him almost dictatorial powers over the economy, and he could work without being restricted by Goering who, although jealous of Speer’s relationship with Hitler, did not interfere with his plans.

67 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 207
68 As well as showing Speer’s political skill it reveals his ability to control and manipulate Hitler.
The German economy not ready for war

As Minister for Armaments and Munitions Albert Speer soon realised that Germany was not prepared to fight a major world war. For a nation to plan, to start, to fight and to win a major world war requires

- The efficient use of its economic potential. In that respect National Socialist Germany can be considered as having been ill-prepared for war
- A national battle plan that sets out the strategy to be followed and which determines not only the weapons to be used, but also the raw materials that industry will require to produce these weapons.

Up to this time the Nazis leaders did not have a clear military strategy and also did not understand how any war would affect the German economy. They predicted that any war would be fought as a series of fast and mobile campaigns, each of which would be won within weeks or months. The fundamental flaw in this military plan was the belief that Germany would only have to fight brief land campaigns. Economic planning was based on the same false premise. As a result only weapons with a limited production run were designed and produced.

The planned scenario for war was that the Luftwaffe would fly ahead of the fast and hard-hitting tank columns, destroying the enemy's air forces at their aerodromes or in the air. When air superiority had been gained the Luftwaffe would go on to act as long-range artillery, bombing the enemy and softening the enemy up for the final assault. Employing the tactics of overwhelming firepower and rapid movement each campaign could begin and conclude quickly. Each success would provide the economic resources needed for the next campaign.

This belief placed the greatest emphasis on the army, especially the artillery and panzers. The role of the navy and air force was to support the army. One result of this was that the Germans, unlike the allies, never developed the long-range bombers that were essential for destroying a nation’s industrial infrastructure.

The outcome was that before Speer became Minister for Armaments the military ordered a limited number of specific weapons for each campaign and was more involved with the technical aspects and quality of the weapons, rather than the manufacturing implications of this equipment. The result was that there were bottlenecks, waste, delay, and lack of standardisation that made mass production impossible, as well as a huge number of different models that created problems with spare parts. In 1941 only 25% of the guns and ammunition were produced compared to the output in 1918. In 1942 the USA produced 100,000 aeroplanes compared with Germany’s 26,000. Britain alone produced 50% more aeroplanes, in 1942, twice the number of trucks, nearly the same number of guns and tanks, and twelve times the number of armoured cars as Germany did.

It was not until the blitzkrieg tactics failed in Russia in 1942 that Speer was able to attempt to create a long-term or total war economy.
Areas of Responsibility
Speer’s attempts to create a German economy able to fight a modern war meant that he had to come into conflict with the other leaders of Germany, including Hitler.

In attempting to increase production Speer’s major problem was Hitler’s policy of giving an overlapping responsibility to two people. He did this, as he was very suspicious of any friendship between his leaders that might result in a challenge to his leadership. This resulted in a chaotic number of conflicting and overlapping authorities and meant that Speer was drawn into the world of politics.

Hermann Goering
In August 1936 Goering, the head of the Luftwaffe, was placed in control of the Four-Year Plan, which stated:

In four years the German army must be operational and the German economy fit for war.

This involved autarchy and the state and party gaining control over the economy by their policy of Gleichschaltung, although by 1942 the major industrialists were still mainly independent.

Goering was a brave and ruthless man. He had been a fighter pilot during World War one; he created the Gestapo and had organised the Prussian police force. Using a combination of charm and ruthlessness he had eliminated those who opposed the Nazis party’s economic plans and built up stocks of essential raw materials. When in 1937 the industrialists were reluctant to use the more expensive German iron ore he set up a state-run steel works and forced them to comply.

Although Goering was in charge of the German economy he became unable to make decisions and eventually became a drug addict. Under his command industrial output fell in 1941 and 1942. When Speer took over the running of the armaments industry he found a catastrophe. He said that Goering:

Did nothing about these problems. Whenever he did do anything, he usually created total confusion since he never took the trouble to work through the problems but made his decision on the basis of impulsive inspiration.

When Goering was shown the figures on the vastly superior US aircraft production rates he refused to believe them. German industry was in chaos and this explains why Hitler did not want Goering to replace Todt in 1942. However, Goering was still Speer’s nominal superior and resented him. When Speer was hospitalised in 1944 Goering took advantage of the opportunity to strike back at him.

The Gauleiters
The German Empire was administered by a series of Gauleiters who were responsible for the internal administration of their specific district and who had the ability to ignore or to circumvent any instructions with which they disagreed. They were long-term members of the Nazi party and many were Hitler’s comrades from the “old days” before 1933. Hitler always felt relaxed with them, partly because they were not his intellectual or social superiors.

The Gauleiters within Germany had worked hard before 1933 to win votes for the Nazi party in their districts and often had developed a loyalty towards the local people who had assisted the Nazis into power. Sometimes the local factories were also a source of personal income and patronage. The Gauleiters would defend their supporters against Speer when he made decisions that affected their best interests.

Although Speer was the Minister for Armaments the Gauleiters had control of the factories in their local district and they reported directly to Martin Bormann and

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69 Coordination.
70 He was wounded during the 1923 putsch and became dependent on his medication.
71 Speer Inside the Third Reich p: 183
72 The term German Empire was used at this time to describe Germany and the conquered or occupied states.
could appeal for his assistance in any dispute with Speer.

Bormann was an ambitious and manipulative man and gained most of his power from his ability to control access to Hitler and he resented Speer’s ability to bypass him and approach Hitler on a personal level. Bormann saw Speer as a threat to his influence over Hitler. As a result Speer and Bormann disliked each other and Bormann soon became Speer’s greatest political enemy.

Speer soon realised that his greatest problem was finding sufficient labour. Although he was responsible for arms production he had no control of the supply of workers to his factories. There was no central allocation of workers to factories and no compulsion for women to take up war work. At a time when the allies had a policy of total war and their factories were working 24 hours a day some German factories only worked one shift a day. Many Gauleiters refused to allow their workers to work outside of their district or to allow Speer to give directions to factories producing consumer goods in their district.

By the end of the war Speer was forced to use prisoners of war, Jews, and forced workers from the territories occupied by Germany.

**Hitler**

Speer’s final difficulty was Hitler’s belief that the First World War had been lost because of poor civilian morale. He believed that the shortages on the home front in 1916 to 1918 created the November 1918 revolution and the fall in morale that resulted in the German surrender. As a result he refused to risk unpopularity by cutting the production of consumer goods or demanding that the German people make sacrifices as the allies had. He and his advisers always remembered the November 1918 revolution. He did not place the same demands on his citizens the way the allies already had and the output of consumer goods in 1942 was only 3% below what it had been in 1939. For the same reason taxes and duties had not been increased.

In 1942 the failure of Germany’s invasion of Russia resulted in food shortages and in a reduction in the food rations. This caused a dramatic drop in morale and in increasing criticism of the lifestyle of the Nazi elite.

Despite having to fight a war of attrition with an ongoing shortage of workers that resulted in there being more than eight million foreign workers and concentration camp inmates in German factories by 1944, Hitler refused, for ideological reasons, to encourage the employment of women in factories.
The increase in armaments production

Speer was a highly successful arms manufacturer and in his autobiography wrote that within six months he increased the production of:

- Guns by 27%
- Tanks by 25%
- Ammunition by 97%

By 1944 he had increased armaments production by more than 300% with only a 30% increase in the labour force.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1941</th>
<th>1944</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft</td>
<td>9,540</td>
<td>34,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanks</td>
<td>2,900</td>
<td>17,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery shells</td>
<td>75 million</td>
<td>408 million</td>
</tr>
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Speer, however also agreed that many of the experts in his office could have done the same but he had what they lacked – the personal support and full authority of Adolf Hitler. Speer was able to brief Hitler in private about the problems he faced and Hitler gave him all the necessary backing.

With Hitler’s full authority and a peaceful Goering Speer was able to introduce his plans for increasing armaments production. He quickly realised that the nature of the war had changed. To this point all military and economic thinking was based on the assumption that there would be a series of very short blitzkriegs. Speer clearly saw that Germany now faced a long-term war and needed the efficiency of the mass production of a limited number of standard items.

In April 1942 Speer wrote:

This year we are facing the decisive turning point in our history, the war must be ended in the shortest possible time; if not, Germany will lose the war. We must win it by the end of October, before the Russian winter begins, or we have lost it once and for all.73 As Speer was not an engineer and he had no technological solutions and he had no military experience he saw his role as being to identify the problems and to leave it to the experts to find a solution.74 This lack of personal involvement meant that he could eventually take on additional tasks outside of his ministry and have a greater role in the running of the country.

Speer based his ideas on those of Walther Rathenau a Jew who was responsible for Germany’s economy during the World War 1. Rathenau believed that by sharing technical knowledge and having specialist factories and standardised weapons it was possible to double production without the need for additional workers. Many of Speer’s solutions were an extension of the methods used by Rathenau and were already being used by Fritz Todt. Speer found that one of Rathenau’s assistants who had written a memorandum on Rathenau’s methods was still employed in Todt’s department. As a result Speer was able to produce his basic plan of action in just five days. When he showed these plans to Hitler however he wrote that Hitler seemed disinterested.

Speer explained his system in just one page and explained that he:

- Set up 13 committees with full responsibility for each category of weapons. These committees then received an allocation of all of the raw materials they needed. By using this method control over the administration of war production was taken out of the hands of the army bureaucracy.

- The heads of each committee had the responsibility of ensuring that each factory concentrated on the maximum production of just one item, using an assembly-line production system.

- Set up groups containing military officers and weapons designers to supervise new products and to limit the number of new projects. The specialists from industry rather than the generals chaired these groups. For example, Porsche (who developed the

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73 Speer Inside the Third Reich p: 215.

74 Speer’s real talent was in finding highly talented subordinates.
Volkswagen) was placed in charge of the production of tanks.

- He gained long-term contracts for a limited number of standard items.

- He reduced the size of the bureaucracy. Speer saw the size of the traditional authoritarian bureaucracy as one of the greatest causes of Germany’s industrial backwardness. He disliked paperwork and was constantly telling his subordinates to communicate orally rather than in writing and not to file every piece of paper. In November 1943 when an air raid destroyed many of the files in his ministry he saw this as a positive benefit.

- He trusted the businessmen and allowed them the maximum freedom in running their factories as long as they achieved their production target. He called this industrial self-responsibility.

Speer had to overcome opposition from a number of sources including:

- Hitler’s dislike of Speer’s clear lines of authority. Hitler preferred to assign more than one person to the same task. Also Hitler refused to end all long-term building projects, that is anything that would take three years to complete, that Speer saw as being unnecessary and as using steel and raw materials that he needed in his factories.

- Government officials who disliked Speer’s “American methods” that is trusting businessmen and technical experts and encouraging initiative and individual decision making that, in turn, developed the enthusiasm of factory owners and workers. Speer set up committees containing the workers who built the weapons to discuss any mistakes or shortages and to consider possible solutions and improvements in the design and production of these weapons. The Gestapo wanted to arrest managers who had these “defeatist” conversations and the Gauleiters did not like any criticisms being directed at them. Some party members distrusted specialists and industrialists who were not members of the party. Gauleiter Sauckel suggested that the best way to increase output was simply to shoot a few factory managers. Speer also had to protect the members of his ministry who were not party members and he refused to allow the Gestapo to arrest anyone on a charge of sabotage of production unless he agreed. He, however, severely punished anyone who abused his honour system.

- The opposition of the Gauleiters to any proposal to reduce production in non-essential factories in their area of command. The Gauleiters could complain directly to Bormann who would regard Speer’s actions and instructions as an attack on his authority of the Gauleiters.

A study of contemporary documents reveals other possible explanations for Speer’s success.

**Hitler**

On 3rd December 1941, two months before Speer became a minister, Hitler signed a memorandum titled “The Simplification and Improvement of the Performance of our Armaments Industry”. A draft copy of this memorandum was found in Todt’s files and it is quite likely that Todt wrote it. This memorandum outlined many of the policies later implemented by Speer.75

**Karl Saur**

At the end of the war the American military interrogated Speer’s staff at a camp they called “Dustbin”. Saur was Todt’s right-hand-man and then became Speer’s deputy and later his rival for the position of Minister of Armaments. His explanation of the increase in output stressed the role played by Fritz Todt.76

**Dietrich Stahl**

75 See Document 2
76 See Document 3
Stahl was the Head of the Main Committee for Munitions in Speer’s ministry. In his interrogation at “Dustbin” he showed that he had a far more detailed understanding of arms production than Speer did. He gave most of the credit to the specialist heads of each of the committees.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{77} See Document 4
Speer as Hitler’s successor

Speer was extremely ambitious and by chance he had the opportunity to create a career as the greatest architect in Germany. Now he had the possibility of a second career – that of a great political figure and possibly even Hitler’s successor as Fuhrer.

As a minister Speer realised that his relationship with Hitler had changed. No longer Hitler’s architect and confidant but just another member of his political administration and he now saw Hitler only two or three times a month. Moreover Speer was a subordinate who often told Hitler things he did not want to hear such as Speer’s comments in 1942 about the possible loss of the war. Hitler had never allowed one person to gain too much power in case he might threaten his position and he usually limited their power by giving someone else a similar role. Speer now had to fight against the other power groups in order to achieve his aims.

Speer soon found that his greatest problem as armaments minister was finding enough skilled workers. His conflict with Bormann came to a head at the end of February 1942. Speer gave a speech to the Gauleiters and threatened to report them to the Fuhrer if they did not end all unnecessary peacetime building projects and release the hundreds of thousands of workers that Speer wanted to use in his armaments factories. After the meeting the Gauleiters came to him and each wanted an exemption for their personal project. Bormann ignored Speer’s instructions by continuing to expand the buildings at Oberalzberg and Gauleiter Sauckel continued his projects at Weimer. Hitler then ordered the rebuilding of a ruined castle at Salzburg and its conversion into a luxurious guesthouse. Many of the Gauleiters managed to bypass Speer and have their factories given ‘special status’.

When the allies began their bombing attacks on Germany the leaders spent huge sums on building their own private bomb shelters, Goering even had concrete shelters built at regular intervals along a 60-kilometre road leading to his country estate. These projects used hundreds of thousands of skilled workers that Speer could have used in his armaments factories.

Speer he realised that even if he could find workers he could not transfer these workers between districts without the approval of the Gauleiters. He decided that if he were going to get their help he would need to have one of them on his staff to assist him. Planning to make an ally of one of the Gauleiters Speer asked his old

Finding workers

Speer agreed with what Todt told Hitler the day before he died – that the war in Russia had to be won before another Russian winter or Germany would be defeated.

78 By the end of 1944 there were 2,000,000 POWs; 2,800,000 Russians; 1,700,000 Poles; 1,300,000 forced labourers from France; 600,000 Italians and 650,000 Jews in the armaments industry
80 In doing this he showed that he had quickly learnt the language and tactics of the Nazis. Schmidt found that he told the Gauleiters that ‘the Bolsheviks are ahead of us in one respect, their ruthless methods of applying drastic punishments for crimes that even slightly oppose the interests of the state. Here in Germany, especially in the armaments industry, we must apply the severest penalties’
friend Karl Hanke who was now the Gauleiter for Lower Silesia, to join his ministry. At first Hitler agreed, but Bormann, knew the two were friends, and saw this as weakening his power over the Gauleiters and a strengthening of Speer’s political position, and so used his influence to have Hitler refuse Speer’s request.

Bormann’s counter-response was to have Sauckel, one of his own supporters and an old comrade of Hitler, substituted for Hanke and appointed as Commissioner for Labour Deployment. Sauckel’s role was to find the labour that Speer needed by any means, including forced labour from the occupied countries, POWs and Jewish slave labour, and he was made directly responsible in this role to Hitler, not to Speer. Hitler believed that with 250,000,000 people in the German Empire finding enough workers from the occupied countries would not be a problem and so there was no need to mobilise the German population (including women).

Sauckel issued his program on 20th April 1942 saying:

Conquered territories and their manpower are to be exploited completely and conscientiously for the benefit of Germany and its allies...

All prisoners of war, actually in Germany, from the territories of the west as well as the

east must be completely incorporated into the German armaments and munitions industries. Their productivity must be raised to the highest possible level. It must be emphasised, however, that a tremendous additional quantity of foreign labour must be found for the Reich. The occupied areas in the east will provide the greatest pool for this purpose. Consequently it is absolutely essential to use the human reserves of the conquered Soviet territory to the fullest extent. If we do not succeed in obtaining the necessary amount of labour on a voluntary basis, we must immediately institute conscription of forced labour. Thus, apart from the prisoners of war still in the territories, we must requisition skilled or unskilled male and female labour from the Soviet territories from the age of 15 upwards for the labour mobilisation programme.

On the other hand, as things stand at present, one quarter of our total needs of foreign labour can be procured from the occupied territories in the east. The procurement of labour from friendly and also from neutral countries can only a be small part of our total requirements. In this connection, virtually only skilled workers and specialists can be considered.

The employment of all prisoners of war, as well as the use of a tremendous number of civilian workers, has become a prerequisite for carrying out the labour mobilisation programme in this war. All the men must be fed, housed and treated in such a way as to exploit them to the greatest possible extent at the minimum of expenditure.

Sauckel limited Speer’s power and as he was Bormann’s subordinate as a Gauleiter Speer was clearly outmanoeuvred in this exchange.

Speer found that many factories had too few skilled workers to use their machines for more than one shift a day. At the same time hundreds of thousands of workers were building new factories that would not produce weapons for months or years because of a shortage of machine tools. He

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81 Sauckel had been a Gauleiter since 1927 and was a member of the Reichstag.

82 Speer would tell Sauckel how many workers he needed and Sauckel would conscript and deport them from the occupied countries. It is estimated that five million foreigners were forced to work in Germany. Speer had no control over his actions.

83 The term German Empire was used at this time to describe Germany and the conquered or occupied states.

84 At first Sauckel tried to persuade young people to move to Germany. In Poland and the Ukraine they were offered money, houses, medical care, and holidays. However, the official Nazi policy that Aryans were the master race and any foreign worker was biologically inferior soon negated this. These workers from the east were put into camps surrounded by barbed wire to prevent any possibility that they might spread communist ideas. As a result the number of volunteers from the east soon dwindled.

85 Nazism 1919 – 1945 Vol 4 p 241

86 In one year he found 3,638,056 workers of which 1,568,801 were assigned to the armaments industries. Basically Speer’s guilty verdict at Nuremberg was based on his use of these slave workers which Sauckel found for him. At Nuremberg their treatment was described as ‘mass enslavement … carried out by force, fraud, terror, arson … and unrestrained by compassion … it also was a policy of underfeeding and overworking … and subjecting them to every form of degradation, brutality and inhumanity’
suggested to Hitler that he should suspend all long-term building projects. He argued, for instance, that instead of building three new fuel refineries at once they should concentrate on building them one at a time. This way the first factory would be producing oil much faster and overall fewer workers would be needed. Hitler refused as he said that he would need all of the refineries for German expansion into Persia after the defeat of Russia.

An incident with Sauckel showed that others were also in the position of being able to use their influence over Hitler and could use their influence to thwart Speer’s plans.

In April 1942 Speer, who was short 1,000,000 workers, went to Sauckel with a plan to use German women in factories, rather than foreign labourers. Speer knew that in Britain millions of women were being used in their war industries and in World War 1 far more women were employed in German factories than were in 1942. Sauckel replied that he was solely responsible for finding workers and that he was responsible to the Fuhrer and not to Speer. Sauckel obviously saw this as a clear attempt by Speer to expand his empire while undermining his own position.

Sauckel then arranged a meeting with Goering and Speer to resolve the issue. At this meeting Speer stated that Goering was friendly towards Sauckel but acted coldly towards him and gave him little opportunity to advance his case. Sauckel opposed Speer and emphasised to Goering the ‘moral and emotional damage’ that factory work might do to German women and to their ability to have children. Goering agreed with him. Sauckel went to Hitler immediately after this meeting and had him confirm this decision before Speer could speak to Hitler. Later Sauckel told the Gauleiters of this decision and of Hitler’s agreement to a plan to import 500,000 girls from the east to act as maids and cleaners for German housewives.

Speer clearly lost this political battle.

At a time when Germany needed every available worker in the armaments industry these girls were to act as maids and cleaners for German housewives.

In order to provide significant relief for the German housewife, especially mothers with many children and farmers' wives who are extremely busy, and in order to avoid any further danger to their health, the Fuhrer has charged me with procuring 400,000-500,000 picked, strong and healthy girls from eastern territories.

87 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 221
Other struggles
To produce armaments Speer needed steel. He found that during World War I 46.5% of steel production was allocated to the making of weapons, while in 1942 the figure was only 37.5%. To remedy this situation he and Milch convinced Goering to establish a Central Planning Committee to allocate raw materials.88

The Central Planning Board embraces the whole economy and has the following responsibilities:
(a) The power of decision over whether or not new plans are required or whether existing plans should be continued;
(b) The power of decision over whether or not to create new raw material manufacturing plants or whether existing plants should be extended;
(c) The allocation of existing raw materials, to those requiring them;
(d) The distribution of coal and energy to manufacturing plants;
(e) The co-ordination of transport throughout the whole economy.89

At this committee representatives of each of the departments and ministries would present their case for an allocation of raw materials. At times these discussions could become quite heated. Despite this Speer could still not get Hitler’s permission to reduce the percentage of raw materials used to produce consumer goods and to allocate it to his armaments factories.

In 1942 Speer found that the shortage of railway engines and carriages restricted the transportation of men and equipment to Russia. He approached Hitler to explain the situation and took with him Dr Dorpmuller, the Minister of Transport, to provide support. However, Dorpmuller did not back him up at this meeting which made Speer irate, and as a result Hitler postponed any decision. Speer attempted to appoint one of his staff to the position of state secretary in Dorpmuller’s office. Dorpmuller refused, as this would have undermined his own position. Two months later Dorpmuller finally realised that the railway system was a bottleneck that threatened to prevent a victory in Russia and he offered Speer the position of ‘traffic dictator’. He refused.

A few days later Speer went behind Dorpmuller’s back and took Dr Ganzenmuller who had successfully restored railway traffic in the Ukraine, to meet Hitler. Hitler liked him and immediately gave him the position of state secretary in Dorpmuller’s office with instructions to resolve the problem in the fastest possible time.

Hitler said:

The transportation problem is crucial; therefore it must be solved. All my life, but more so than ever in the past winter, I have confronted crucial questions that had to be solved. So-called experts and men who by rights should have been leaders repeatedly told me: “That isn’t possible, that won’t do!” I cannot resign myself to such talk! There are problems that absolutely have to be solved. Where real leaders are present, these problems always are solved and always will be solved.

This cannot be done by pleasant methods. Pleasantness is not what counts for me; in the same way, it is a matter of complete indifference to me what posterity will say about the methods I have been compelled to use. For me there is only a single question that must be solved: We must win the war or Germany faces annihilation.90

Dorpmuller was pushed to one side and Ganzenmuller took control of the efficient functioning of the railways.91 Ganzenmuller was able to speed up traffic, repair locomotives damaged by the Russian winter, and he introduced an assembly-line method for the production of new wagons and engines.

However, a week later Speer was unable to convince Hitler to ban the use of private railway cars of which the Gauleiters were the greatest users.

88 This committee made all the key decisions about economic and industrial priorities and so made Goering’s position as the head of the Four Year Plan irrelevant.
89 Nazism 1919 – 1945 Vol 4 p 229
90 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 223
91 As such his office would have received train movement reports for the extermination camps showing trains arriving full every few hours and departing empty a few hours later
A different Hitler
Speer’s opinion of Hitler began to change with the German advance into Russia in June 1942. At first the Germans assumed that a Russian collapse was inevitable and they looked forward to an easy victory. For the first two months this was the case as the German army made rapid progress. However, the situation changed as the German supply lines became overextended and they found the Russian resistance to be far stronger than they had expected.

During this advance Speer spent a few days every two or three weeks at Hitler’s headquarters in the Ukraine and implied that he had long discussions with the generals about the progress of the war. He became very critical of Hitler and he now saw him as an amateur who made a series of wrong decisions that were largely responsible for Germany losing the war.

These included:
- His “political weakness” in not reducing the production of consumer goods in order to increase the production of weapons.
- Not understanding that the supply columns could not keep up with the rapidly advancing army.
- Not realising that the amount of arms being produced was inadequate for such a large campaign. In 1942 Germany was producing only 25% of the artillery and 33% of the tanks that would be produced in 1944.
- Ordering attacks that were certain to fail because the troops were exhausted.
- Hitler could not realise that his tanks could not move as fast as he wanted (their treads had to be replaced every 800 kilometres).
- Not accepting the advice of his generals and depriving them of the ability to take independent action. Hitler often made wild decisions and being self-taught in military strategy he did not understand what real specialised knowledge was. When the generals argued with Hitler he reacted by replacing General Halder.

Speer describes Hitler as naive, not fully understanding the implications of what was being discussed, and constantly attempting to show himself to be superior to the real experts. When a controversial point was raised he usually postponed making a decision. Speer also said that Hitler had an almost infallible memory for facts and figures, which he often used to intimidate his audience that included his generals. When given an order that they thought was ridiculous some of the generals added little clauses, which Hitler did not understand, to modify his instructions.

Todt had been able to present his arguments in person and he only occasionally needed the support of his staff. As he lacked the necessary technical knowledge Speer countered Hitler’s intimidating barrage of facts and figures by bringing with him to conferences up to twenty experts who could counter Hitler’s arguments. In these conferences with Hitler Speer usually said little. He opened the subject to be discussed and allowed his team to take over. He found that Hitler could not argue against a true expert and that he respected their opinions and often changed his mind after talking to them. Speer noted that others were astonished and envious of his ability to get Hitler to change his mind.

At this time Speer always remained close to Hitler although the relationship between the two seems to have been tense and Speer writes that even he realised that the German invasion had failed when the Russian winter offensive began on 19th November 1942. However, Hitler had difficulty accepting that his armies were being overwhelmed.

He said:

> Our generals are making their old mistakes again. They always overestimate the

92 One example was Hitler’s insistence on producing the maximum number of tanks. This was achieved by producing fewer spare parts. The result was an actual reduction in the number of available tanks as they could not be repaired.

93 He did this so often that those at Hitler’s headquarters referred to his visits as ‘Speer invasions’. This also is an example of Speer’s ability to manipulate Hitler.
strength of the Russians. According to all
the front line reports, the enemy’s human
material is no longer sufficient. They are
weakened; they have lost far too much
blood. But of course nobody wants to accept
such reports. Besides, how badly Russian
officers are trained! No offensive can be
organised with such officers. We know what
it takes! In the short or long run the
Russians will simply come to a halt. They’ll
run down. Meanwhile we shall throw in a few
fresh divisions; that will put things right.\textsuperscript{94}

By the end of 1942 Hitler allowed only
one civilian – Speer – to participate in the
situation reports at his headquarters. Speer
stated that Hitler would never have done
this if Speer had threatened his prestige
among the generals by opposing him. This
implies that Speer had stopped disputing
issues with Hitler and was taking a more
tactful and subordinate role and Speer
said:

The storm had calmed down; Hitler had
regained his standing.

Clearly Speer valued his personal
relationship with the Fuhrer and the
benefits that flowed from this.

Speer remained at Hitler’s headquarters
throughout the defeat at Stalingrad and
clearly blamed the disaster on Hitler’s
refusal to listen to the professional advice
of his generals. General Zeitzler constantly
argued that the troops in Stalingrad should
be withdrawn before they were
surrounded, something Hitler refused to
do. This decision was influenced by
Goering’s personal promise to fully supply
the city by air, something he was unable to
do. Speer’s brother died at Stalingrad
despite his attempts to have him evacuated
by air after he had been wounded.

\textbf{The Leader crisis}

In his chapter headed ‘Intrigues’ Speer
writes that for the first time he was forced
to engage in political manoeuvring. He
wrote that he attempted to remain focused
on his specialist work but because of the
nature of Hitler’s authoritarian rule he was
forced into political battles simply by his
being a member of the leadership.

Speer had always been in conflict with
Martin Bormann. In the middle of 1942
Bormann, General Keitel and Lammers,
the head of the Reich Chancery, moved to
give themselves complete control over
Hitler. From that time on all orders signed
by Hitler had to be cleared by them. They
said this was to prevent Hitler’s habit of
signing contradictory decrees. Keitel had
to approve of all orders about the armed
forces Lammer, all constitutional matters,
and Bormann all domestic matters. The
three would therefore surround Hitler and
have a stranglehold on the decision-
making process. The effect of this would
be to prevent people like Speer
approaching Hitler directly and gaining his
approval on an issue.

Bormann drew up Hitler’s appointment
calendar so that he decided who in the
government and party could, or could not,
see Hitler. The Gauleiters and government
officials now had to ask Bormann to
present their proposals to Hitler. Bormann
was usually very efficient in doing this and
most received their reply in writing in
days, instead of having to wait for months
as they had had to in the past. Speer was
often present when Bormann presented
these requests. He usually summarised
them in a few sentences and gave his own
opinion, to which Hitler usually
nodded and said ‘agreed’. Bormann would then
write lengthy instructions, based on his
interpretation of Hitler’s comments. The
only exception to this system was Speer
who still had unlimited access to Hitler.

Speer had developed good relations with
Goebbels. He had asked him to use his
propaganda system to promote an increase
in arms production. Speer took advantage
of this to gain personal publicity and he
soon became one of the best known of the
Nazi leaders. He says that this was useful
in his political battles with government
officials. He described Goebbels as being
hard-working, objective, and logical.

\textsuperscript{94} Speer, \textit{Inside the Third Reich} p 247
Speer stated that it was Goebbels who initiated the first plot in December 1942 to reduce the power of Bormann. Speer wrote that Goebbels approached him, Walter Funk and Robert Ley. They intended to use the defeat at Stalingrad as the justification for major political changes and the mobilisation of the entire country for war. The military situation was so serious that even Goebbels believed that the civilian economy had to be made subordinate to the needs of armaments production. However, although Hitler had ordered an increase in arms production he also ordered the conscription of 800,000 men working in the arms industry.

Goebbels, Speer, Funk, and Ley first attempted to approach Hitler with plans for an austerity campaign, but Bormann blocked this move, as he feared the potential influence of this alliance. At a meeting with Lammers to discuss the issue Sauckel insisted that cutting consumer production was unnecessary as he could provide all the skilled workers the armaments industries needed from the conquered countries.

Goebbels then complained that Hitler did not hear their opinion on issues and that because Hitler was so involved with the war he had given up his role of a political leader for his military role.

He said:

Things cannot go on this way. Here we are sitting in Berlin. Hitler does not hear what we have to say about the situation. I cannot influence him politically, cannot even report the most urgent measures in my area. Everything goes through Bormann. Hitler must be persuaded to come to Berlin (from army headquarters) more often.95

Bormann was controlling domestic policy and his control had to be reduced. Goebbels then criticised Hitler, saying that Germany did not have ‘a leadership crisis but a leader crisis’. Both Goebbels and Speer feared that Bormann was aiming at becoming Hitler’s heir and the new Fuhrer.

Speer proposed using Goering as an ally. Goering had, on paper, immense power as the head of the Four-Year Plan and as the chairman of the Reich Defence Council he could issue decrees without consulting Hitler. To now this authority and power had not been used. However, if he could be won over to their side this could be the method to break Bormann’s power. Speer was not concerned about Goering’s power being restored as The Central Planning Board, which he controlled made most of the decisions for the Four Year Plan.

On 28th February 1943 Speer visited Goering and convinced him to have a meeting with Goebbels the following day. Speer wrote that he and Goebbels then manipulated Goering into joining them by telling him how Bormann constantly undermined Goering to Hitler (Goering was still the official successor to Hitler) and Speer describes Goering as being an ‘easy mark’. He also said that Goering saw this as an opportunity to restore his status in the party.

On 5th March 1943 Speer visited Hitler, supposedly to gain his approval for a number of decisions, however, his real purpose was to get Hitler to invite Goebbels to his headquarters.

On 8th March Goebbels joined Speer at Hitler’s headquarters. Before the meeting Speer warned him that Hitler was irate about Goering’s failure to stop the allied bombing attacks and that they should avoid mentioning his name.96 The two of them met with Hitler after supper and Speer tells that Goebbels took the initiative in the discussion and in flattering Hitler’s vanity. Just as they were discussing the plan to reactivate the Defence Council news of another air raid on Nuremberg arrived and Hitler began a tirade on the many failures of Goering.97

With this the plot collapsed.

95 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 258
96 Goebbels said of Speer that ‘as usual his preliminary work was intelligent and skilful’ Schmidt p 80.
97 Speer implies that Bormann may have known about this plot and already undermined Goering in Hitler’s eyes.
Goebbels’s diary entry for the 2nd March 1943 gave the impression that he was the organiser of the plan and that Albert Speer played a secondary role. It also supports the belief that Speer was actively involved in the political intrigue of this time.  

Speer made an attempt to undermine both Bormann and his ally Sauckel. He asked for a meeting with Hitler and the topic was Sauckel’s alleged falsification of the figures, he had given to Hitler as to the number of worker he had found for Speer (there was a shortage of several thousand). Speer arranged for Goebbels, Goering and Milch to be present. However, on their arrival they found that Himmler, Bormann and Keitel were also with Hitler.

Sauckel simply denied Speer’s claims and refused to believe that he needed an additional 2,100,000 workers. Milch had spoken to Goering and ensured that he understood what he had to say, however, Goering switched sides during the discussion and attacked Milch, and indirectly Speer. Speer later found that Bormann had given Goering six million marks from the Adolf Hitler Fund.

The meeting was a failure and Speer’s group of allies was divided and each was suspicious of the other. Goebbels then decided that they could not win against Bormann and switched sides. He agreed to send all of his reports to Hitler via Bormann in return for Bormann getting Hitler to agree to them. Bormann offered Speer a similar arrangement, which he refused.

Bormann had definitely won this battle and Speer wrote that, by this time, Hitler no longer automatically agreed to his own requests. Bormann was doing everything he could to block any increase in Speer’s power.

**Missing workers**

Speer made an attempt to undermine both Bormann and his ally Sauckel. He asked for a meeting with Hitler and the topic was Sauckel’s alleged falsification of the figures, he had given to Hitler as to the number of worker he had found for Speer (there was a shortage of several thousand). Speer arranged for Goebbels’ apology, as he was too sick to attend. Speer believes that he knew what was going to happen and decided to stay out of it.

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98 See Goebbels’ account in Document 5
99 Sauckel figures were for all of the workers he sent to Speer. However, many of these workers were unskilled and were rejected by the factories.

100 Goebbels sent his apology, as he was too sick to attend. Speer believes that he knew what was going to happen and decided to stay out of it.
An alliance with the navy

Speer’s next attack on Bormann came through his support for Admiral Doenitz (the head of the German U-boats) which Bormann saw as an attempt by Speer to build up a system of alliances within the army and navy. 101

Speer had met Doenitz through his conferences about the building of the U-boat pens in France and had later learnt that Admiral Raeder the Commander of the Navy was planning to replace Doenitz.

Speer wrote:

When I was in headquarters at the beginning of January, Hitler was worked up over foreign press reports of a naval battle, which the navy command had not informed him about in detail. As if by chance, in our subsequent conference he raised the question of the feasibility of assembly line building of U-boats, but soon he became more interested in the troubles I was having in my collaboration with Raeder. I told him of the stricture against my discussing technical questions with Doenitz, of the U-boat officers’ fears that their commander was going to be replaced, and of the censorship of the photo captions.

By now I had learned, from watching Bormann’s tactics, that one had to plant suspicions very carefully and gradually for them to be effective with Hitler. Any direct attempt to influence him was hopeless, since he never accepted a decision which he thought had been imposed on him. Therefore I merely hinted that all obstacles standing in the way of our U-boat plans could be eliminated if Doenitz were given his head. Actually, what I wanted to achieve was the replacement of Raeder. But knowing the tenacity with which Hitler clung to his old associates I hardly hoped that I would succeed.

On January 30, Doenitz was named Grand Admiral and simultaneously appointed Commander in Chief of the navy, while Raeder was kicked upstairs. He became Admiral Inspector of the navy, which entitled him solely to the privilege of a state funeral.102

Hitler gave building U-boats the highest priority, but three months previously he had also given tank production the highest priority. Doenitz realised that this would involve him in a political struggle with the other sections of the armed forces to gain the men and material that he needed. He decided that cooperating with Speer’s armaments industry was in his own best interest and he offered to give him responsibility for all armaments production for the navy. In return Speer agreed to produce a new, improved type of U-boat with greater range and speed and to double the number of minesweeper and PT boats.

Speer had to find the right person to head this project and to develop a method of producing these submarines. He selected Otto Merker who, up to then, had been building fire engines. By 5th July 1943 Merker and his team had developed a method of building U-boats in sections on a production line in inland factories and these were transported to the coast where they were assembled.

Clearly any increase in U-boat numbers came about as a by-product of Speer’s political manoeuvring.

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101 Speer had established very good relations with the army generals such as Guderian and Fromm and his personal friendship with Milch (and Goering’s inaction) gave him control over armaments for the air force. However, to now, the navy had remained outside of his control.

102 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 272
Expanded role
On 26th July 1943 Speer gained Hitler’s approval for all war production to be placed under his control. He explained to Hitler that this would free up 500,000 workers who could be used in the arms industries. This gave him responsibility for all consumer factories, including those controlled by the Gauleiters, and would allow him to convert them to armaments production. The Gauleiters saw this as an attack on their power, as well as threatening a source of patronage and favours and they resented any infringement of their independence. They opposed Speer and looked to Bormann for support.

Speer went to Hitler for his signature on the final document and Hitler refused, saying that Bormann had warned him against signing and he suggested that Speer was trying to trick him, saying:

I am glad that in Bormann at least I have a faithful soul around me.”

Speer enlisted Funk’s support and the two of them visited Goering and gained his support by stressing that this would in no way affect his power as head of the Four-Year Plan. With this Hitler finally signed – making Speer Reich Minister of Armaments and War Production.

Speer concludes that this time he had defeated Bormann and was “accumulating more and more power myself”.

However, he says that Bormann used all of his energy and cunning to attack him and he united the Gauleiters to oppose him. Speer had to complain to Hitler constantly about the reluctance of the Gauleiters to cede some of their power to Speer. Bormann was now telling his associates that Speer was planning to replace Hitler and Speer agrees that he had often discussed this possibility with Milch.

Speer in turn seems to have developed good relations with most of the people who opposed Bormann. He states that his work allowed him to develop good relations with the leaders of the army Guderian, Zeitzler and Fromm, and the air force, Milch, and now Doenitz in the navy. Speer had formed a friendship with everyone in Hitler’s inner group who opposed Bormann, including his army, navy and armed forces adjutants, and Hitler’s personal doctor.

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103 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p: 275.
104 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p: 275.
The second man
In his book Speer refers to himself as being the “second man in the state”, Hitler being the first. Towards the end of 1943 Hitler referred to him and Himmler as ‘you two peers’. Speer stated that he was now moving outside of Bormann’s control and he was clearly winning the race to gain power.

General Schmundt told Speer that the army had full confidence in him: 

You can alway rely on the army Herr Speer. It is behind you.

General Zeitzler also said:

The Fuhrer is so pleased with you. He recently said that he placed the greatest hopes in you, now that a new sun has arisen after Goering.

Speer was certain that both of these comments got back to Bormann.

Mentioning his hopes of becoming the ‘First Man’, Speer believed that, at this time Hitler was considering who he would appoint as his successor and Speer believed that he was the most likely candidate.

At the time Hitler must have been wondering whom he should select for his successor... Hitler probably thought he recognised kindred features in me...Possibly he regarded me as an artistic genius who had successfully switched to politics. so that I thus indirectly served as a confirmation of his own career

Speer believed that Hitler saw him as a gifted artist like himself, someone who had an impressive position in the political hierarchy, someone who had achieved much in the armaments industry, as well as having ability in the military field. He stated that to Bormann this spelt danger and that he constantly told his associates that Speer was an enemy of the party and that he was planning to succeed Hitler.

Among friends Speer called Bormann ‘the man with the hedge clippers’ as he always used all his energy and brutality to prevent anyone becoming more powerful than himself. From now on Bormann was at war with Speer and used his Gauleiters to attack him constantly, which sometimes so depressed him that, at times, he considered resigning his position.

Speer, however, was confident that Hitler would not replace him as armaments minister as so much depended on him personally that his removal would be unthinkable and would have damaged the war industry and would have reduced the chances of victory.

105 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 276
106 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 275
107 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 276
108 Hitler often spoke of retiring to the city of Linz as soon as the war ended
109 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 276
Military strategy
By 1942 the allies were bombing Germany. Speer wrote that this actually increased his prestige as he managed to increase production, despite the damage.

On 30th May 1942 the British used 1,046 bombers to attack the city of Cologne. Milch and Speer were visiting Goering the next morning and Goering refused to accept that this number of enemy aircraft could exist and, in Speer’s presence, ordered the Gauleiter of Cologne to supply Hitler with false figures. Three days later Speer was at Hitler’s headquarters and he made Hitler aware of Goering’s activities. Hitler was furious.

In May 1943 the British attacked the dams in the Ruhr Valley. This attack had the potential to destroy the electrical supply for the industrial heart of Germany. Two weeks later Speer proposed to Hitler that they use similar tactics to destroy an essential requirement for all of the allies’ industries. He would establish a group of experts to identify similar key targets in Russia and they chose the Russian electrical power plants. Hitler refused to implement this idea saying that the General Staff would not want to take advice from him.110

On 26th November Speer gained Goering’s approval to set up a group of long-range bombers to attack these power plants but he did not tell Hitler until December. However, the German retreat soon meant that the air force did not have the range to reach their target. Speer set up a committee of experts then to come up with a plan to destroy the British coal industry, but the Luftwaffe no longer had the ability to put this proposal into operation.

On December 19th 1942, Speer was alarmed by the devastating damage to German industry caused by the allies’ air attacks on Hamburg, and those on the ball bearing factories at Schweinfurt which had cut production by 60 per cent. This had the potential of stopping all arms production by destroying a few key industries. He said that attacks on just six more major cities would have brought all arms production to a halt. He suggests that these key industries be scattered into towns that, to now, had not been bombed. The Gauleiters rejected this proposal, as it would have given Speer control of the factories and of the workers in their district.

Speer stated that he constantly checked with his factory managers in the bombed cities as to the extent of the allied air raid damage. He then confirmed that Bormann was passing on the correct figures to Hitler.

At end of 1943 General Thomas presented a study which gave a high rating to the Soviet war potential. Hitler was irate about this and forbade the High Command of the Armed Forces from making any further reports on this subject. In an attempt to assist the generals Speer had his planning board write a document evaluating the Russian armaments production capacity and sent it to the military operations staff. Keitel reprimanded him and told him not to send any more similar documents.111 Speer arranged for a young army officer, who was married to one of Hitler’s secretaries, to present it to Hitler at a conference. Hitler ignored the report.

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110 This would also be a dramatic change in Speer’s role and would give him a voice in military strategy.

111 Speer was acting outside his assigned role and could be seen as attempting to influence military policy. As Hitler was the Commander in Chief of the army and responsible for military strategy it could be argued that Speer was attempting to replace Hitler. The generals would have supported this as they now saw Hitler as an amateur.
Confronting Bormann
Speer was able to use the need to increase arms production to his political advantage in his struggle with Bormann. By the end of 1943 the arms industries of Germany were at full capacity and Speer looked at the unused industrial potential of the occupied countries. At first Hitler was reluctant to use this capacity as his long-term plan was to eliminate all of their industries as he feared that factories might breed communism and as a result few German armaments came from these occupied countries.

One of the ways that Sauckel found enough workers for Speer was by making the occupied countries provide forced labour. Speer believed that this was inefficient as it encouraged the workers, many of whom worked in armaments factories, to join the Resistance and the workers Sauckel did find were often of limited value as they were unskilled and could not speak German.

After gaining Hitler’s approval to set up a Pan European planning council on 17th September 1943 Speer came to an arrangement with the French Government. Under his scheme French factories would produce consumer goods for the German market for example clothing, shoes and furniture, so allowing the German factories producing similar items to be converted to armaments production. He also promised that French workers in these factories would be exempted from forced labour inside Germany.

In doing this he undermined both Sauckel who knew nothing about this plan and was furious and the Gauleiters who would lose their authority over the factories in their districts. He then beat Sauckel to Hitler and ensured that he had his approval before Sauckel could act. He quickly extended this system to Holland, Belgium, and Italy. Soon the number of forced labourers from France fell from 50,000 a month to fewer than 5,000 a month.

In August 1943 Speer came to an arrangement with Himmler who had just been appointed Minister of the Interior and so he had some authority over the Gauleiters. Bormann had been appointing more and more of his personal supporters to the position of Gauleiter and Himmler promised Speer that he would assist him by limiting the power of the Gauleiters.

With Himmler’s promise of support Speer gave a speech to a meeting of the Gauleiters at Posen in the morning of 6th October 1943, telling them that they could not rely on secret weapons such as rockets to win the war and that the allies had gained the initiative. He said that the whole economy of Germany had to change and that 1.5 million German workers had to be transferred from producing consumer goods to working in the armaments plants. From now on all consumer goods would be made in France. He then said that the leaders of Germany had to make sacrifices and that the past policy of many of the Gauleiters of obstructing his plans to close down factories producing consumer goods would not be tolerated. If districts did not close industries within two weeks of receiving his instructions he would act firmly against them ‘with the authority of the Reich government’ and the full support of Himmler.

The Gauleiters were irate and said that Speer was threatening them with being sent to the concentration camps. When he asked Bormann if he could speak again to correct this impression Speer said that Bormann seemed friendly at the time but he told Speer that there was no need for him to speak again, as there were no

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112 Hitler thought that it was an excellent idea as it created 10,000 French factories producing goods for Germany and avoided having to transport those workers to Germany and then having to feed and house them.

113 He said ‘You will please take note of what I’m saying. The manner in which some of the Gaue have hitherto obstructed the shutdown of consumer goods production will no longer be tolerated...I can assure you that I am prepared to apply the authority of the Reich Government at any cost. I have discussed this with ReichFuhrer SS Himmler, and from now on districts that do not carry out within two weeks the measures I request will be dealt with firmly.’
misunderstandings. Speer then wrote that many of the Gauleiters became so drunk that night that Speer complained to Hitler about it the following morning.114

Speer’s strategy failed as Bormann was able to use the Gauleiters’ anger with Speer as a means of undermining his standing with Hitler, who regarded the Gauleiters as his comrades from the old pre-1933 days.

Himmler did attempt to support Speer and sent orders to the Gauleiters through his SS commanders in each of the districts. However Bormann, was able to appeal to Hitler and have him prohibit Himmler from taking such steps. Himmler eventually withdrew his support for Speer and Speer said that from this time on he could no longer rely on Hitler’s automatic support. Himmler then sent all of Speer’s documents about his disputes with the Gauleiters directly to Bormann who wrote back that he had investigated Speer’s claims and had found that they were without foundation.

Soon Himmler and Bormann were on a first-name basis and Himmler accepted that the Gauleiters were independent of his control. Finally Hitler banned Speer from taking any action against the Gauleiters, and Speer concludes that he had endangered his life by his actions.

After having failed twice in the power struggle five days later he counter-attacked by having Hitler appoint him to the position of planning the reconstruction of all cities damaged by the allied bombing. He justified this on the grounds that many of the Gauleiters were destroying historic buildings that had been damaged by the bombing. This gave him some control over the cities in the districts administered by the Gauleiters.

**Split with Hitler**

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114 This became a vital piece of evidence when the speech given by Himmler at the same meeting was found. See the section on his knowledge of the treatment of the Jews in section three.

Early in November the Russian army was about to recapture the town of Nikopol, an important centre for the production of manganese, essential for arms production. Hitler insisted that the army immediately counter-attack as he said that Germany only had a three-month supply of manganese. General Zeitzler rang Speer and said that he had just had a violent argument with Hitler and asked for his assistance in having this order rescinded. He believed that it would result in another Stalingrad. Speer sent Zeitzler a report with a copy to Hitler, saying that even if the Russians recaptured Nikopol there were sufficient stocks to maintain full production for eighteen months. When Speer visited him two days later Hitler was furious and screamed at him that he had made him seem a liar and that he was only to send memos to him.

Speer described Hitler in 1942 and 1943 as being a ‘changed man’. He became isolated, his mind was sluggish, and he was unwilling to accept new ideas. He reacted to the constant stress of the German defeats with disappointment, dejection, and forced optimism and more and more he said ‘there is no turning back we can only move forward we have burnt our bridges’. He increasingly made his decisions in isolation and avoided all personal conversations and he also suffered from insomnia. More and more he talked about hanging up his field grey jacket and retiring to Linz. Speer even found it impossible to convince Hitler to tour the bombed cities in order to improve morale.

Speer describes Hitler as being neither a competent executive chief, a vigorous head of the armed forces nor a capable commander of the army. Speer says that he had discussed Hitler’s state of mind with his adjutants and his associates.

Speer was also finding that his control over Hitler was waning. He attempted to tell Hitler the truth about allied aircraft production figures that Goering had underestimated to Hitler but Hitler refused to believe what Speer was saying. Speer says that Hitler was now speaking to him in an
aloof and impersonal manner and ‘it was clear to everyone I was in disfavour’. By the end of 1943 Hitler was beginning to contact Saar, one of Speer’s subordinates, for information rather than Speer.

Bormann was very friendly with Saur and Dorsch, both long-term members of the party. As a result Speer said that he started to feel insecure in his own ministry. His first response was to appoint a deputy from industry to each of the ten department heads, but Saur and Dorsch prevented him appointing a deputy to their departments. Since Speer realised that Dorsch was plotting against him on 21st December 1943 he put two people that he knew he could trust in control of the previously independent Todt Organisation.  

In order to escape from the pressures of work Speer went to the most isolated place he could find – northern Lapland. He was there for Christmas, passing up an opportunity to spend Christmas with his family, while he was inspecting a forward post a Russian sniper shot a soldier standing next to him.

A few days later Bormann organised a conference at Hitler’s headquarters to prepare a plan for the supply of labour in 1944. Speer had convinced Himmler that they should unite in this instance as Himmler was responsible for the police services in the occupied countries and any increase in forced labour would result in more partisan activities. The day before the meeting Speer suggested to Hitler that they should discuss the key points in private. He said that Hitler became aggressive and said in an icy voice that he would not put up with any attempts to influence him and that he would make the decisions himself. It became obvious during the conference that Bormann had prepared Hitler who ignored Speer’s comments and acted coldly and rudely towards him, at one stage saying:

I will not have you trying once again to force your ideas on a conference. I am chairing the meeting and I shall decide at the end what is to be done. Not you. Kindly remember that.  

With this Himmler remained silent. Hitler then asked each of his ministers how many workers they needed and wrote down the answers. The total was four million. Hitler then asked Sauckel if he could find that number of workers. Sauckel replied:

Of course Mein Fuhrer. I give you my word on that. But to fill the quota I’ll have to have a free hand again in the occupied territories.

Hitler then gave Sauckel permission to find these workers in any way he wished. When Speer tried to interject Hitler made it obvious that Sauckel and not Speer had control over the supply of labour.

Are you responsible to me for the labour force or is party Comrade Sauckel?

When Speer tried to have Sauckel promise not to take workers from the restricted factories Hitler said:

What more do you want, Herr Speer? Isn’t it enough if Party Comrade Sauckel assures you that? Your mind should be at ease about French industry.

Speer was in disfavour and Bormann had won the battle between them. Bormann then started to apply more pressure on him by having the Gestapo investigate members of his staff.

Speer describes himself as being depressed, physically exhausted and with constant pain in his knee.

On 18th January 1944 Speer was hospitalised.

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115 To this point Dorsch had been in control of the Todt Organisation although it could only operate outside of Germany.

116 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 320.
117 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 321
118 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 321,
Speer in hospital

Speer spent more than two months in hospital. Because Hitler often used an individual’s illness as the reason to remove them from the government or the party Speer was determined to continue to run his ministry from his bed. His secretaries were placed in rooms in the same building and a direct telephone line was installed in his room. At one stage he was convinced that this direct line had been tapped. He often worked until midnight and in doing so he hoped to maintain a high profile.

Speer quickly found that a number of groups were taking advantage of the opportunity to work against him.

- Sauckel tried to gain control of the workers in Speer’s factories
- Bormann used the opportunity to have his district economic advisers try to take over control and direction of the industrialists
- Himmler was planning to set up a series of industrial factories in the concentration camps which would be controlled by the SS. Speer had always opposed this as it would be inefficient and weaken his own position. Himmler took advantage of Speer’s illness to push through his plans
- Bormann, Himmler and Goering used the opportunity to get back at Speer for his attempts to replace Hitler. One of his deputies, Dorsch, tried to take over control of the old Todt Organisation. Dorsch had, in the past, supplied Bormann with confidential information and was also now found to also have been a Gestapo agent. Dorsch was also working with Bormann in preventing the promotion of Gerhard Frank an official whom Speer trusted.

Bormann continued to apply pressure and on 1st March 1944 he wrote to Speer:

Dear party comrade Speer,

This evening, the Fuhrer instructed me to inform you that he is extremely annoyed that the construction of bunkers for the foreign embassies has been halted. Orders from the Fuhrer must be carried out by every German, and it is by no means permitted for them to be suspended or blocked. Evidently, a number of your colleagues are unaware of this and, therefore, they must he enlightened by you once again on this basic point. If the Fuhrer receives another piece of information such as is contained in the enclosed, he will immediately have the officials responsible arrested for contravening an order from the Fuhrer and consigned to a concentration camp. The Fuhrer requests that you immediately order the continuation of the construction of the bunkers and confirm this in writing. The Fuhrer expressly instructed me to pass on his orders to you verbatim.\(^\text{119}\)

Speer constantly wrote to Hitler asking for his help and support, writing that he wished to dismiss Dorsch, one of Hitler’s favourites, but he never received a reply – Hitler ignored him. Hitler then had a number of confidential talks with Dorsch, which told Speer and others that the balance of power had definitely shifted against him. This encouraged others to also attack Speer. He described Hitler at this time as being cold and unfriendly and he soon realised when he received a bowl of flowers with a standard typewritten note that he had been dropped to the lowest rung on the hierarchy.

I was no longer counted as Hitler’s favourite minister and one of his possible successors a few whispered words by Bormann and a few weeks of illness had put me out of the running.\(^\text{120}\)

Hitler turned to Dorsch for confidential information, which strengthened his position at Speer’s expense and made it impossible for Speer to dismiss him.

For the first twenty days Professor Gebhardt, who was a good friend of Himmler, and an SS group leader, was Speer’s doctor. When, after three weeks, Speer’s condition grew critical and he seemed to be close to death with a pulmonary embolism, his wife,

\(^{119}\) Nazism 1919-1945 vol 4 p 12
\(^{120}\) Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 330.
Margarete,\(^\text{121}\) had a new doctor, Dr Koch, appointed. According to Speer Koch later said that Gebhardt had wanted to perform an unnecessary and life-threatening operation. Later another source told Speer that at this time Himmler was saying that Speer was dangerous and that he would have to disappear.

On 23rd February 1944 General Milch visited Speer and told him that the allies were bombing aircraft factories and production was now only 35 percent of the planned output. Milch brought with him a written proposal that they establish a ‘fighter aircraft staff’ containing staff from Speer’s ministry and the air force to develop methods to improve production. Speer telephoned Goering and outlined this proposal. This could have been seen as being the first step towards the integration of his ministry with the only section of the armed forces for which he did not already produce arms. Goering refused, saying that Speer was trying to take over part of his responsibilities. Speer decided to take the matter further and rang Hitler to seek his support. Hitler agreed with the concept but became angry when Speer suggested having Hanke appointed to this position. He said that Hitler became very cold and unfriendly towards him and refused his request. Hitler then appointed Saur to the position.

When Hitler did visit Speer after ten weeks Speer described Hitler as looking repulsive with a broad nose and sallow colour. In spite of Hitler’s friendly attitude Speer said that he had no interest or enthusiasm for working with Hitler and he wished to return to his family. He realised how little Hitler cared for him or appreciated what he had done.

Speer writes that he regained his assertiveness when his enemies tried to eliminate him. Goering used this opportunity to attack Speer and reassert himself as the second man in Germany. He spread rumours that Speer was too ill to return to work and he started to look for someone to replace him. Robert Ley quickly volunteered to replace Speer as Minister for Armaments. Goering started taking Saur and Dorsch to his conferences with Hitler. Bormann and Himmler also undermined Hitler’s confidence in Speer’s administration by having three of Speer’s key administrators dismissed. At this time only Doenitz, Milch and the army generals, such as Fromm, remained loyal to Speer.

In the past Hitler had suggested the building of six huge underground factories for the key armaments industries. Speer had always resisted this proposal, as he believed that these shelters would not be effective against bombers and would take years to build. On 14\(^\text{th}\) April 1944 Goering used this plan to attack Speer. He discussed the concept with Dorsch and he suggested that Dorsch and the Todt Organisation could build these shelters. However, Dorsch told Goering that Speer would only allow the Todt Organisation to operate in the occupied territories, although he did already have the plans for an underground shelter that he was intending to build in France. Goering went to Hitler and on 14\(^\text{th}\) April Hitler gave Dorsch control over the project to build six of these underground shelters, expanding his role to include construction inside Germany. He also gave this project top priority. Speer was not consulted about this decision and he had no control over Dorsch as a separate organisation under the control of Dorsch had been established and it had been made independent of Speer.

It was on 19\(^\text{th}\) April that Speer wrote to Hitler, stating that the plan would not work, as there were not sufficient men and resources. Already Speer had to cease work on the building of new arms factories so as to have sufficient men and resources. Already Speer had to cease work on the building of new arms factories to maintain production in the existing factories. He asked that Hitler reverse this decision and leave Dorsch in charge of only the construction work in occupied countries. He ended his letter with an offer to resign if his requests were not agreed to. Hitler not only refused his requests, he was very angry at Speer’s attitude. Goering rang Speer and said that Hitler

\(^{121}\) Gretel.
would not let him resign and suggested that he take prolonged sick leave.

On 20th April 1944 Walter Rohland, Speer’s expert on tank production, visited him and said that word of his offer to resign was common knowledge and he begged him not to resign. He said that it was essential that he remain at his post as word was spreading that Hitler intended to order a scorched-earth policy. Speer stated that he felt a sense of responsibility towards the country and the people to save as much as possible of the nation’s industry so it could survive after the war was lost.

Milch arrived with a verbal message from Hitler, saying that he had esteem for Speer and he wanted to continue their relationship. Afterwards Speer found out that Milch had almost forced Hitler to make that statement. Speer decided to return as long as Dorsch was placed under his command. Speer decided to see Hitler to resolve the situation. After a conversation with Hitler he managed to return to Hitler’s inner circle and had Dorsch confirmed as his subordinate, saying:

The desire to retain the position of power I had achieved was unquestionably a major factor.

Speer wrote that Hitler seemed willing to do anything that he wanted, including a reversal of his decision to make Dorsch independent of him and he even used the phrase that he seemed ‘to be courting him’.

I am determined not to separate these fields. You know I have nobody I can turn building over to. Such a misfortune that Dr Todt was killed. You know what building means to me, Herr Speer. Please understand! I will approve sight unseen all the measures you think necessary for the construction area.

However Speer also says that their relationship had developed a crack and his loyalty was shaky and would never be the same again. Despite this he said that he still had faith in Hitler and was once again under the spell of his personal magnetism.

Speer noted that as he was again popular with Hitler Bormann changed his attitude towards Speer. Bormann spoke to him in a friendly manner and assured him that he was not involved in the intrigue against him. Speer states that he had come out victorious in the power struggle with Goering, Himmler and Bormann. In saying this he confirms that he was an active participant in the political power struggles of that time.

Speer repeated a conversation he had in May 1944 with one of the Gauleiters who told him that Bormann was still actively encouraging the Gauleiters to be hostile towards him. When he repeated this conversation to Hitler he was told that complaints about him had been received but Hitler had decided to ignore them. This meant that Bormann had been continuing his campaign to undermine him. Hitler then advised Speer in a friendly manner not to offend the Gauleiters as they had a lot of power and could make things very difficult for him.

At the end of this section Speer writes that while he still retained his faith in Hitler he became aware of the steadily increasing distance between Hitler and himself. He was becoming more independent and was more willing to oppose Hitler.

He returned to work on 8th May 1944

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122 In his book he does not explain how he managed to do this.
123 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 342.
124 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 341
125 This statement proves that there was intrigue against Speer while he was ill.
126 On 22nd May Speer appointed Colonel von Below as his liaison with Hitler with orders to keep him informed of anything Hitler might say about him.
Speer had doubts about a German victory

It was at this time that Speer began to seriously doubt that Germany could win the war. The sight of allied aircraft flying unopposed over Germany made a deep impression on him. The British and Americans had developed a huge fleet of long-range heavy bombers plus fighter aircraft with sufficient range to accompany them to Germany. They began a systematic campaign to destroy Germany’s industrial capacity to fight the war.

On 12th May 1944 nearly 1,000 bombers attacked the German fuel plants. To Speer this was the turning point of the war. Until then he had been able to produce all of the weapons that the German military needed.

Speer told Hitler:

The enemy has struck us at one of our weakest points, if they persist we will soon no longer have any fuel production worth mentioning.  

To him it was the beginning of the end for German armaments production.

When he saw Hitler five days latter he told him that Germany’s greatest weakness was its fuel plants and a determined allied bombing campaign against them could cost Germany the war. Speer knew that Goering, Keitel and Hitler would make out that this situation was not as bad as he claimed so he brought a team of expert industrialists with him and their statistics convinced Hitler that Speer was right.

Hitler said:

In my view the fuel, Buna rubber, and nitrogen plants represent a particularly sensitive point for the conduct of the war, since vital materials for armaments are being manufactured in a small number of plants.

Despite this Goering told Speer at the end of the meeting that what he said was pessimistic nonsense.

On 28th May the allies bombed the fuel plants inside Germany and the oilfields at Ploesti in Rumania. Total fuel production was halved. Speer took advantage of this opportunity to attack Goering whose standing as the commander of the air force was already low and who had made out that Speer was over-estimating the potential impact of these attacks. He took advantage of his weakness to propose to Hitler that he take over all armaments for the air force.  He said:

My motive was largely a desire to pay Goering back for his treacheries during my illness.

Goering accepted his loss of control over air force armaments production gracefully and then complained about Hitler’s sudden reversals in policy. He said that just a few weeks before Hitler was planning to take the construction industry away from Speer as he thought he was overworked. Now it was all different. As Speer sympathised with Goering’s position he decided not to humiliate him and allowed him to make the announcement. Upon reflection Speer agreed that these sudden alterations in policy by Hitler were also potentially dangerous to himself.

The allies 1944 bombing campaign against the oil refineries continued and in August September and October Germany only produced 10 percent of its fuel needs. Eventually Speer had to assign 350,000 skilled workers to the repairing of these fuel plants. Speer sent Hitler a memorandum saying that if they continue the enemy attacks will have ‘tragic consequences’.

Speer wrote to Hitler proposing the creation of a force of 2,000 fighter planes with the specific task of defending German industries. This never happened.

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127 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 346
128 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 348
129 To now the air force had acquired armaments independently of Speer
130 Speer Inside the Third Reich p 348
Speer says that Hitler just did not comprehend the seriousness of the situation.

Speer was with Hitler at Obersalzberg when news of the Normandy invasion was received. He says that for weeks after the invasion Hitler refused to believe that it was genuine. He thought it was a diversion and that the real attack would take place at Calais. Because of this he refused to commit the full German military force and this greatly assisted the allies. Almost at the same time on 22nd June the Russian attack began and the German army was no longer capable of stopping their advance.

Speer claimed that Germany had the potential to destroy the allied bombers but the opportunity was lost because of Hitler’s closed mind and of his autocratic approach. Germany was the first nation to develop a jet-powered aircraft, which had the speed to outclass any other aircraft. This was one of its ‘secret weapons’ and if used it would have had the potential to change the outcome of the war by destroying the allied bomber fleet. In 1941 the Germans were well advanced in the development of the jet engine. In 1943 Hitler cancelled all work on the Me 262 jet. On 7th January 1944 he changed his mind and ordered that it be put into mass production, but insisted that it be used as a bomber, rather than as a fighter. Speer argued that as a fighter the Me 262 could outclass any allied aircraft, but as a bomber it had very limited capacity and to use it as a bomber would be a grave error. In the end Hitler simply refused to discuss the issue with him.

Speer writes that he had developed a fascination with the research into rockets at Peenemunde in 1939 and he enjoyed mixing with the young idealistic scientists. When Hitler decided to end all work on rockets Speer secretly continued to build the facility. When the first successful flight took place in October 1942 Hitler became enthusiastic and ordered that they be put into mass production. In July 1943 he invited von Braun and a group of his scientists to a meeting with Hitler who was very impressed with them. The first rocket was fired against Britain in September 1944. However Speer thought it was very inefficient to build and fire thirty rockets a day carrying just twenty four tons of explosives at a time when the allied bombers were dropping 3,000 tons of bombs a day on Germany. However, the development of these rockets was later to have unintended consequences for Speer.

As the end of the war became closer Hitler closed his mind to anyone who disagreed with his decisions. Speer believes that Hitler believed he was appointed by divine providence and that this assured him of the ultimate victory. The more that events went against him the more he believed that luck or fate would give him victory at the last minute. However on 24th June 1944, in a speech to the industrialists, Hitler told them in a contemptuous tone, what they as businessmen could expect if the war was lost.

There is no doubt that if we were to lose this war, German private business would not survive. Rather, with the destruction of the entire German people, business would naturally be wiped out also. Not only because our enemies do not want German competition, this is a superficial view, but because fundamental matters are involved. We are involved in a struggle, which will decide between two points of view. Either humanity will be thrown back several thousand years to a primitive condition...or humanity will continue to develop through the furthering of private initiative. If the war were lost gentlemen, then you would not have to worry about shifting [to a peacetime economy]. Then all anyone will have to think about is how he himself will accomplish his shift from this world to the hereafter. Whether he wants to take care of it himself, or let himself be hanged, or whether he prefers to starve or to labour in Siberia, these are some of the questions which the individual will have to face.

Speer writes that this speech and his own lack of faith in a final victory led him to

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131 As Armaments Minister he had no control of the operational use of aircraft and this was outside his area of responsibility.

132 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 360

133 Despite this on 24th June 1944 he was still telling the industrialists that Germany could win the war.
become convinced that he had a higher responsibility – preventing the destruction of German industry.
Speer and the Jews

Speer does not mention his involvement with the Jews and with the other concentration camp prisoners until September 1944 (page 369 of his book *Inside the Third Reich*) and his discussion of them takes only seven pages. This is unusual considering the importance the Nuremberg trial placed on the treatment of the prisoners under his control.

However Speer did, inadvertently, suggest that he might have known something when telling of his visit to Russia in June 1942. He told of driving through the peaceful forests of the Ukraine without an escort and compared this with the partisan activities just six months later. He blamed this change on ‘the twisted policies of the eastern commissioners’ and told of Goebbels’ horror at the brutal treatment of the people of the occupied sections in the Soviet Union. It is difficult to believe that he did not ask Goebbels what he meant by his term ‘brutal treatment’.

Speer’s account of his involvement with the concentration camps is placed in the context of an internal fight for power between himself and Himmler.

In 1942 Himmler had attempted to introduce a scheme to turn the concentration camps into large modern armaments factories. On that occasion Speer had been able to convince Hitler on 21st September 1942 that, in view of the poor record of the SS in running factories, the prisoners in the camps should remain under his control. Speer’s motive for doing this was not out of concern for the prisoners’ welfare but to curb Himmler’s plans for expansion.

At first Speer’s factory managers complained that the prisoners arrived in a poor condition and had to be sent back to their original camp after a few months because of exhaustion. Speer complained that this meant that they had to train a new group every few months. As a result of his complaints the SS improved living conditions and rations in the camps and:

> In the course of my rounds through the armaments plants I saw more contented faces among the prisoners and better fed people.

Speer then wrote that Hitler, by ordering the SS to establish a rocket production factory, broke his total control over armaments production.

In September 1943 Hitler was excited by the potential of a V2 rocket attack on Britain and believed that this secret weapon could win the war. Six weeks later Himmler proposed to Hitler that the best way to guarantee absolute secrecy for this vital project was to place it under his control. He would use skilled concentration camp prisoners as workers and ensure that they had no contact with the outside world. These factories would be under the control of the SS and all that Speer would have to provide would be the managers and engineers. This was part of Himmler’s long-term plan to make the SS financially independent of the government by turning the concentration camps into large, modern armaments factories that produced weapons for the SS.

This time Himmler won. As Hitler agreed with the plan Speer had to accept it, even if it reduced his own control over German industry. Himmler then offered to make Speer an honorary general in the SS, but Speer politely refused the offer.

On 10th December 1943 Speer inspected this SS controlled underground rocket production factory (called ‘Dora’) in the Harz Mountains. He described conditions there as being barbarous and inhuman. The workers had dull expressionless eyes and seemed incapable of any reaction. They were undernourished and overtired. Sanitation was inadequate,

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134 His concern was for the interruption to production caused by this retraining rather than a concern for the prisoners’ well being.
135 Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* p 370.
136 The SS called this their Central Works.
the air stank of excrement, disease was rampant, medical treatment inadequate and because they were housed 24 hours a day in the damp cold caves there was a very high mortality rate. A footnote in his book comments that some of his inspection team were so upset at what they saw that they had to be sent on leave to restore their nerves.

One of the inmates described ‘Dora’ as a place where:

The block leaders were criminals who had been convicted before the war and had been assigned to the concentration camps for life and had no hope of ever getting out. These criminals, however were offered by the SS management of the camp, the chance of a career. This career consisted in stealing from and robbing the other prisoners, and obtaining from them the maximum output demanded by the SS. They beat us from morning till night.

We got up at four o'clock in the morning and had to be ready within five minutes in the underground dormitories where we were crammed, without ventilation, in foul air, in blocks. . .into which 3000 to 3500 internees were crowded. There were five tiers of bunks with rotting straw mattresses. Fresh ones were never issued. We were given five minutes in which to get up, for we went to bed completely dressed. We were hardly able to get any sleep, for there was a continuous coming and going, and all sorts of thefts took place among the prisoners. Furthermore, it was impossible to sleep because we were covered with lice. The whole Dora camp swarmed with vermin. It was virtually impossible to be free of the lice. In five minutes we had to be in line in the tunnel and march to a given place.

Speer allocated the necessary material to build new barracks blocks outside of the caves, and requested the camp commander to improve sanitation and to increase the food rations. He stated that as the camp commander assured him that conditions would be improved he paid no further attention to the issue.

On 13th January 1944 Speer received a report from Dr Poschmann, his medical supervisor, that described conditions at the Central Works ‘in the blackest colour’. The following day he sent one of his department heads to inspect the camp and Dr Poschmann took immediate steps to improve the medical treatment in the camp. His ministry records recorded that:

The minister has received Dr Poschmann who, as the physician for all the agencies in the ministry, has painted the state of health at the Central Works in the blackest colours. The rapid construction of this factory and the natural unhealthy conditions would have an unfavourable effect on performance without sufficient medical attention. The minister has agreed that the necessary medical measures must be made up for so that the amount of illness can be reduced in the factory.

A few days later on 19th January Speer was hospitalised and little more was done. On 26th May after his release from hospital, Dr Poschmann told Speer that he had, on his own initiative, assigned civilian doctors to many of the camps but he had encountered problems. He said:

The first deliveries of additional food, medications, vitamins etc from our stores in the ministry of armaments and the Todt Organisation aroused great protest from Kammler and Ley. Nevertheless...they were given medication and vitamins so that they might supply one another in the camp, to which the medical personnel of the Todt Organisation had no access. However the medication was taken from the prisoners upon their entry to the camp. We then supplied the sick and weakened prisoners ourselves on the labour sites.

Speer then received a rude letter from Robert Ley in which he said that Speer was interfering and that medical conditions in the camps were a part of his role, and he demanded that Dr Poschmann be disciplined and told not to take any further action.

Speer ignored Ley’s letter, as he believed that there was a ‘rational’ argument for adequate medical treatment being given to the prisoners and he was confident that he would have Hitler’s support on this issue.

137 Of the 60,000 workers sent to Dora more than 30,000 died.
138 P Padfield, Himmler p 486.
139 Speer, The Slave State p 211
140 Speer, The Slave State p 212
Himmler’s response was to have Werner von Braun, the head of the rocket program, arrested and questioned by the Gestapo. Speer had to ask Hitler to intercede on behalf of von Braun and to also ensure that he would be protected from any future questioning. Although von Braun was released Himmler had made the point that Speer was powerless to prevent the Gestapo questioning his officials and supporters and it was quite probable that Speer could not protect them all in the way he had von Braun.

In June 1944 Himmler managed to convince Hitler that the SS should set up their own large-scale businesses and Hitler asked Speer to assist Himmler in doing this. Speer managed to have Hitler agree that these businesses should remain under his control. Himmler gave Hans Kammler responsibility for this project and because Himmler constantly took Kammler to his meetings with Hitler Speer assumed that Himmler was grooming him to be Speer’s replacement. To find enough skilled workers for his factories Himmler simply arrested Speer’s workers and sent them to the concentration camps. Kammler boasted that he had:

Simply placed 50,000 persons in protective custody in order to obtain the necessary labour for the SS enterprises.

Speer also tells of a tour he made of the Linz steelworks in 1944 where he saw a group of relaxed and well-fed prisoners who were on good terms with the other workers and who were acting as their assistants. He noted that the army and not the SS guarded them. He says that he came across a group of about twenty Russian prisoners and when he asked them if they were happy with their treatment they made ‘gestures of passive assent’. However when he asked if they would like to return to a regular camp ‘they gave a start of fright and their faces expressed the purest horror’.

Speer states that if he had more prisoners under his control, rather than under the control of the SS, more of them would have survived, as the conditions in his factories were superior to those in the SS concentration camps.

Speer writes that he made no further enquires about conditions in the concentration camps as he was so obsessed with production and statistics that he ignored concerns with people. He then quoted Eugene Davidson, an American historian, who said that he loved machines more than people. Speer agreed with this statement.

He writes that his feeling of guilt was based on his failure to think about the regime that produced what he saw on the faces of those prisoners.

As an example of this failure to see what was happening around him he recounts a conversation that he had with his old friend Karl Hanke in 1944. Hanke was now the Gauleiter of Lower Silesia where Auschwitz was located and he spoke of his experiences to Speer:

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.141

At Nuremberg Speer argued that this was the basis of his personal guilt – that he ignored the words of his friend – that he should have known but because he was so involved in his work he did not know. He was afraid of what he might find out so he deliberately decided to close his eyes. He also argued that it showed that he had no knowledge of what was happening until the middle of 1944.

141 Speer, Inside the Third Reich pp 375 –376.
He wrote that it was not until the middle of May 1945, and two weeks after the German surrender, he learnt of the conditions in the concentration camps. However he also repeats a comment made by Goering during the Nuremberg trial when they learnt that some Hungarian Jews had survived. Goering said:

So there are still some there! I thought we had knocked off all of them. Someone slipped up again.142

Goering knew.

As well as Inside the Third Reich Speer wrote two more books. The second book is called Spandau – The Secret Diaries and it recounts his twenty years in prison. In his third book The Slave State143 Speer gives an account of the economic role of the SS in the Third Reich. It was published a few weeks before he died in 1981.

Speer’s attitude towards the Jews and their suffering was clearly illustrated by his discussion of Himmler’s armaments production. In 1943 the 30,000 prisoners in his work camps produced 340,000 rifles in seven months. He compares this with a US factory, which produced 1,050,000 rifles in the same amount of time with just 14,000 workers. Speer calculated that these prisoners worked with only 17 percent of the efficiency of normal workers. By the time that the cost of building the camps and paying for the necessary guards of one guard per 1,000 male prisoners at an average annual cost of 1,500 marks each, was factored in he concluded that this was an extremely inefficient system of production. In saying this Speer depersonalised the Jews and their suffering and reduced them to just a number.

In The Slave State Speer made out that his ministry tried to prevent the deportation of the Jews from Berlin, as they were needed being skilled armaments workers. He stated that on 22nd September 1942 Hitler ordered Sauckel to deport all of the Jews from Berlin to the east. When he protested that these were skilled workers Sauckel assured him that he could replace them with skilled foreign workers. Speer then stated that:

Thus my arguments had no weight. Whatever I felt beyond these considerations of expedience, I can not determine with any accuracy.144

His discussion of their arrest and of their being placed on special trains avoided any reference to his own involvement.

When I think about the fate of Berlin's Jews, I am overcome by an unbearable feeling of failure and inadequacy. In the course of my daily drive to my architectural office...I frequently saw crowds of people on the platform of the railway station. I knew this

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142 Speer Inside the Third Reich p 512
Goering had no involvement with the camps. He was the head of the air force and the Four Year Plan. He was also a known drug addict and during the war he was one of the most marginalised leaders. Yet he knew.

143 In the USA the book was released under the title Infiltration
144 Speer, The Slave State p 251.
had to be Berlin Jews being evacuated. I’m sure that at that moment I must have had a feeling of unease, a foreboding of dark events. But, impossible though it is to understand today, I was so wedded to the principles of the regime that phrases such as “Fuhrer: command, we obey”, or “The Fuhrer is always right,” had a hypnotic effect, especially perhaps on those of us in his immediate environment.  

In March 1943 Speer was in Linz for a meeting and found out that the SS was planning to build a harbour on the Danube River to transport stone quarried from the nearby Mauthausen concentration camp. He considered that this was an unnecessary and very expensive project and he wanted it cancelled and have the workers transferred to the nearby steelworks, which had a shortage of labour. Because of this he toured the camp where he found expensive granite foundations for neat orderly buildings. He saw no emaciated inmates as they were all working in the quarries at the time.

Mauthausen was not a neat and pleasant place for the inmates. It had been classified as a category three camp for incorrigible criminals and asocials incapable of re-education. On arrival the inmates were told

Germany needs your arms. You are therefore going to work; but I want to tell you that you will never see your families again. When one enters this camp, one leaves it by the chimney of the crematorium.

On 5th April 1944 Speer sent a letter to Himmler saying:

While we lack not only iron and wood but also manpower to construct armaments works for the immediate needs of the front I saw during my inspection of the concentration camp at Mauthausen that the SS is carrying out plans that strike me as more than generous given today’s conditions. For the expansion of concentration camps, we must carry out any new planning with an eye to achieving the highest degree of effectiveness with the deployment of the least means and the achievement of the utmost success for the momentary armaments demands, that is, we must switch immediately to primitive construction methods.

In saying this he was referring to his edict of March 1943, which said:

All construction during the war must be of the simplest form possible. Permanent building methods must be widely replaced by temporary methods. Buildings meant only to outlast the war will be normally quite adequate...Outer and inner walls are to be of light construction as far as practicable. We should generally forgo outer and inner adornments.

Pohl who was the SS officer in charge of all concentration camp inmates, wrote back to Himmler saying that:

It would be completely wrong to shift to primitive construction in concentration camps immediately. Reich Minister Speer does not seem to know that we have over 160,000 prisoners now and are constantly fighting epidemics and a high mortality because the lodgings for the inmates, including the sanitary facilities, are totally inadequate...therefore the return to primitive construction methods will probably cause a so far undreamt of mortality in the camps.

Apart from the strange situation of an SS officer worrying about the health of the inmates Pohl obviously assumed that Speer already knew about the conditions in the camps.

Speer stated that two of his staff then toured all of the concentration camps in 1943. At Auschwitz they uncovered terrible sanitary conditions. There were three separate camps at Auschwitz, one for administration, one for mass executions, and a labour camp for war production called ‘Auschwitz 3’. It was this third camp that his staff inspected.

As a result of their report on 30th May 1943 Speer raised the steel ration for new buildings in the concentration camps in general. He made a special, much higher allocation of 2,400 tons of various steel items specifically for Auschwitz 3, which would allow for the building of 300 new

146 Padfield, *Himmler* p434.
147 Speer, *The Slave State* p 43
148 Speer, *The Slave State* p 43
barracks to house 132,000 additional prisoners. 149

After the concentration camps had been inspected Speer received a detailed report on them and commented:

I am delighted that the inspection of the other concentration camps resulted in a highly positive picture. 150

He reported that the death rate in the camps in December 1943 was 10 percent but because of his actions by August 1944 it was ‘only’ 2.09 percent. Speer seems to have not questioned a death rate of 2.09 percent a month or 25.08 percent a year.

So it is only reasonable to assume that he knew of the existence of these camps and their purpose.

In The Slave State Speer reveals that it would have been relatively simple for him to save the lives of thousands of Jews. For a Jew to be sent to a German factory outside of the concentration camps was the difference between life and death. In these factories they received more food and had contact with the outside world and as a valued skilled employee they were safe from the SS (for example Schlinder’s List).

He quotes one Jew saying:

Anyone who knew what was what volunteered even if he knew almost nothing of a craft. Skilled workers came into the workshops, which in any case was tantamount to something like initial life insurance

Many Germans assisted these Jews. Speer tells of Elena Skrjabin, a forced labourer, who worked in a Rhineland factory and wrote in her diary:

We whispered to the Jews that they had to cite some kind of special training or artisan ability as much as possible. What could save them now, we said, was some work to make themselves useful to the Germans

Walter Schieber was one of Speer’s nine department heads and on 7th May 1944 he told the SS manpower expert Obersturmbannfuhrer Maurer that:

With a decentralised distribution of the concentration camp labour force (ie out of the concentration camps and into factories), a technically more expedient use of manpower, along with better nourishment and more sensible lodging, would be possible. With the food that our company directors continue to supply to their labour force in spite of all impediments and with generally decent and humane treatment both the Jewesses and the concentration camp inmates work well and would do anything to keep them from being sent back to the concentration camps. These facts clearly make it imperative that we transfer even more concentration camp inmates to the armaments industry 151

This suggests that Schieber had a good idea why these workers did not want to go back to the concentration camps and he was doing everything he could to assist them.

When Himmler organised the evacuation of the Jews from Berlin his SS were not able to locate all of the Jews. Goebbels wrote in his diary:

The Berlin Jews were assembled with lightning speed on this past Saturday and are being deported to the East within the shortest possible time. Unfortunately it turned out that the better circles, especially the intellectuals, do not understand our Jewish policies and are partly on the side of the Jews. As a result our action was betrayed prematurely and a whole bunch of Jews slipped through our fingers. The Jews were supposed to be arrested on one day but because of the shortsighted behaviour of industrials who warned the Jews in time this plan was a fiasco. All in all we could not lay hold of 4,000 Jews. 152

This occurred because some unknown person in Speer’s ministry gave special passes to these 4,000 Jews which allowed them to escape deportation.

Speer also quoted a letter he received from one Jew who was a member of a group

149 van der Vat, The Good Nazi p 135.

150 A letter from Speer to Himmler found by Matthias Schmidt.

151 Speer, The Slave State p 26

152 Speer, The Slave State p 253
that was transported to Auschwitz to be gassed but were saved by a letter which he believed was signed by Speer. This letter ensured that they were sent to Auschwitz 3, the labour camp, and not the extermination section of Auschwitz.

In 1944 I was in [the] Lodz Ghetto and working at a metal factory. When the liquidation of [the] Lodz Ghetto took place, the group of men, women, and children who were employed in the metal factory received a letter handed to them by either Mr. Bibow or Mr. Schernula. This letter was taken by the leader of our group, Mr. Chimovitz, and when we reached Auschwitz with [a) transport scheduled for gassing, he approached the SS selection leader, to whom he presented this letter. We then had to wait for about an hour by the sidings of the rails in Auschwitz until it was verified whether this letter was a forgery or genuine. After the hour, we were taken to the camp, not the gas chambers, and sent in due course through another concentration camp, Schthoff, to Dresden, where we worked in a munition factory, which was part of the Reemtsma cigarette factory. This letter, which saved the life of 500 of us, was purported to have been written by you. The date was September 1944. I was fifteen years of age at that time.

Speer then wrote:

It is scarcely conceivable that this could have been a personal letter of mine. Presumably, it was an accompanying letter from the Posen Armaments Inspection, which, in keeping with the linguistic practice of that time, could have come from the "Speer Ministry".153

However, someone in authority knew what the transportation of these Jews to Auschwitz meant and was willing to sign their name (the account says that the SS verified the letter with its author) to a document that would save their lives.

Was it that easy to save the lives of 4,500 people? How many more could have been saved?

153 Speer, The Slave State p 288/289
The July 20th attempt to assassinate Hitler

The attempt by part of the army to assassinate Hitler by placing a bomb in his bunker resulted in Martin Bormann winning the long feud with Speer.

On 29th May 1944 Speer approached Hitler with his fears that the allies might attempt to seize one of the major ports of Germany such as Bremen which was lightly defended. If this happened the German armies in the west would be cut off and isolated. On 6th to 8th July he met with Hitler to organise a plan for the rapid assembly of soldiers on leave in Germany to resist such an attack. This plan was given the code name “Valkyrie”.

The officer who Speer took with him to the conference to explain the plan to Hitler was Colonel von Stauffenberg who was the officer who later placed the bomb in Hitler’s bunker. Through his contact with the army generals Speer had come to know and had also become good friends with Colonel von Stauffenberg who he described as being one of the most charming, dynamic, and competent, officers in the entire German army.

Operation ‘Valkyrie’ gave the military commanders full independent power during an emergency and they could issue all instructions without consulting the Gauleiters. The conspirators used this power to issue orders during their putsch. Using their power under Valkyrie the conspirators arrested the Gauleiter of Hamburg; the deputy governor of Bohemia and the entire Gestapo service in Paris was also arrested.

A few days before the attempted assassination Speer met with the generals who organised the military conspiracy to discuss his plan to transfer hundreds of thousands of men from the air force to the army. Although he and the generals often had frank conversations about the growing inability to produce sufficient weapons he said that at no time was he aware that they were planning a putsch. However, at the time, he was struck by their apparent lack of concern about the worsening situation on the eastern front.

Speer then explained that his life was saved by pure chance. On 17th July General Fromm sent von Staffenberg to invite Speer to lunch on 20th July. Speer declined as he had a previous meeting but von Staffenberg repeated his invitation saying that it was essential that he attend. Speer had to refuse.

On 20th July, the day of the assassination attempt, Speer was in Berlin and gave a speech to a group of more than 200 businessmen and government officials in the morning. Colonel von Staffenberg’s bomb would have exploded while he was giving this speech. Afterwards he was with Goebbels when news of the attempt on Hitler’s life was received. At first it was believed that the assassins were members of the Todt Organisation who were doing construction work on the Fuhrer’s bunker. Goebbels immediately questioned Speer about the security arrangements for these workers and he was embarrassed, as he could not tell him what security checks his department had.

Despite this suggestion that he may have been indirectly implicated in the attack Speer commented that he left Goebbels and then went on with his normal days work and that it did not occur to him to ring Hitler to find out what had happened.

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154 Valkyrie was also designed to deal with a possible rebellion by foreign workers or a putsch by the SS. It involved the mobilisation of the 4,000,000 man reserve army which was commanded by Fromm and which would occupy the cities. Martial law would be imposed and the army would have supreme authority. Politicians, party officials and civil servants would be subordinate to the military. After the bomb exploded one of the conspirators, Field Marshall von Witzleben, announced that ‘The Fuhrer Adolf Hitler is dead. An unscrupulous clique of non combatant party leaders has tried to exploit the situation to stab the deeply committed front in the back and to seize power for selfish purposes’.

155 Speer had a professional relationship with many of the conspirators which must have made Hitler suspicious.
That day, 20th July, Speer had lunch with Colonel Engel, Hitler’s former army adjutant, and he discussed with him a memorandum, dated 20th July that he had written. In this he proposed the creation of a ‘subdictator’ that is someone with wide power who could efficiently coordinate the different sections of the military. He had already discussed this idea with the generals who were involved with the bomb plot.

Later Goebbels rang and told Speer to come to his house at once and he remained with him until the rebellion had been suppressed. Goebbels had already spoken to Hitler and he had been told that Speer’s friend von Stauffenberg was under suspicion and that a military rebellion was taking place. Speer writes that Goebbels took a dominant role at this stage and acted as if Speer was under suspicion. An army battalion under the command of Major Remer then surrounded Goebbels’ house and they did not know on whose side the troops were on. At one stage they thought that they might be arrested. Remer changed sides when Goebbels rang Hitler’s headquarters and Hitler personally spoke to Remer who immediately changed sides and obeyed Hitler’s orders.

Speer thought that Goebbels was highly suspicious of him and that he had summoned him to his house so he could keep an eye on him. At times Goebbels asked Speer leave the room while he was speaking on the telephone.

On 21st July Speer and the other ministers were invited to a meeting with the Fuhrer in order to congratulate him on surviving the attack. Speer was the only minister told to bring his assistants, Dorsch and Saur. It was obvious from the way he was treated that he was thought to have been a member of the conspiracy. Hitler greeted Dorsch and Saur warmly, but was cold and unfriendly towards Speer. When Speer first entered the room all conversation ceased and those in the room either left or turned away from him. Then Schaub, Hitler’s adjutant:

_Said meaningfully to me ‘now we know who was behind the assassination attempt. Then he walked out on me._

At the end of the meeting Dorsch and Saur were invited to afternoon tea with the inner group, but Speer was excluded. He writes that he was greatly disturbed by this.

The next day Hitler was friendlier towards Speer and the other members of the élite followed his example. However, when Speer attempted to defend the generals, Goebbels snapped at him and Hitler said nothing.

A few days later Kaltenbrunner, the chief of the Gestapo, visited Speer and showed him a list the conspirators had drawn up of the officials in their proposed new government. His name was on the list as the Armaments Minister. Next to it was ‘If possible’ followed by a question mark. He writes that this comment and his failure to attend the July 20th meeting with the generals saved his life and if the plot had been successful and he was asked to continue as Armaments Minister he would have agreed and he would have quickly gone over to their side and forgotten about his loyalty towards Hitler.

The following day Speer had a compulsory loyalty meeting with his staff which lasted only twenty minutes and where he made ‘the feeblest speech I had ever made’. He writes that he felt insecure.

156 Von Stauffenberg and the other leaders were reluctant to order the execution of Goebbels and seriously underestimated him. When the rebellion failed General Fromm ordered the immediate execution of von Stauffenberg and the other key leaders to avoid them being ‘questioned’ and possibly incriminating him.

157 Remer became the hero of the hour and was promoted to a general and placed in command of a division. Near the end of the war he deserted and dressed in civilian clothes surrendered to the American. In 1950 he joined the neo Nazi Socialist Reich party.

158 Speer, _Inside the Third Reich_ p 389

159 Although this suggests that he was not a member of the conspiracy it does show that the conspirators assumed that he would accept the position and that he was sympathetic to their aims.

160 Nearly 5,000 Germans were executed as a result of this plot.
and compromised and he had to end the rumours going around Berlin that he had already been arrested and executed.

Bormann invited Speer to give another speech in Posen to the Gauleiters. He received an icy reception and was isolated by the party leaders. Before he gave his speech he heard Goebbels say to the Gauleiters ‘now at least we know where Speer stands’. Rather than demanding that the Gauleiters change their practices to increase arms production Speer decided to impress them to improve his own standing and to make himself ‘indispensable’. He told them of his achievements and of how he had exceeded production quotas and now the army had a huge stockpile of spare parts. **161**

Speer writes that although he was not a Gauleiter, Hitler specifically invited him to attend a meeting with the Gauleiters at the end of his speech. Speer comments that he took a seat in the back row. However, this would have sent a clear message to those around him that Hitler had total faith in his Armaments Minister. In the coming weeks Hitler referred to Speer’s achievements a number of times and Speer assumed that he was attempting to restore his standing in the party.

Saur took advantage of the situation to advance his own career by denouncing two generals in the Army Ordnance Office whose only crime was to comment that Hitler did not have the technical knowledge to judge new weapons. Speer successfully intervened on their behalf and had them released.

The Gauleiters argued that the plot showed that the party should exert more control over the administration. They believed that Roehm**162** was correct in wanting to ensure that the party controlled the army. They similarly argued that the party should control the production of armaments, especially as many of the officials in Speer’s ministry were not party members and, to them, his policy of industrial self-responsibility gave these manufacturers too much freedom. Within weeks the Gauleiters began to take more control over the factories in their districts. At the same time Goebbels, with the support of Bormann and Keitel, took advantage of Speer’s weakness to push for the conscription of hundreds of thousands of factory workers.

Hitler’s refused to speak to Speer on matters that concerned the party so he had lost his ability to control and manipulate Hitler and he now had to communicate any concerns in writing.

On 30th August 1944 he ‘capitulated’ and told the heads of his department that he was going to make the Gauleiters responsible for armaments production. His control over armaments production disintegrated with Himmler already having his own SS factories and now some of the Gauleiters were even setting up their own arms factories.

On 21st September Speer gave Hitler a report complaining of the party’s hostility and suspicion of him, as well as their attempts to pass him and also the bullying tactics of some individuals. He stated that he would agree to the party having control over armaments production if there was a clear chain of command and requested that the Gauleiters and Bormann’s economic advisers be placed under his control on all questions to do with armaments production.

Hitler took the letter, skimmed through it, and handed it to Bormann. Hitler said that he would leave it to Bormann and Goebbels to decide what to do. Speer knew he had ‘lost for good’. A few hours later Bormann had a meeting with him and told him that he was now placed under the command of Goebbels and that he should stop trying to contact Hitler directly.

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161 In fact this speech contradicted his constant demand that the Gauleiters surrender control over the factories in their district in order to boost arms production.
162 Roehm was the head of the SA and was killed during the Night of the Long Knives. He argued that his SA and the army should merge so ensuring that the party controlled the army.
Hitler ceased asking Speer for information and reports and instead turned to Saur. From this time on Saur was effectively in charge of armaments production. When Speer was able to get Hitler to agree to one of his requests Bormann ignored it.

Speer decided to get away from Berlin and spent more time visiting the front and talking to the army officers in the hope that his report on their comments could “influence decisions at headquarters”163

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163 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 399.
Speer opposes Hitler

By September 1944 the German generals at the front, and the industrialists and the Gauleiters in the western area of Germany knew that Germany had lost the war. The German army was exhausted and the allies had a vastly superior firepower. However, his reports on what was really happening at the front and the examples that the generals and commanding officers gave him of chaos and inefficiencies in the German military made no impact on Hitler and were a waste of time.

By the end of October 1944 the fuel shortage was so severe that some sections of the air force could only fly for one day in three. General Galland had assembled 2,000 fighter planes to defend German industry by attacking the allied bombers while they were over Germany. On 10th August he rang Speer and asked for his help. Hitler was planning to send these planes to the western front where they would be quickly destroyed. Speer explained to Hitler that such an action would lead to a catastrophe for German industry and that every plane should be used to defend German factories. Hitler went red in the face, his eyes became fixed and he looked nervous and angry, and he yelled at Speer that military operations were none of his business. The next day an enraged Hitler ordered that all production of fighter aircraft should cease and that the resources be used to increase the supply of anti-aircraft weapons. Speer ignored this command.

Preparations for the destruction of all industrial installations were under his control and Speer had followed Hitler’s command for a scorched-earth policy on the eastern front, but Speer opposed any extension of this policy to the western front as he was now concerned with the reconstruction of Germany’s industries after the end of the war.

When the allies liberated France Speer was able to use Hitler’s belief that Germany would inevitably defeat the allied armies and reconquer France to convince Hitler to order that French industries be paralysed, rather than be destroyed. When Hitler later complained that the newspapers spoke of French industrial output reaching prewar levels in just a few months Speer simply said that it was not true and that it was newspaper propaganda.

Once the allies invaded Germany Speer had to consider the views of the local Gauleiters as well as those of Hitler. Nevertheless he was surprised when many of the Gauleiters joined with the industrialists in opposing any plan to destroy factories in their district. The fact that many of the people also felt this way was well known by the government. Because there were no uncensored newspapers the secret police had the role of telling the government the mood of the people. In March 1944 many Germans believed that Germany would be defeated and some believed that a US occupation would not be too bad and might ‘perhaps be even better than at present’.

Hitler ordered a scorched-earth policy – all bridges, mines, factories, railways, the water, gas and electricity supply, all records and documents, all homes, schools, churches, all food supplies, all of the infrastructure of a modern country, had to be destroyed before it could be captured by the British and US forces.

Not a German stalk of wheat is to feed the enemy, not a German mouth to give information, not a German hand to offer him help. He is to find every footbridge destroyed, every road blocked – nothing but death, annihilation and hatred will meet him.

5th September 1944
Speer decided to oppose Hitler’s orders. In doing this he was supported by the factory owners who did not want to see their businesses destroyed, and by many of the Gauleiters in the west and many of the army generals.

Speer writes that he was able to outwit Hitler by using a simple trick. Hitler was constantly assuring his supporters that

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164 Padfield, Himmler p 419.
Germany possessed secret weapons that made a German victory inevitable. Speer exploited Hitler’s faith in this ultimate victory by issuing a message stating:

The Fuhrer had declared that he can shortly reconquer the territories now lost. Since the western areas are vital for the armaments and war production needed to continue fighting, all measures undertaken in connection with evacuation must have the view of the possibility of restoring full functioning of the industries of these areas.

If Hitler ordered Speer to cancel this order he would be admitting that Germany had lost the war. However, Speer was certain that Hitler knew that the war was lost and his talk of recapturing lost territory was just a face-saving device. Bormann supported Speer on this issue and passed the message onto his Gauleiters saying that his instructions should be obeyed.

11th November 1944

By the middle of November 1944 the Ruhr Valley, where most armaments were produced, was close to being cut off from Germany and Speer told Hitler that by using emergency stocks he could only produce arms for a few more months. As most of Germany’s coal came from the Ruhr the railway system would also have to shut down. This resulted in the Gauleiters commandeering coal trains for the people of their district.

On 20th December 1944 he had to issue the following instructions:

The sharp reduction in coal supplies resulting from the transport situation is producing considerable tension in various parts of the Reich when the existing coal supplies have been used up. The head of the Reich Association, State Councillor Pleiger, receives regular directives from me are intended to ensure that unacceptable disruption of armaments and war production and of the supplies to the population is avoided as far as possible. This sometimes necessitates the concentration of supplies, a fact which always entirely comprehensible from the point of view of individual districts which cannot be aware of the overall supply position.

During the last two weeks, in some parts of the Reich, Reich Defence Commissioners have interfered to such an extent that coal trains scheduled for other districts have been halted or diverted. In view of the tenseness of the overall situation such interference must have grave consequences whose extent cannot be assessed at district level.

I must, therefore, appeal to you urgently to avoid at all costs any interference with coal supplies not intended for your district or which have been allocated for a particular purpose. In the event of particular difficulties I request that you contact State Councillor Pleiger, who has been granted full authority by me and whose dispositions must be observed in all circumstances.

However, Hitler made one statement that made a great impact on Speer:

If the German nation is now defeated in this struggle, it has been too weak. That will mean it has not withstood the test of history and was destined for nothing but doom.

About this time Hitler referred to Saur as the genius of the armaments industry and asked him for advise rather than Speer. He said in front of Speer:

We have the good fortune to have a genius in our armaments industry. I mean Saur. All difficulties are being overcome by him.

Speer did not react to this insult but says that he was “beginning to take my leave of Hitler.”

December 1944

Speer spent the following three weeks with the army. Hitler gambled all of Germany’s military resources on one last offensive, in the Ardennes. He had hoped to force the allies to retreat allowing Germany to recover France. Speer writes that the army generals believed that it would be better to concentrate all of Germany’s military strength on holding back the Russians and allowing the US force to occupy as much of Germany as possible. General Vogler said “nobody could be so crazy as to strip the East (war

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165 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 404.
166 Nazism 1919 – 1945 Vol. 4 p 76
167 Nazism 1919 – 1945 Vol. 4
168 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 415
169 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 415.
against Russia) in order to try to hold back the enemy in the west the USA and Britain. Speer visited the generals and soon realised that the attack a failure. From now on the occupation of Germany was inevitable.

3rd January 1945
Speer spoke against a plan to conscript all available Germans, including those in the armaments industry, as it would have led to the collapse of arms production. Goebbels then spoke insultingly towards him saying that it would be his fault if Germany lost the war. Hitler ignored Speer and directed all of his questions to Saur. Speer accepted this and did not react, as he knew a German defeat was inevitable.

12th January 1945
The Russian offensive began and German resistance collapsed.

21st to 24th January 1945
Speer visited Silesia, the other important industrial centre of Germany. In an attempt to support General Guderian, who wanted all available panzer divisions moved to the east, he rang Hitler and suggested that all available fighter planes be shifted to the eastern front to attack the Russian supply columns. He was told that Hitler just smiled sarcastically and ignored his suggestion.

On 24th January 1945 Hitler stated that he would ‘take action’ against anyone (and also their family) regardless of rank and position who talked about the possibility that the war would be lost.

I most emphatically forbid generalisations and conclusions in regard to the whole situation. That remains my affair. In the future anyone who tells anyone else that the war is lost will be treated as a traitor, with all the consequences for him and his family. I will take action without regard to rank and prestige.

30th January 1945
Speer had von Below give Hitler his memorandum, which stated that the arms industry was now not capable of producing all of the weapons that the military needed. Speer says that after receiving this memorandum Hitler ignored him. The next day the two of them met, along with Saur. Saur did everything he could to negate Speer’s points and he ‘sat by sulkily without participating in the dialogue.’ Speer concludes by saying that Hitler was curt towards him but cordial towards Saur.

February 1945
By the middle of February Speer had decided to kill Hitler as well as Bormann, Goebbels and Ley.

While walking through the Berlin Chancellery garden he had seen the ventilation shaft for Hitler’s underground bunker. It was level with the ground and only covered with a thin grating. Speer planned to put poison gas into this ventilation shaft. He approached Stahl, who was the head of his munitions production team, for the poison gas and then told Henschel, the chief engineer of the Bunker complex, that the air filters needed to be removed for cleaning. However Speer writes that when, about four weeks later, he attempted to put the poison gas into the air intake that he found it guarded by the SS and that a three-metre chimney (which put it out of his reach) had been added. After this he ceased all thought of assassination.

From this time on Speer left Saur to run the armaments industries and Speer spent his time with the industrialists discussing how to make the transition to a post war economy. Speer flew to the Hungarian oil region, to Upper Silesia, Czechoslovakia and Danzig to gain the support of his officials for his plan to oppose Hitler’s scorched-earth policy. The rumour was that Saur was to be officially placed in charge of this policy under the direction of Himmler.

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170 See Document 6
171 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 425.
172 This implies that Speer believed that he would have a role in this process.
By the end of February 1945 Speer found that the generals were beginning to ignore orders from Hitler which they disagreed. He was with General Weiss when he received orders from Hitler not to abandon a position. Weiss did so, saying that he was not going to waste lives. He was in Upper Silesia when General Heinrici had refused to destroy the railway system. In the Ruhr he spoke to General Model who had decided not to destroy the bridges and then to General Guderian who had issued orders preventing any destruction that would impact on the lives of the local people. Deputations of the local population would often approach the army requesting that they not defend the local area and that they allow their city to be captured without damage.

18th March 1945
Speer sent a report to Hitler in which he said that the German economy would collapse in four to eight weeks and that Germany had lost the war. He then urged Hitler to consider the interests of the German people and to end the program of destruction. This was the first time that Speer had openly opposed Hitler. Hitler’s response was to order the evacuation of all civilians in the areas about to be occupied by the allies saying ‘we can no longer afford to concern ourselves with the population’. He ordered the army to use force to remove people from their homes.

18th to 21st March 1945
Immediately after the meeting Hitler gave Speer a signed photograph for his birthday which suggests that he still thought highly of him. When he learnt that Speer was going to spend three days touring the western areas of Germany Hitler insisted that he take his car and that he use Kemptka, Hitler’s personal chauffeur, as his driver. Before he left Hitler told Speer that he would receive a written reply to his memorandum. Speer found that hardly any preparations had been made to destroy installations in the Saar and its Gauleiter told him that he would refuse to order the evacuation of the people and that he would personally accept full responsibility for this decision.

Speer was at General Model’s headquarters when he received Hitler’s answer to his memorandum. Hitler had ordered the destruction of all military, transportation, communications, industrial and supply facilities. Speer was stripped of all of his power and all of his orders for the preservation of factories were revoked. The Gauleiters were put in charge of this program of destruction, meaning that Germany was to be returned to the Middle Ages. Speer says that as a result of this Hitler’s group did not trust him and he had lost all influence over the industries that he had been running.

On his return on 21st March Hitler spent more time talking to Kemptka than Speer.

24th March 1945
The British army crossed the Rhine River. That night Speer drove to the Ruhr Valley, and Dr Rohland, the chief of his staff in the Ruhr, told him that the Gauleiters of the Ruhr area were determined to carry out Hitler’s orders and intended to sink barges full of cement in the canals and flood all the coalmines. However, the plan depended on Rohland supplying the necessary explosives and trucks. Speer had him arrange to have all the available explosives thrown into a flooded mine, and all the trucks and petrol under his command given to the army. Speer then

If the war is lost the people will be lost also. It is not necessary to worry about what the German people will need for elemental survival. On the contrary it is best for us to destroy these things. For the nation has proved to be the weaker and the future belongs to the stronger eastern nation. In any case only those who are inferior will remain after this struggle, for the good have already been killed.

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173 This was what Hitler warned him, and others, against doing on 24th January and Speer was not punished.
174 This gesture of friendship occurred just hours after Speer told him that the war was lost.
175 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 440.
176 See Document 7
supplied weapons so that Rohland’s supporters could defend the key factories and installations. This was a virtual rebellion against the government.

Speer then met with the three Gauleiters of the Ruhr and was able to convince two of them to just paralyse the factories, rather than destroy them. The third was determined to order the full destruction of all facilities.

Later General Model told Speer that he intended to avoid fighting close to the industrial areas in order to reduce the amount of damage. When the Gauleiter of Baden issued orders for the destruction of the water works and gasworks in Mannheim, Speer got around him by having the orders sent by mail, but he placed the letters in a post box about to be captured by the US forces. When the allies were approaching Heidelberg, only twelve miles from Mannheim his place of birth, he wrote to SS General Hauser asking that Heidelberg be declared a hospital city and that it be surrendered without a fight.

Gauleiter Hellmuth told Speer that he had made detailed plans to destroy the ball-bearing plant at Schweinfurt. Speer told him that German troops were preparing to recapture the town and that by destroying the plant he would be ending any chance of a German victory.

27th March 1945
On his return to Berlin on 27th March Speer found that SS Gruppenfuhrer Kammler who controlled the production of rockets had been given responsibility for the production of all aircraft. The rumour was that Saur was to be made responsible for all armaments for the army but was to be placed under Himmler’s control. Speer was then summonsed to a meeting with Hitler where he was accused of trying to convince the Gauleiters to disobey orders:

Bormann has given me a report on your conference with the Ruhr Gauleiters. You pressed them not to carry out my orders and declared that the war was lost. Are you aware of what must follow from that? 177

Hitler said that the only reason Speer would not be punished was because he was his architect.

If you were not my architect, I would take measures that are called for in such a case. You are overworked and ill. I have therefore decided that you are to go on leave at once. Someone else will run your Ministry as your deputy. 178

Speer refused to do this and told Hitler that he would have to dismiss Speer.

Hitler then said:

You have no choice. It is impossible for me to dismiss you for reasons of foreign and domestic policy. I cannot spare you…if you can convince yourself that the war is not lost, you can continue to run your office

Speer told Hitler that the war was lost and that he could not lie to him the way that the Fuhrer’s inner circle did. Hitler then told him again that all would be well if Speer could say that he believed that the war could still be won and he gave him 24 hours to consider his answer.

If you could at least hope that we have not lost! You must certainly be able to hope … that would be enough to satisfy me 179

The next day Speer drove to the meeting with Hitler not knowing what he was going to say. He writes that Hitler seemed unsure of himself and anxious and said ‘well?’ Speer was confused for a moment and without thinking he pledged his loyalty to Hitler ‘Mein Fuhrer I stand unreservedly behind you’. Hitler, with tears in his eyes said, ‘then all is well’.

Speer took advantage of the opportunity to request that he once again be given the responsibility of carrying out the scorched-earth decree rather than the Gauleiters. Hitler made it clear that he still insisted on total destruction.

Speer then drafted a decree stating that all destruction was only to be carried out by his ministry and added into the decree a

177 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 451
178 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 451
179 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 452
sentence saying that the desired effect could be achieved by crippling, rather than destroying, installations.[180]

This decree was printed and was issued that night. Speer believes that Hitler knew he was making a concession when he signed this decree.

30th May 1945

Speer talked with Seyss Inquart, the Commissioner General for the Netherlands, and was surprised when he said that he was negotiating with the allies to prevent any more damage to Holland.

3rd April 1945

Speer used Hitler’s decree to send out orders forbidding the blowing up of dams, bridges, and industrial plants and ordering that they be temporarily crippled.

In response to a telegram from Gauleiter Uberreither seeking instruction Speer replied

According to the Fuhrer’s orders of March 30, 1945 there is to be no scorched earth. All installations and plants should he crippled so that the enemy will derive no additional military potential from them. In almost every case expert crippling by engineers will be sufficient and will fulfil the conditions stipulated by the Fuhrer. This applies to the plants mentioned in your cable.

The Fuhrer’s order of March 30th 1945 was intended to eliminate the varied interpretations that could be attached to the order of March 19th 1945, and to establish his unequivocal commitment to the method of crippling. Destruction is therefore permissible only if crippling would not achieve the desired effect. In addition the Fuhrer proclaims ‘Work until the last possible moment’. Power plants are to be crippled only. [181]

One of Bormann’s secretaries assisted Speer by ensuring that Bormann’s counter-instructions were not passed on. He was later told that the SD (Security Service) knew what he was doing but also ignored his actions. He had the full support of the key military officers for example General Praun the chief of the Signal Corp ignored orders to destroy stockpiled equipment as he believed that it would be useful in rebuilding Germany after the war.

At this time Speer stayed close to Hitler to avoid anyone influencing him during his absence. He knew what he was doing was treasonous.

In the same month Speer wrote that he was a member of a group including General Galland that intended to arrest Bormann, Ley and Himmler. Each night the three drove in separate cars to villages outside Berlin, which they knew would not be bombed by the allies. The plan was to use flares to simulate an air raid and then seize the three men as they rushed from their cars to the safety of a bomb shelter. He even had the necessary flares brought to his house, but he says that General Thomale talked him out of it. The army then sent armed troops to act as a bodyguard for Speer.

Speer told of an allied radio broadcast, which said that he was one of the very few people that they would deal with on the terms of a German surrender.

18th April 1945

Gauleiter Kaufmann asked Speer to come to Hamburg immediately as the navy was planning to destroy the port. However, at a meeting that Kaufmann and Speer held with the representatives of the Hamburg industries, the shipyards and the navy, Kaufmann was able to talk the navy out of their plan. Kaufmann asked Speer to remain in Hamburg where his armed supporters could protect him. Speer declined and he returned to Berlin where he found a Hitler who seemed to have lost all purpose. He looked like an old man with trembling limbs and a quavering voice. He seemed to have withdrawn from the real world. However, Hitler was more amiable and the two seemed to have regained the relationship they had in 1933. They would sit together and look through the building plans for Linz.

23rd April 1945

[180] See Document 8
[181] Nazism 1919 – 1945 Vol 4
Speer spent a day on his family estate but on 23rd April he decided to fly to Berlin to make one last visit to Hitler whose Chancellery was already under fire from the Soviet army. This was a gesture of duty, gratitude, friendship and respect for all that Hitler had done for him during the past twelve years. He wanted to see Hitler ostensibly to say good bye.

Speer found the Chancellery being hit by Russian artillery. He then described an empty burnt-out Hitler – a man with no emotion at all. A man who was already dead.

I shall not fight personally. There is always the danger that I would only be wounded and fall into the hands of the Russian alive. I don’t want my enemies to disgrace my body either. I’ve given orders that I be cremated. Fräulein Braun wants to depart this life with me, and I’ll shoot Blondi (his dog) 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

Hitler asked Speer what he thought of Doenitz, and Speer realised that Hitler was considering Doenitz as his successor. Speer used all his knowledge of Hitler’s way of thinking to create a favourable impression of Doenitz. He then confessed that he had lied to him during the last months and that the destruction he had ordered had not taken place an action, which placed his life in danger. Hitler merely accepted what he said without comment and Speer concluded that Hitler no longer saw it as important, he knew that he had lost the war.

While Speer was with Hitler, Goering sent a message stating that if he did not receive a reply within a few hours he would assume that Hitler was dead and that he, as Hitler’s deputy, would take command. Bormann used this to have Goering resign on the grounds of a heart attack and so advanced his own position.

At the end of this meeting Colonel Poser, Speer’s liaison officer to the General Staff asked him how it went and he gave a strange reply.

Thank God I don’t have to play the role of a Prince Max of Baden.

30th April 1945
Hitler appointed Admiral Doenitz, a friend and ally of Speer, as his successor. Saur – not Speer was named as the new Minister for Armaments.

1st May 1945
Hitler’s death was announced. On hearing the news Speer wept and he then realised that the spell that Hitler had over him was broken.

4th May 1945
An armistice was signed and Germany surrendered unconditionally on 7th May.

Prince Max was appointed Chancellor in 1918 and made the declaration of the abdication of the Kaiser and negotiated the armistice. He then turned the government over to the Weimar Republic. He was severely criticised for this. At one point Speer referred to himself as the Second Man in the government and he quotes one US newspaper which stated he was the only member of the German Government they were willing to negotiate with. Speer was not the only one to think that he would have a career after the surrender. Himmler was confident that the Americans would make him the Minister of Police in any new government.

[182] Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 479
The Doenitz government

Karl Doenitz, the new Chief of State, immediately decided to end the war as quickly as possible and once this was done to dissolve his government. When the commandant of the city of Hamburg asked if he should continue fighting to prevent the allies from capturing the city Doenitz told him to surrender. Doenitz also signed Speer’s edict banning the destruction of bridges and other infrastructure.

Speer was with Doenitz on 1st May when Hitler’s death was announced. At one stage Speer considered flying to Greenland and remaining there for several months on an extended hunting holiday and he had even packed books, rifles, food, boats, and tents184 but now Doenitz was the head of the government Speer cancelled these plans and remained with him constantly. He became the Minister for Economics and Production.

On 2nd May Doenitz moved the ‘government’ to the naval city of Flensburg to avoid air raids, but the British army soon surrounded that city.

For some time Doenitz’s government was virtually ignored by the allies.185 Journalists arrived to interview the former leaders of the Third Reich but the allies allowed them their freedom. Speer noted that two members of the new government, Bache and Dorpmuller, disappeared one day and it was believed that they had been taken to Eisenhower’s headquarters to begin work on plans to reconstruct Germany.

The new Cabinet met daily and Speer tried to make it more ‘socially acceptable’. He even suggested appointing a minister for the churches as well as including some liberals and Social Democrats. He said that the government must consist of people in whom the allies could have confidence and so the composition of the government had to change and any close associates of Hitler should be removed.

In the middle of May 1945, and before the Nuremberg trials began Speer was visited by representatives of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey who wished to discuss the effectiveness of the US bombing campaign against German industries. Their discussions went on for three days in a very courteous manner,186 and Speer stated that he understood the importance of what they wished to know and that he gave them a great deal of information, especially as to the mistakes that the US military had made.187 General Anderson gave him the most flattering comment of his whole career when he said ‘had I known what this man was achieving I would have sent the entire American Eighth Air Force (2,000 bombers) merely to put him underground’.188 Speer was well aware of the importance of the information that he was giving to his former enemies and that this was a highly unusual action from a man who was still a minister in the German Government.

Until the allies determined what they were going to do with it they allowed this government a great deal of freedom and on several occasions Speer drove 40 kilometres to where his family was staying in order to visit them. However, the British soon stopped this.

On 23rd May 1945 the British army surrounded the politicians and all of the members of Doenitz’s government were placed in a room under armed guard. One by one they were called into a room where they were registered as prisoners and in doing so Doenitz’s government was dissolved. Speer and the other members of

184 General Milch said that Speer was hoping that once the situation had settled down the allies would ask him to return to ‘take over the German government’
185 The allies wanted to avoid the possibility of another ‘stab in the back’ theory by having the armistice signed by the military. Doenitz wanted time to allow 3,000,000 German soldiers to reach the allied lines and avoid having to surrender to the Russians.

186 The team that interviewed him included John Galbraith
187 The war with Japan had not ended and the US wanted to know how to destroy their industries.
188 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 500.
the Flensburg government were flown to Luxembourg under armed guard. There Speer found all the surviving former leaders of Germany and Goering, as the highest ranked military officer, attempted to dominate the group of prisoners.

After two weeks the Americans began to treat Speer with a little more respect and he was told that he was going to be transferred. The other prisoners believed that he was about to be asked to assist in the reconstruction of Germany, and he still believed that this could not be done without his aid. He was driven in a limousine to Chesnay at Versailles, close to General Dwight Eisenhower’s headquarters. There he found the leading German technicians, scientists, railway specialists, aircraft designers, as well as many members of his own ministry, including Saur. They agreed to tell the allies all that they wished to know but Speer says that he could not contribute very much and that Saur knew more about German industry than he did.

When Eisenhower’s headquarters was moved to Frankfurt all of the prisoners were transferred to Kransberg Castle (Speer had rebuilt this castle as a headquarters for Goering). They were given freedom of movement within the castle and were treated well. Here the leading men in munitions, ship, aircraft chemistry, and textile production, were once again questioned. They hoped that once they had given the British and the Americans all the information that they needed they would be released. One of those interviewed was Wernher von Braun and all of the prisoners knew that he and his staff had already received an offer to work in the USA.

Speer was astounded when he was told that he was to be placed on trial at Nuremberg.

\[189\] Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces
The Nuremberg trial

Albert Speer was transferred to the interrogation camp of Oberursel near Frankfurt where he found the other 21 Nazi leaders who were awaiting trial. After a preliminary interrogation by the deputy prosecutor Speer was handed the indictment.\(^{190}\)

Instead of separate charges all of the prisoners were accused of the same four crimes. This filled Speer with despair as he believed that he was to be treated the same as the other Nazi leaders.\(^{191}\)

**COUNT One:**
The common plan or conspiracy to accomplish the planning...or waging a war of aggression, or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances.

**COUNT Two:**
Crimes against peace – the planning, preparing, initiating or waging of a war of aggression, or a war in violation of international treaties.

**COUNT Three:**
War crimes – violations of the laws or customs of war, to include...murder, ill-treatment or deportation to slave labour or for any other purpose of civilian populations...prisoners of war...persons on the seas, killing of hostages, plunder...wanton destruction...or devastation not justified by military necessity.

**COUNT Four:**
Crimes against humanity – namely murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population, before or during the war... or persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds... in connection with any crime within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal.

Of these counts the last two would have been the ones that would have concerned Speer the most as, to 1942, he was an architect and could clearly argue that he had no involvement with the causes of the war.

He quickly realised that he had to develop a plan to challenge these charges. He was told that Sauckel had already tried to make out that Speer was solely responsible for the entire forced labour program.

The prisoners discussed among themselves how they would describe their role in Hitler’s government and their involvement in the treatment of the Jews and of the forced labourers. Goering had been cured of his drug addiction and had once again become a dominant and formidable personality. He wanted all of the accused to take the same approach, arguing that as they were all going to be found guilty anyway, there was no point in trying to defend the charges. He wanted to whitewash Hitler and so use the trial to promote a positive legend of his rule. Goering believed that he would be executed but that within 50 years the German people would regard him as a hero and martyr.

If I have to die then I’d rather die as a martyr...than a traitor...don’t forget that the great conquerors of history are not seen as murderers – Ghengis Khan, Peter the Great, Frederick the Great...in five years time Hitler will be the idol of Germany again.\(^{192}\)

Many of the prisoners agreed with him.

Speer decided that he would adopt a very different defence and that he would admit responsibility for the actions of the whole regime in a general form. When asked to comment on the accusations he wrote:

This trial is necessary. There is a shared responsibility for such horrible crimes even in an authoritarian state.\(^{193}\)

As his lawyer Speer selected Dr Hans Flachsner who he described as being friendly and unassuming and with a sensible attitude. Flachsner strongly opposed Speer’s decision to accept this responsibility.

Speer’s account of the nine month trial which began on 20th November 1945 and

\(^{190}\) He was given this by Major Neave whose opinion of Speer is in the third section.

\(^{191}\) It would be reasonable to assume that Speer soon realised that his only way to escape the death penalty was to make himself appear very different from the other accused.

\(^{192}\) Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 511

\(^{193}\) Speer Inside the Third Reich p 510
ended on 1st October 1946 is very brief and comprises only six pages.

Speer found that although the 21 men were all still charged with the same crimes, by the time the trial started, a more detailed indictment for each of the accused had been added which gave him more confidence that he might not be treated the same as the other accused. He noted that occasionally the British and US prosecutors seemed to show him some sympathy. Throughout the presentation of the case for the prosecution Speer worked with his lawyer on his defence case until ten at night during the week, and all day on Saturday and Sunday.

After the presentation of the prosecution case each of the accused was given the opportunity to present his case. This took Speer two days. At the end of this the prosecutors could cross-examine Speer on his evidence.

Speer adopted a form of defence that was completely different from the other accused who either denied the charges or claimed that they were not responsible on the grounds that they were only carrying out a written order from Hitler. On one occasion on hearing this defence made Speer called out ‘letter carrier on high salaries’. This comment of his was reported in the newspapers.

When giving evidence Speer began by stating ‘if Hitler had had any friends I would certainly have been one of his closest friends’. He then adopted a cooperative attitude and did not try to be evasive. He accepted responsibility, as a leader, for all of Hitler’s orders that he had carried out. He stated that although subordinates have to obey orders the leaders have to accept co-responsibility for them being issued. However, this responsibility only applied to ‘fundamental matters and not to details’. In doing this Speer admitted responsibility for events that were outside of his ministry, something that Flachsner strongly advised him against.

In the second part of his testimony Speer dealt with the events that occurred at the end of the war. He talked of Hitler’s plan to destroy Germany, claiming that he wanted the German people to know the truth so that they could turn their backs on the past and end any possibility of a Hitler legend. Goering and the others strongly disapproved of this.

Speer then mentioned that he planned to kill Hitler, but said that he did not want to go into the details. The judge, however asked for more detailed information which he provided with ‘considerable reluctance’. His statement ended with an account of his attempts to counter the scorched-earth policy and the comment that from January 1945 it was quite easy to defy any of Hitler’s orders and that many other people apart from him did.

At the end of Flachsnr’s defence the chief US prosecutor Robert Jackson began his cross-examination in what Speer describes as ‘an unusually benevolent manner’. Jackson had Speer admit co-responsibility for the employment of millions of forced labourers and then discussed the second part of his testimony in a favourable light and...said he was the only man who had the courage to tell Hitler to his face that the war was lost. Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 517.

In his final statement the court Speer tried to explain what had happened. He said that Hitler’s regime was the first government in the world where the use of technology made it possible for one man to dominate an entire country. In the past any dictator needed the active support of those who were subordinate to him. Now that no

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194 Over the following three years another 177 individuals were placed on trial.
longer applied. He warned that other countries could also be dominated by similar technology at some time in the future.

After the trial Speer said that he was pleased that the guilt had been concentrated on him and the other accused, rather than the German people.

After a recess of four weeks, during which he knew that the Soviet prosecutor had urged that he be sentenced to death, Albert Speer was found guilty and sentenced to 20 years.

The court found Albert Speer guilty of having part-responsibility for the deportation of foreign workers and that he had used concentration camp inmates and had requisitioned Russian prisoners of war in the armaments factories. It found that he had opposed Himmler over the treatment of prisoners on solely the effect of such treatment on production figures and had raised no ethical or humane concerns about their treatment.

Speer served his sentence in Spandau prison and was released on 1st October 1966 with the draft of his first book already finished.
Speer in Spandau prison

Spandau military prison was built in 1876 in Berlin to house 600 prisoners. From 1947 onwards there were only seven prisoners in the jail;

Karl Doenitz
The commander in chief of the German navy and the last head of state of the Third Reich

Konstantin von Neurath
The former Foreign Minister under Hitler

Baldur von Schirach
The Reich youth leader and Gauleiter of Vienna

Albert Speer
The Reich Minister of Armaments and War Production

Walter Funk
The Minister of Economy

Rudolf Hess
Hitler's deputy until 1941

Erich Raeder
The head of the German navy until 1943.

More than four hundred soldiers guarded these seven prisoners, and the Americans, British, French, and Russians each controlled the prison on a monthly rotational system.

Speer’s cell was 3 metres long, 2.7 metres wide with yellow walls and a white ceiling. It contained a small table fixed to the wall, a chair, a toilet, and a wardrobe. There was an iron-framed bed and the blankets on it came from one of the Nazi concentration camps. He was to spend 19 years 2 months and 13 days in this cell.

The prisoners were only allowed one letter a month and a 15-minute visit by a family member every two months. Mrs Speer visited him four times in five years. He soon realised that to survive imprisonment he had to give his life a structure and this was described in his Spandau Diaries.

Speer became a gardener and replanted a 6,000-square metre garden that had been allowed to go wild, planting hundreds of fruit trees, and establishing a large vegetable patch. He ran seven kilometres a day, which eventually became his imaginary run around the world. By the end of his sentence he had travelled 32,000 kilometres and was ‘in’ Mexico. To exercise his mind he read books and journals on architecture and ancient history as well as theology and philosophy. He said that in that time he had read more than 5,000 books and had written the 1,800-page draft of his memoirs.

In October 1947 one of the guards at Spandau, told Speer that he would be willing to smuggle his mail out of the jail and this gave the prisoner unlimited, and uncensored, contact with the outside world. Eventually thousands of pages of his writings were smuggled out. At first the secret messages were transmitted through Speer's former secretary, Frau Kempf, but after 1951 Rudolf Wolters office acted as Speer's secret post office. Wolters organised Speer’s affairs on the outside world and took care of his family. Contributions were raised from Speer’s former officials and friends and Wolters maintained a bank account that eventually reached more than 150,000 marks. This money was used to support Speer’s family and to pay for his children’s education.

Speer gained access to even more money in 1953 as the allies released his personal funds. When Inside the Third Reich was published Speer gave much of the money he received in royalties to organisations set up to assist the survivors of the Final Solution.

In 1953 Hilde, his daughter, wrote to Speer asking about his involvement in the Final Solution. He wrote a lengthy reply saying ‘there is no excuse…(but there) are things for which one has to carry the blame’. He would not accept the use of the term ‘guilt’, but because he had accepted Hitler’s orders he had to share some of the consequences. He said to her that he knew nothing of what was happening to the Jews but he could have found out if he had
thought more about what was happening around him. He said that his sentence was a part of the price to be paid for his redemption. Despite being blind to what was happening around him someone had to accept responsibility for what had happened.

There were attempts to have Speer paroled early but all failed especially after the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 as the presence of the prisoners gave the Russian a justification for sending their troops into West Berlin. He was not released until 1st October 1966 when he had served his entire sentence. On the night he was released there were television cameras and reporters waiting to speak to him and the public interest in him, as an insider from the government of Hitler, was enormous.

Speer returned to Heidelberg and corresponded, either in person or in writing, with everyone who contacted him and he had a constant stream of visitors. However, he continued to have very little contact with any of his family and his books became his life. He was approached by Wolf Siedler, the head of the Propyläen publishing house, who wanted to know how someone with his background could have got mixed up ‘with those crooks’. Siedler suggested using Joachim Fest the author of *The Face of the Third Reich* to edit Speer’s draft documents. Fest cut the document from 1,800 to 500 pages and, in doing so may have edited the book according to his own interpretation of Speer as being the amoral technician.197

Speer’s book became a bestseller as it was written by a high-ranking member of Hitler’s government. It appealed to the younger generation that did not know Hitler, as Speer tells what really happened and places the blame clearly on Hitler and his inner circle, rather than on the German people. At the same time many of the older generation were offended by the idea that they had obeyed the orders of a criminal.

In both *Inside the Third Reich* and *The Spandau Diaries* Speer tried to present himself as a decent ex-Nazi who has seen the light and has turned over a new leaf. However these books upset Wolters who said that he had barely recognised his friend in these books and eventually this ended his friendship with Speer. Wolters believed that history had not given Hitler credit for ending unemployment and that the number of victims in the Holocaust was only 10 percent of the accepted estimate. He also said that it was wrong of Speer to blame Hitler when the overwhelming majority of the German people had agreed with his policies.

Speer seems to be presenting himself as a criminal and all who supported Hitler as also being criminals. When talking about his party activities in 1932 Speer writes that the party often used him as a courier, and he often had to drive into areas of the city dominated by the communists. He writes of one Nazi troop leader in one dangerous part of the town, saying:

> These people were risking their lives and sacrificing their health for an idea, never imagining that they were being exploited on behalf of the fantastic notions of a power hungry man.198

For the remainder of his life Speer spoke to anyone who was interested in his career example Matthias Schmidt, Gitta Sereny and Dan van der Vat. On 1st September 1981 Speer died while in Britain for a television interview with the BBC.

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197 See his views of Speer in the first section of this publication

198 Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* p 23.
PART THREE

THE CHANGING OPINION OF HISTORIANS

ABOUT ALBERT SPEER AND HIS ROLE

IN WORLD WAR 11
Is Albert Speer a reliable source of information?

*Inside the Third Reich* was accepted as a reliable source up to the publication of Matthias Schmidt’s book. Not only did *Inside the Third Reich* provide a new understanding of Hitler and his government but it was believed to have been written by an insider who honestly attempts to explain how he came to be one of the leaders of Hitler’s government. There have always been doubts, however, about the reliability of some of his statements.

The US team that debriefed Speer before the Nuremberg trial included John Galbraith. In *Life* magazine in 1945 Galbraith evaluated Speer as being

Speer showed himself extremely co-operative. He is without a doubt a man of very unusual ability and has a complete picture of the German war effort. His memory...is astounding

However John Galbraith had a low opinion of many of Speer’s claims and he believed that many of them contained ‘elements of fantasy’. He also believed that Speer’s confession was a part of his ‘well developed strategy of self vindication and survival.’

Matthias Schmidt completed a thesis on Speer in 1979 and this was then extended and published as a book *Albert Speer – The end of a Myth* in 1982. Matthias Schmidt made a detailed examination of the inconsistencies contained in Speer’s book and thoroughly researches his statements by making cross-references to other sources. He was the first historian to do this and as a result has come to question the persona that Speer had created for himself.

Some of the inconsistencies in Speer’s autobiography include his account of his ‘dramatic’ birth:

> I came into the world in Mannheim at noon on Sunday, March 19, 1905. The thunder of a spring storm drowned out the bells of nearby Christ Church

Matthias Schmidt researched this and finds that Speer embellished on the story and:

- He was born at 11.15 am
- The thunderstorm occurred at 3.00 pm
- The Christ Church was not built until 1911 – six years after his birth.

Schmidt then looks at a 1943 biography of Speer where he describes himself as:

> One of those who fervently committed themselves to National Socialism. His staunch faith in the victory of the movement made him a true follower of the Fuhrer.

This is not consistent with Speer’s account of his total lack of involvement with the party before 1933 and shows that he is not telling the truth to his fellow members of the party. However if this statement were true Schmidt questions Speer’s later claim at Nuremberg to have been the non-political Nazi, the technocrat who ignored the political implications of his actions and had no involvement, or interest, in government policies.

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199 Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* p. 4.
200 P. 34.
Dr Julius Lippert
In Himmler’s archives Matthias Schmidt found a copy of the documents telling how Speer gained the commission to rebuild Berlin.

In his memoirs Speer tells that Hitler had originally wanted Dr Julius Lippert, the mayor of Berlin, to carry out the work of rebuilding Berlin but as Hitler was dissatisfied with Lippert’s inability to meet Hitler’s plans he ordered Goebbels to have him replaced as mayor. Speer clearly states that it was only after Lippert was dismissed that he was given control over Berlin and he personally had no involvement in the dismissal of Lippert.

In the spring of 1936 Hitler took me with him to inspect a stretch of the autobahn. In conversation he dropped the remark: ‘I have one more building assignment to give out. The greatest of all.’ There was only this one hint. He did not explain.

Occasionally, it was true, he outlined a few of his ideas for the rebuilding of Berlin, but it was not until June that Hitler showed me a plan for the center of the city. “I patiently explained to the mayor why this new avenue must be a 118 metres wide, and now he presents me with one only 91 metres wide.”

A few weeks later Mayor Lippert, an old party member and editor in chief of the Berlin Angriff, was summoned again; but nothing had changed; the avenue was still a hundred yards in width. Lippert could not work up any enthusiasm for Hitler’s architectural ideas. At first Hitler was merely annoyed, remarking that Lippert was petty, incapable of governing a metropolis, and even more incapable of understanding the historical importance he planned to give it. As time wore on, these remarks mounted in intensity: ‘Lippert is an incompetent, an idiot, a failure, a zero.’ What was astonishing, however, was that Hitler never showed his dissatisfaction in the mayor’s presence and never tried to win him over to his views. Even in this early period he sometimes shied away from the wearisome business of explaining reasons. After four years of this sort of thing, and right after a walk from the Berghof to the teahouse, during which he once more brooded over Lippert’s stupidity, he telephoned Goebbels and categorically ordered him to replace his mayor.

Until the summer of 1936 Hitler had evidently meant to have his plans for Berlin carried out by the municipal government. Now he sent for me and tensely gave me the assignment: ‘There is nothing to be done with the Berlin government. From now on you make the plans. Take this drawing along. When you have something ready show it to me. As you know I always have time for such things’.

Matthias Schmidt’s research resulted in an entirely different interpretation of this event. Hitler, in appointing Speer to head the program to rebuild Berlin, made use of his usual technique of giving two people overlapping responsibilities. Lippert, an old comrade of Goebbels and mayor of Berlin since 1937, was in control of Berlin while Speer was always in charge of the rebuilding program. The reality was that Lippert had no objection to the redevelopment of Berlin and on a number of occasions had stated that he would assist Speer. He did, however, object to Speer’s arrogance and ‘omnipotence’ in ignoring the views of the city officials. Schmidt examines Speer’s letters to Lippert where he writes:

It would be inconceivable that the...measures necessary to this project should be regulated by arrangements and comprises between myself and the official agencies...the unique nature of my project clearly demands that one agency bear sole responsibility for the entire work. It is...

Speer then issued an edict to Lippert that he must follow ‘instructions’. Lippert was a long time Nazi and could not be intimidated and he refused to agree to this demand which he saw as being dictatorial, but he wrote to Speer in return saying, ‘my entire municipal administration is at your disposal for the Fuhrer’s gigantic work’.

Speer complained directly to Hitler who immediately had Lippert replaced.

Schmidt describes Speer in this incident as being ‘sneering, crude, rude and gross’ while van der Vat described it as an example of ‘political ruthlessness’.

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201 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p. 73 –74.
Speer in hospital

Schmidt examines the documents surrounding Speer’s hospitalisation in 1944 and has found evidence that contradicted the account in his book.

He found that Speer originally consulted Dr Karl Brandt, one of Hitler’s doctors, and it was Brandt who recommended that he enter Hohenlychen Clinic, run by Dr Gebhardt, the top physician in the SS.

According to Schmidt the reason why Speer continued to work to midnight for the first three weeks was not his fear that Hitler would forget him but his concern that others might encroach on his power. Indeed Gebhardt had to remove Speer’s visitors on a number of occasions and Hitler was openly worried about him and had given orders that he receive regular reports about Speer’s health.

This impression of Hitler is confirmed by von Below’s memoirs where he says:

Hitler was aware of the change in Speer, he knew that Speer was no longer convinced of our victory. But, in the many conversations he drew me into, particularly during those comparatively quiet months...he said repeatedly that despite Speer's diminishing faith in victory, he was the only one capable of understanding the complexity of the armament sector. "Given our urgent needs now," he said, ‘Speer is the only one who can deal with it.’ And the fact is, that once Speer had taken it all in hand again, the old close relationship between him and Hitler was quickly restored and there was not a trace of distrust on either side.

The records show that Dr Koch was not called in by Speer’s wife but by Gebhardt and Dr Morell, Hitler’s other personal doctor. There is evidence that Koch had several telephone conversations with Morell about Speer’s condition and after the war Koch had no memory of any life-threatening operation ordered by Gebhardt.

When Speer was transferred to the warmer climate of Italy Gebhardt made all the arrangements and, as Himmler had made him personally responsible for his safety, Gebhardt went with him. On his recovery Speer gave Gebhardt a signed photograph with his personal thanks and requested that he continue to monitor his health.

Schmidt also questions Speer’s claim that Hitler was cold towards him. In reality, although he was angry with Speer’s letters demanding that he take action against Dorsch, Hitler summoned General Milch, one of Speer’s best friends, to a meeting to bring about a reconciliation between the two of them. At the end of this meeting he told Milch to ‘tell Speer that I love him.’

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204 Schmidt, Albert Speer p. 97
The attempted assassinations
Speer claims that he planned to kill Hitler. At the Nuremberg trials this sensational statement was an integral part of his well thought out defence and it impressed the court by making Speer very different from the other accused. It was intended to assist him in receiving a sentence different to the ones the other accused would receive.

Schmidt writes that Goering’s reaction was:

That damn fool Speer! Did you see the way he completely humiliated himself in the courtroom today? God in heaven! I nearly died of embarrassment! To think that a German can act that vile in order to prolong his lousy life – to say it openly – in order to keep pissing in front and shitting in back! Goddamn it, damn it to hell. Do you think I give a hoot about this lousy life? I don’t give a tinker’s damn whether I’m executed, drown, die in a plane crash, or drink myself to death! But there’s such a thing as a sense of honour in this accursed life! Assassinate Hitler! Ha! God in heaven! I could have sunk into the ground! 205

Clearly Goering had doubts about the accuracy of Speer’s claim to have planned to kill Hitler and has given Speer another motive for his statement to the court. There must have been some basis for this assassination attempt as Speer names Stahl and Henschel as being involved in the plot.

Despite this Speer’s story does not seem to add up.

- If he had wished to kill Hitler he could have simply put a gun in his pocket and shot him when he was alone with him.
- As Hitler worked in the Chancellery and at this time only went into the underground bunker during an attack this meant that he could only put the gas in the ventilation shaft during an air raid.
- As Speer was the architect who designed the Chancellery surely he knew of another access point for the gas?

Speer had made no plans for what would happen afterwards. Assuming he had killed Bormann and Goebbels as well, Goering, officially next in line to Hitler, would have taken control. This ignores the reaction of Himmler and the SS. Had Speer ensured that he had the support of the army?

In April 1945 Speer claims to have been a member of a plot to kidnap Bormann, Ley and Himmler. Flares were to simulate an allied bombing raid and the three were to be seized when they rushed to a bomb shelter. However, this would have been a very complex operation and would involve a large number of people. What would be achieved by arresting them? While they were still alive they could be freed. What would Hitler’s reaction to this be? His reaction to the July bomb plot suggests that the organiser any other plot would have been treated the same way.

On 29th March 1945 Speer offended Hitler by telling him that the war lost. He was then given an ultimatum that he must state that he believed the war could be won. The following day Speer stated, ‘Mein Fuhrer I stand unreservedly behind you’. 206 Yet it was not long before this that Speer had been planning to assassinate Hitler with poison gas. Speer immediately gained Hitler’s approval for him to be given control of the plans to destroy the German infrastructure and did everything he could to prevent this destruction from taking place.

206 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p. 455.
Their final meeting

Just days before the end of the war in Europe on 7th May 1945 Speer made a very dangerous flight into Berlin as the Chancellery was being hit by Russian artillery shells. He says that he did this to say his last farewell to Hitler as he still respected him and was grateful for all that he had done for him during the previous twelve years. While he was there he confessed to Hitler that he had disobeyed his scorched-earth policy, something which could have resulted in his own execution. Speer’s account of this visit, and his personal respect for Hitler, also had a very favourable effect at Nuremberg.

Speer’s confession to Hitler has to be questioned because Hitler already knew that he was undermining his scorched-earth policy. On Speer’s return from his tour of the Ruhr area on 27th March he was summoned by Hitler who said:

Bormann has given me a report of your conference with the Ruhr Gauleiters. You pressed them not to carry out my orders and declared that the war was lost. Are you aware of what must follow from that?…If you were not my architect I would take the measures that are called for in such a case.207

Not only did Speer know that Hitler knew all about it, Hitler had already spared his life! However there is another possible motive for Speer’s visit and it is centred on what happened as a result of this conversation with Hitler. At this time it was obvious that the end of the war was near and Speer would have known that Hitler was writing his Last Testament and would be naming his successor, as well as those who would be in the new government after his death.

Speer did not want to be named as Hitler’s successor and have to accept the unpopularity with the German people for surrendering. His reference to Colonel Poser after the meeting about Prince Max makes this obvious.

Thank God I don’t have to play the role of a Prince Max of Baden

At the same time Speer would not want to be a member of the new cabinet. Speer had intended to have an extended holiday in Greenland and would return to Germany after the situation had settled down and he believed that he would be accepted by the allies as a member of the organisation to rebuild German industry. To be a member of the last Nazi government would be a stain that would be difficult to remove.

Speer describes what happened at his last meeting with Hitler:

He showed no emotion at all. Once again I had the feeling that he was empty, burned out, lifeless. He assumed that businesslike expression, which could be a mask for anything and asked me what I thought about Doenitz's approach to his job. I had the distinct feeling that he was not asking about Doenitz by chance, but that the question involved his successor. And to this day I think that Doenitz liquidated the hopeless legacy that unexpectedly became his lot with more prudence, dignity, and responsibility than Bormann or Himmler would have done. I voiced my favourable impression of the admiral, now and then enriching my account with anecdotes which I knew would please Hitler. But with the wisdom of long experience I did not try to influence him in Doenitz's favour, for fear that this would drive him in the opposite direction.208

Apart from showing his ability to manipulate Hitler Speer took advantage of the opportunity to ensure that Doenitz was named as Hitler’s successor and the new Prince Max. This impression is confirmed when on 30th September 1956 Doenitz was released from Spandau prison. His last words to Speer were

Because of you I've lost these last eleven years. You're to blame for it all….but for you Hitler would never have had the idea of making me chief of state...my career was wrecked

This friendly meeting between Hitler and Speer ended with the two of them going over the plans for Linz. Speer was not a member of the new cabinet, and this would be to his advantage after the war.


208 Speer, Inside the Third Reich p 479
After the death of Hitler was announced on 1st May 1945 Speer plans to fly to Greenland were at an end. He remained close to Doenitz as his minister for Economics and Production (not armaments) and did all he could to make the new government acceptable to the allies by including liberals and Social Democrats. This would also assist Speer in his expectation of being made a member of the new government with the role of rebuilding German industry.

Armaments
There also has to be doubts about Speer’s claim to be the great armaments minister who single-handedly did so much to assist the military effort. John Galbraith, a member of the team who questioned Speer at Frankfurt, said, ‘he kept presenting himself as an outstanding technician and organiser. He could assume that his enemies would admire a good mind and a technological talent’ 209. This has to be balanced against Speer’s admission that Saur knew more about German industry than he did.

Speer was not an engineer and had no experience with the use of mass-production techniques in a factory setting. Hitler did not give him his position because of his technical skill, he made him Minister for Armaments because he had a reputation for being a skilled organiser. He had shown that he could handle huge and complex tasks such as the rebuilding of Berlin and Nuremberg and could complete these tasks within a strict time limit for example the building of the new Chancellery.

Speer, in just five days, had developed his plan to revitalise industrial output, basing it on the ideas of Rathenau and he gave individual businessmen the freedom to develop their own methods to increase production.

For most of his career Speer was not in his office solving problems. He left that to his assistants and when they came to him with an issue be simply approached Hitler to gain his support for the solution.

Finally it is difficult to believe that Speer knew nothing about the plans and policies of the Nazis about the Jews when he joined the party in 1931. The institute where he worked was a centre of Nazi activity and he wrote that his students were constantly arguing with him and with each other about the policies of the Nazi party. His knowledge of foreign affairs and the planned invasion of Russia, in particular, show that he gained a detailed knowledge of Nazi policies, outside of the area of his ministry from his close association with Hitler. Was the term Final Solution never raised in his presence?

\[209 \text{ Galbraith, Economics, Peace and Laughter p. 295.}\]
Speer and the Final Solution

The greatest question about Speer is did he know about the Final Solution?

When asked by Flachsner during his trial if he had ever made any statements about ideology or anti-Semitism Speer replied:

No I never made a statement of the kind, either in speeches or in memoranda. I assume that otherwise the prosecution would have ... produced something like that.

Speer insisted that he did not know of the extermination program or the gassings during the war. However, he accepted that his personal guilt included the Final Solution, meaning that he should have known and that he gave his approval because he was ignorant of what was happening.

As Reich Armaments Minister, he was responsible for the mobilisation of the entire resources of the German Empire\(^{210}\), including the Jewish workers. That millions of Jews could have been killed in wartime industrial centres such as Auschwitz without Speer becoming aware of it seems to be almost impossible. Speer made a number of statements in which he used key words, which suggest that he did know about the Final Solution.

In his autobiography Speer’s account of a conversation with Karl Hanke contains the word ‘again’\(^{211}\). The second is his account of Goering’s comments about the Hungarian Jews during the trials\(^{212}\). Goering was the head of the air force and the Four Year Plan and had very little to do with prisoners. He was a known drug addict and the most marginalised of the leaders. However he knew. So how could Speer not know?

Other key words

The American journalist Eric Borden interviewed Speer for ten days and then wrote an article about him in \textit{Playboy} magazine (Volume 6, 1971). Most of the article repeated known points but Speer made one decisive admission. Borden wrote how Speer repeated his confession that he failed to take Hitler’s threats against the Jews seriously, and his refusal to accept any personal involvement in these actions saying

I just stood aside and said to myself that as long as I did not personally participate it had nothing to do with me. My \textit{toleration} for the anti-Semitic campaign made me responsible for it.

The key word is use of ‘toleration’ – how can someone tolerate something if one was not aware of that event. Speer must have known what was happening to the Jews. When he referred to his use of slave labour, supplied to him by Sauckel, he used the comparison

Our roles were rather like the captain of the slave ship and the slave owner who buys his cargo.

Speer agreed that he had pleaded not guilty to this accusation at Nuremberg as it carried the death sentence. Sauckel was sentenced to death.

Another example occurred in 1977. A group of South Africans racists were claiming that the Holocaust had never occurred. The Jewish Board of Deputies wrote to Speer asking if he could provide any evidence to show that the Holocaust had actually taken place.

Speer’s reply included:

I regard it as right to take upon myself the responsibility, and with it the guilt, for everything that was undertaken by way of crime...after my entry into Hitler’s government in February 1942. It is not individual misdeeds ...that incriminate me, but rather my conduct in the leadership. I still see my main guilt in \textit{connivance} at the persecution of the Jews and the murder of millions of them.

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\(^{210}\) The term German Empire was used at this time to describe Germany and the conquered or occupied states.  
\(^{211}\) See page 62  
\(^{212}\) See page 63
Again it is Speer’s unconscious use of key words that is revealing. How could he use the word ‘connivance’ if he did not know what was happening?

When Gitta Sereny interviewed Speer he said:

I can say that I suspected...that something appalling was happening with the Jews.213

If you suspect you must have some hard information on which to base your suspicions.

If Speer was the second-most important person in the Nazi hierarchy and he knew what was being done to the Jews he must be guilty of being one of the persecutors.

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**Rebuilding Berlin and flats owned by Jewish people**

There is no question that Speer had complete control of the GBI, (the organisation set up to rebuild the city of Berlin. However, Speer’s *Inside the Third Reich* ignores the question of what was going to happen to the residents whose flats had to be demolished to allow for the construction of the new buildings. To create room for these new huge public buildings it was necessary to demolish 50,000 apartments in the centre of Berlin. Of these, 23,765 flats were owned or were rented by Jews. It was estimated that approximately 75,000 Jews lived in these flats. Our knowledge of Speer’s actions comes entirely from Rudolf Wolters’ chronicle of Speer’s career in the GBI, which contains detailed original source material on this topic. Speer decided that the flats should be given to Aryans whose own accommodation had been damaged by the British air raids or men who had been wounded in the war. He knew that the Jews would be deported to Poland and eventually to the concentration camps. Wolters’ chronicle for 1941 records:

In accordance with Speer’s orders, a further action was started to clear about 5,000 Jewish flats. The existing apparatus was appropriately enlarged so that the Jewish flats could be made ready at top speed and with demolition tenants from the areas to be cleared.

The third major action for the de-renting of Jewish flats was inaugurated at the end of November...and made available...Jewish flats.214

This ‘action’ involved the Gestapo visiting each flat, ordering the people to pack; and placing them on trains to be sent to the east. Speer was fully informed of these evacuations. This contradicts Speer’s claim at his trial, and in his memoirs, that he had no personal involvement in the crimes against humanity that occurred during the Third Reich. He lied, as he knew in 1941 that the Jews were being persecuted and he played an active role in the process.

Van der Vat comments:

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214 Van der Vat *The Good Nazi* p98
These mass evictions are...the first landmark on a trail of evidence which proves that he was a fraud\textsuperscript{215}.

However, in 1971, the American historian Erich Goldhagen located a document that supports the allegation that he was definitely at a meeting at Posen on 6\textsuperscript{th} October 1943 when Himmler explained the Final Solution to all of the Gauleiters. In the morning of October 6\textsuperscript{th} Doenitz, Milch, Speer, and five of his heads of departments each gave a report to the Gauleiters. In the afternoon Himmler made a speech to the elite of the party during which he outlined the policy of eliminating the Jews.\textsuperscript{216}

Speer made no reference to this speech of Himmler’s in his memoirs. However he was definitely at this meeting in the morning of the 6\textsuperscript{th} October and afterwards he complained to Hitler that the Gauleiters became drunk that same night.

When Goldhagen’s article was published Speer claimed that although Himmler did refer to him by name this did not prove that he was present at the time and it could have been a rhetorical reference. He pointed out that there were 70 people present at the meeting and Himmler could not have seen them all. He stated that he had confused the speech he had given to the Gauleiters at Posen on 6\textsuperscript{th} October 1943 with the one he had given on 4\textsuperscript{th} August 1944. In fact he had left the city on the afternoon of 6\textsuperscript{th} October before Himmler’s speech and his former assistant Walter Rohland confirmed this in an affidavit.

**A good deed forgotten**

Schmidt tells that after Speer’s release from prison, he was, in 1968, called as a witness in the trial of a former SS guard at the Dora concentration camp. Dora was the underground factory for the production of V2 rockets and Speer had visited the camp on 10\textsuperscript{th} December 1943. Speer wrote that he was distressed at the barbarous conditions under which the prisoners worked and the resulting high death rate.

A Jewish prisoner who was ordered to work in the crematory overseeing other Jewish prisoners was a also witness at the

\textsuperscript{215} Van der Vat *The Good Nazi* p74

\textsuperscript{216} See Document 9
trial and in his evidence he testified that while Speer was at the camp he had prevented a number of planned executions. Speer, however, denied that this had ever taken place. If it had occurred it would have meant that he was aware of the crimes of the Nazis.

**Russian prisoners**

On 20th February 1942 Albert Rosenberg, the Minister of the Occupied Eastern Territories, wrote to General Keitel complaining about the treatment of Russian prisoners of war. In his letter he said that many of these prisoners were anti-communist and by their actions the military had deprived the armaments industry of millions of potential workers.

A copy of this letter would certainly have been sent to Speer.

Rosenberg wrote:

> Of 3.6 million prisoners of war, only a few hundred thousand remain capable of working. Many have died of starvation, others from typhus. Although, given the immense numbers, supply problems were bound to be inevitable, a proper appreciation of our policies could have avoided this extent of loss.

Thus, while a few sensible camp commanders facilitated the provision of food by local inhabitants, most of them prohibited it, preferring to let the men die or (on many occasions) even shooting them. In many camps, even in snow and ice, there was no covered accommodation and not only were there no latrines, but not even tools to enable the prisoners to dig holes. The result of the commonly employed maxim ‘the more croak, the better’ is that typhus has spread not only to the civilian population and German troops, but even into Germany

On 1st February 1943 Speer’s department wrote to Himmler saying:

> To the ReichFuhrer SS

> Dear Party Comrade Himmler, I am informed that a large resettlement drive is about to be undertaken in the district of Bialystok. Following the evacuation of about 40,000 Jews from the district's ghettos, 40,000 White Ruthenian peasants, who if left in place could support partisans active in the areas, are to be transferred to the habitations left by the Jews. As the available space is considered insufficient for their needs, application has been made to me for building materials for a barrack settlement for 20,000.

While fully appreciating these measures, I fear priority for building materials in these times of scarcity must be given to housing for armament workers and victims of enemy bombardments at home. I must therefore ask you to have these people settled without further demands on our limited building supplies.

> Heil Hitler

> Yours, Speer

This suggests that Speer knew that large numbers of Jews were being “evacuated”.

Sereny also located a directive from the Ministry of the Occupied Eastern Territories dated 12th June 1944. As Speer was responsible for the Todt Organisation it is quite likely that he knew of this plan:

> Army Group Centre has the intention to apprehend 40,000-50,000 youths of the ages of 10 to 14 who are in the army territory and to transport them to the Reich. It is intended to allot these juveniles primarily as apprentices to the German trades, to be used after two years' training as skilled workers. This is to be arranged through the Organisation Todt, which is especially equipped for such a task, by means of its technical and other set-ups....

This action is aimed not only at preventing a direct reinforcement of the enemy's military strength but also at a reduction of his biological potentialities as viewed from the perspective of the future. These ideas have been voiced not only by the ReichFuhrer SS but also by the Fuhrer.

**His Knowledge of Hitler’s intentions**

At the end of his book Speer reflected on his guilt and said:

> Today, a quarter of a century after these events, it is not only specific faults that burden my conscience, great as these may

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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 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. 219

In this speech Hitler said:

This war will not end as the Jews imagine by the extermination of the European Aryan people, but the outcome of this war will be the annihilation of the Jews. Now, for the first time, they will not bleed other people to death, but for the first time the old Jewish law of eye for eye and tooth for tooth will be applied. 220

Speer states that Hitler repeated this statement on 30th January 1940.
Speer and the Nuremberg trial

A detailed study of Speer’s trial at Nuremberg reveals an interpretation that differs from the account in his autobiography.

The international tribunal came about as a result of initiatives from the USA. From 1943 on the US Government had been debating what to do with Germany once the war was won. The conclusion was that

- Germany must agree to any treaty and it could not be imposed, as any peace had to be lasting.
- The destruction of all German industry would seriously damage the economy of Europe and increase the possibility of another dictatorship in Germany.
- The German people could not be treated as criminals, but the punishment of war criminals might make it easier for other countries to accept Germany as an equal in the new postwar Europe. The Secretary for War Henry Stimson wrote to Roosevelt saying ‘the punishment of these men in a dignified manner consistent with the advance of civilisation will have a great effect on posterity’.

The chief US prosecutor Robert Jackson said that:

> One of the primary purposes of these trials is to convince the German people that they were the first to be betrayed and to prevent, if possible, the building up of a legend which will revive hostilities in the future.\(^{221}\)

The trials began on 20\(^{th}\) November 1945 and the legal representatives consisted of four prosecution teams and eight judges (two from the USA, France, Britain, and the Soviet Union).

Robert Jackson opened the trials with a detailed history of the Nazi party:

> The privilege of being the first trial in history for crimes against the peace of the World imposes a grave responsibility. The wrongs which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant and so devastating that civilisation can not survive their being repeated… the common sense of mankind demands that the law shall not stop with the punishment of petty crimes by little people. It must also reach men who possessed themselves of great power and made deliberate and concerted use of it to set in motion evils which leave no home in the world untouched\(^{222}\).

The Russian presented eyewitnesses who spoke of what they had seen, including Jacob Vernik a Polish carpenter who had spent a year in Treblinka where 10,000 people a day were killed and he said:

> Awake or asleep I see the terrible visions of thousands of people calling for help, begging for life and mercy. I have lost all of my family. I have myself led them to death. I have myself built the death chambers in which they were murdered. I am afraid of everything. I fear that everything I have seen is written on my face. An old and broken life is a very heavy burden, but I must carry on and live to tell the world what German crimes and barbarism I saw.\(^{223}\)

Sir Hartley Shawcross, the British prosecutor, presented a description from a German eyewitness of a mass execution of Jews by one of Himmler’s Action Groups:

> Without screaming or weeping, these people undressed, stood around in family groups, kissed each other, said farewells, and waited for a sign from another SS man, who stood near the pit…with a whip in his hand. During the fifteen minutes I stood nearby, I heard no plea for mercy. I watched a family of about eight people, a man and a woman of about fifty with two daughters of about twenty to twenty-four and boys of about one, eight, and ten. An old woman with snow white hair was holding the one year-old in her arms and singing to it and tickling it. The child was cooing with delight. The couple were looking on with tears in their eyes. The father was holding the hand of a boy about ten years old and speaking to him softly; the boy was fighting his tears.\(^{222}\)

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\(^{221}\) Goering was determined to establish a legend of Hitler and do what Jackson feared. Speer realised this and did everything he could to undermine Goering’s standing in the hope that it may assist his defence. See Goering’s attitude in the section on the trials on page 80.

\(^{222}\) Taylor, *The anatomy of the Nuremberg trials* pp 167/168

\(^{223}\) Tusa, *The Nuremberg trial* pp 200/201
The father pointed to the sky, stroked his head and seemed to explain something to him. At that moment the SS man at the pit shouted something to his comrade who then counted off about twenty persons and instructed them to get down behind a mound of earth. Among them was the family I have mentioned.

An SS man sat on the edge of the narrow end of the pit, his feet dangling... a tommy gun on his knees. He was smoking a cigarette. The people, completely naked, went down some steps, which were cut in the clay wall of the pit and clambered over the heads of the dead lying there, to the place to which the SS man directed them. They lay down in front of the dead or injured; some caressed those who were still alive and spoke to them in a low voice. Then I heard a series of shots. I looked in the pit and saw that the bodies were twitching or lying motionless on top of those before them. Blood was running from their necks.

The trials soon gained a reputation for fairness. Wilson Harris, a British Member of Parliament wrote:

The whole setting of the court is impressive and reassuring...no bench could be more impartial than this...body is showing itself to be ...the atmosphere of vengeance and retaliation is totally absent from the courthouse. The atmosphere is one of justice, stern but scrupulous and based on evidence, which the defence had full liberty to controvert if it can to the court.

At the conclusion of the prosecution case each of the defendants was able to present their defence case.

Some of them felt a little optimistic. On 20th September 1946 the Chicago Daily News published a report stating that the prosecution was not expecting the death penalty in every case and that the sentences would vary from prisoner to prisoner. The defendants’ morale rose dramatically in March 1946 when Winston Churchill made his famous Iron Curtain speech and spoke of the widening gulf between the allies and the Russians. Speer describes the accused as being delighted and tremendously excited. Goering said:

The Fuhrer and I always prophesied it. This coalition had to break up sooner or later.

The men on trial thought that all would be forgotten and that they would be released to take responsible positions in the new Germany and would be praised for their foresight.

However when each man was presented with the task of explaining his own role in the crimes of the Third Reich most of the accused tried to blame Himmler, who had committed suicide and could not contradict them, rather than Hitler and himself. In this way each hoped to avoid having to accept responsibility for the crimes of the Third Reich.

Goering was once again a strong and ruthless character and he was determined to dominate the trials. He accepted personal responsibility for his actions:

Though I received orders from the Fuhrer, I assume full responsibility for them. They bear my signature. I issued them. Consequently I do not propose to hide behind the Fuhrer’s orders.

However when Goering was cross-examined and was asked who was responsible for the attacks on the Warsaw ghetto he said:

Himmler I suppose...he had his own chosen psychopaths to carry these things out and it was kept a secret from the rest of us. But I would have never suspected him of it. He did not seem to be the murder type.

When asked the same question Ribbentrop said:

I can’t conceive of Hitler ordering such things. I can’t believe he knew about it. He had a hard side I know, but I believed in him with all my heart. He could really be so tender. I was willing to do anything for him.

Sauckel replied:

It’s hard to say. We are of different opinions whether Hitler knew about those things ... But there is no doubt Himmler did those things and they cannot possibly be justified.

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224 Taylor, The anatomy of the Nuremberg trials pp 244/245
225 Tusa, The Nuremberg Trial p. 205.
226 Tusa, The Nuremberg Trial p. 201
Frank was more prepared to pin blame on Hitler:

At some moment Hitler and Himmler must have simply sat down and Hitler gave him orders to wipe out whole races and groups of people.

Neurath thought that Hitler:

Must have done his conspiring with his little group of henchmen late at night. But I couldn't stay up so late. Sometimes he would call up at one, two or three in the morning. That is probably when these secret discussions with Himmler and Bormann took place.

All the defendants claimed to have known nothing of the unpleasant policies of the government in which they served. However, after three months of detailed courtroom evidence, there was no longer any question of not knowing. All the defendants accepted the evidence they had heard, and did not deny that these crimes had happened while not accepting that they were legally and morally responsible.

By June when Speer gave his evidence the atmosphere at Nuremberg was one of boredom. It was only by his own actions in the witness box that the Speer could break through the court’s feeling of routine at hearing accused after accused make similar statements and explanations about their lack of responsibility for the crimes of their government.

Speer had to deal with his involvement with Sauckel. To many people Sauckel was Speer’s subordinate who simply found, by any possible means, the workers that Speer demanded.

Sauckel was seen by many as a slaver, admitting that he moved more than five million people to Germany and he agreed that less than 200,000 came of their own free will. These workers were assigned to armaments factories and to the building of fortifications. The evidence presented during the trial clearly show that Sauckel knew the terrible conditions under which these people worked and knew of the squalor and cruelty that they had to endure. He wrote to the Gauleiters saying that:

Cool commonsense demands the proper treatment of foreign labour ... slaves who are underfed, diseased, resentful and full of hate will never yield that maximum of output that they might achieve under normal conditions.

Speer had decided on the form of his defence, which was very well prepared, before he met Dr Hans Flachsner.

He was charged with four counts. The first two were weak and had been based on the assumption that since Speer was Hitler's close friend and was constantly in his company, he must in some way have been part of the alleged conspiracy and was involved in planning and in waging aggressive war.

Flachsner’s first question to Speer was:

Herr Speer will you please tell the tribunal about your life up until the time you were appointed Minister.

Speer opened his defence by accepting that this perception of his involvement existed and then said

If Hitler had had any friends I certainly would have been one of them.

But Speer then argued that Hitler had always been 'unapproachable' and had treated Speer at first as his personal architect with whom he loved to discuss only grandiose schemes for the rebuilding of Germany, and then as his minister with whom meetings were restricted to technical matters. Speer explained that he had entered the inner Nazi circle as the creator of the regime's cathedral of light. He had designed Nazi public buildings and his great theatrical achievement had been the Nuremberg rallies with the vast expanses of stadiums, the unfurling flags and the dramatic torches.

Having shown that he had administrative ability, a grasp of technical problems, and immense drive in minor jobs in the labour front and as an Inspector of Water and Energy, in 1942, Hitler made Speer Reich
Minister for Armament and Munitions, taking the place of Todt, who had died in an aeroplane crash. By this time most of the military planning was finished and the war of aggression had already begun.

Once a minister, Speer agreed that his department became the most powerful influence in the German economy which, he admitted, he had tried to regulate to meet the armaments requirements of the military. Such work was not in itself criminal, according to the indictment, as other people had played a similar role in every country at war.

Speer was found not guilty of counts one and two. The tribunal said that:

Speer’s activities did not amount to initiating, planning, or preparing wars of aggression, or of conspiring to that end. He became the head of the armament industry well after all of the wars had been commenced and were under way. His activities in charge of German armament production were in aid of the war effort in the same way that other productive enterprises aid in the waging of war; but the tribunal is not prepared to find that such activities involve ‘engaging in the common plan to wage aggressive war’ as charged under count one or ‘waging aggressive war’ as charged under count two.

The charges against Speer under counts three and four were about his methods of obtaining and treating the workers on which Germany’s armaments production depended. It was alleged that he had employed prisoners of war in military factories, which was forbidden by the Hague Convention and that he had used millions of slave labourers who were degraded and were brutalised by excessive work, inhumane conditions, and vicious punishments.

Many people who attended the Nuremberg trials found it difficult to reconcile such charges with the man they saw in the dock. Speer was young, energetic, intelligent, pleasant looking, and ‘respectable’, not at all the sort of man expected in the company of vicious, immoral Nazis such as Streicher, Kaltenbrunner or Rosenberg.

For the first day and a half Speer concentrated on how he had accomplished an industrial miracle between 1942 and 1945. In his dark suit, clean shirt, and neat tie he was very much the confident young managing director reporting to his shareholders on the successes of his firm.

He had a lot to be proud of, and was well aware that he was infinitely better informed than the prosecution. Speer had always shown an amazing mastery of his complex tasks and his knowledge had been refreshed, and probably deepened, by his interrogations by the allied industrial and technical experts at the end of the war.

Flachsner made out that Speer was non-political by quoting his memorandum to Hitler, dated September 20th 1944.

The task I have to perform is a nonpolitical one.

He opened by stating that Speer’s building projects for Berlin and Nuremberg would have been among the greatest in the world and would have cost more than two months of Germany’s expenditure on weapons and so had a negative impact on its military preparation for war.

Next Speer defined his ministerial tasks as overcoming Germany’s lack of raw materials, introducing an assembly-line production and developing new weapons. From 1943 he had to deal with the damage caused by the allies’ bombing campaign. He said that he had been able to increase the production of weapons sevenfold, of ammunition sixfold and that of armoured vehicles by five-and-a-half times. To achieve these figures Speer had taken over the armaments factories from first one armed service then another; evolved more efficient production methods; and taken control of all raw steel, nitrogen, synthetic rubber, locomotives, and textiles. He had raised production with only a 30 percent increase in the workforce. By 1944 he was employing 14,000,000 people in the Greater German Reich alone.

227 Or someone trying to convince the allies that he still had much to offer them.
Speer said:

In 1942 I took over the armaments and production programs with altogether 2.6 million workers. In the spring of 1943 Doenitz gave me the responsibility of naval armament as well, and at this point I had 3.2 million workers. In September of 1943, through an agreement with the Minister of Economy, Herr Funk, the production task of the Ministry of Economy was transferred to me. With that I had 12 million workers working for me. Finally, I took over the air armament from Goering on 1st August 1944. With that the total production was marshalled under me with 14 million workers. The number of workers applies to the Greater German Reich not including the occupied countries. [228]

The tribunal became increasingly restless as Speer bombarded them with statistics and boring details of industrial processes. The judges asked if this was relevant to his case but Speer did not deviate from his prepared line of defence.

Speer then discussed his role with the forced labourers. He realised that it was essential for him to make it clear to the court that Sauckel was solely responsible for finding forced labourers as he, Speer, had no control over Sauckel. He expressed gratitude to Sauckel for finding these workers and expressed regret that a shortage of raw materials meant it was impossible to employ more. He expressed no regrets about the way the workers had been found and had been brought to Germany, as that was the responsibility of others.

I had no influence on the methods by which workers were recruited. If the workers were being brought to Germany against their will that means, as I see it, that they were obliged to work for Germany. Whether such laws were justified or not, that was a matter I did not check at the time. Besides this was no concern of mine. [229]

Nor did Speer feel personally responsible for the working conditions of the slaves. He claimed to have believed that output could 'be achieved in the long run only through the goodwill of the worker himself' and to have insisted on decent working conditions.

If methods of recruitment, transport, discipline and employment were not up to the standard Speer had requested, others were to blame. Perhaps the army, Sauckel, the SS, or the factory managers. He thought that Mauthausen had given 'a model impression of cleanliness'. He blandly explained that the factories within the concentration camps had been set up to spare factory workers the strains of travel. He had never heard of cruelty in such places. As far as Himmler's SS factories were concerned they were not under his control.

In all my activities as Armaments Minister I never once visited a labour camp and can not therefore give any information about them.

Speer then turned to the accusation that he used prisoners of war in the armaments industry. He argued that it was legal to use prisoners of war in factories that did not produce goods for the military. Since he had control over many different types of factories and there were no accurate statistics as to where these prisoners had been employed, he was able to argue that he avoided using them in armament factories. This was a shrewd argument. Even if the prosecution did not believe him, they could never produced evidence to show that prisoners of war had been illegally employed. He was willing to produce figures on the numbers of Russian prisoners sent to German coalmines because he could show that they were not employed in munitions, military vehicle, or explosives factories.

In the afternoon of 20th June the atmosphere in the court suddenly changed when Speer changed topics and began his discussion of Hitler. Speer began by describing Hitler as someone who:

Knew how to confine every man to his own speciality...he was the only coordinating factor.

Speer argued that Hitler's monopoly of power and control over the decision-

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228 Taylor, The anatomy of the Nuremberg trials p 449
229 Taylor, The anatomy of the Nuremberg trials p 451
making process had led to the defeat of Germany. He had insisted on continuing the war when, by autumn 1944, the war was clearly lost. The transport system was in chaos, contact with the Ruhr cut and 90 per cent of the fuel plants destroyed. Speer had sent twelve memoranda to Hitler between June and December that year, drawing attention to the irreparable damage and the reduction in production, insisting that the fight could not continue. Hitler had ignored his pleas, threatened that pessimistic public statements would be treated as treason, and incited the people with promises of fresh victories and rumours of new miracle weapons. As the intensity of the allied bombing mounted and the Russian advance cut Germany’s coal supplies from Upper Silesia, Hitler screamed first for greater efforts and then ordered the destruction of industrial plants and agricultural resources as his armies retreated from the occupied territories.

Finally Hitler demanded a scorched-earth policy in Germany itself. Hitler, said Speer, 'had identified the fate of the German people with his own'. He blamed the people for his defeat, 'but he never blamed himself'. His slogan had been 'Victory or destruction' and it was clear from March 1945 that he:

| Intended to deliberately destroy the means of life for his own people if the war were lost …the sacrifices which were made on both sides after January 1945, were senseless. The dead of this period will be the accusers of the man responsible for the continuation of that fight, Adolf Hitler. |

This was sensational and the mood in the courtroom was electric. There was considerable consternation in the ranks of the defendants as they listened to the statement and Goering and Doenitz openly argued about it. However, in saying this Speer did not denounce Hitler's ambition or his actions, but only his insistence on prolonging the war and of punishing the German people for being defeated.

Speer had told his family and fellow defendants that he would take a moral stand and accept his collective responsibility as one of the leaders of the Third Reich. But the way in which he did it might be called either halfhearted or devious as his statements were always hedged with saving clauses. He said:

| It is my unquestionable duty to assume my share of the responsibility for this disaster before the German people |

Yet he never specified the areas in which he would accept blame. Having stated this duty his next statement undercut this sense of responsibility:

| This is all the more my obligation...since the head of the Government has avoided responsibility before the German people and before the world. |

Speer was throwing the main burden on to Hitler and drawing a sharp contrast between his actions and those of the Fuhrer. He modified his position even further:

| In so far as Hitler gave me orders and I carried them out, I assume responsibility for them. I did not, of course, carry out all the orders, which he gave me. |

Flachsner asked Speer about the nature of his personal responsibilities and whether this was limited to his personal actions:

| No, I should like to say something of fundamental importance here. This war has brought an inconceivable catastrophe, and indeed started a world catastrophe. Therefore it is my unquestionable duty to assume my share of responsibility for the disaster before the German people... I, as an important member of the leadership of the Reich, therefore, share in the total responsibility, beginning with 1942. |

What did Speer really mean by the term ‘responsibility’? Jackson was later to return to this point.

Speer’s reference to Hitler and his acceptance of his own responsibility took up only a few minutes. The rest of the afternoon was occupied with the account of how he had struggled to prevent the destruction of Germany at Hitler's hands in 1945.

According to his own testimony, Speer behaved with resolution and risked his life.
He read to the court a memorandum he sent to Hitler in March 1945:

Nobody has the right to destroy industrial plants, coal mines, electric plants, and other facilities...we have no right at this stage of the war to carry out destruction which might affect the life of the people.230

From January 1945 he had given up all attempts to produce armaments. Instead his energies had gone into issuing orders to contradict Hitler's scorched-earth policy. When the destruction of factories was ordered he had removed and hidden essential parts. He had dropped explosives down mines in the Ruhr when they were to be used to blow up factories; fought to preserve bridges, wireless installations, and the railway system. He commandeered the remaining transport for the distribution of food supplies and for the distribution of seed for that year's harvest. He encouraged the Wehrmacht to disobey Hitler's orders to destroy everything and encouraged the military to negotiate with the Russians to prevent a fight for Berlin.

Speer brought up in an extremely dramatic manner, the story of his attempt to kill Hitler by suggesting that it might be too technical and too involved to be of interest to the court. The judges, not surprisingly, were fascinated.

The Tribunal would like to hear the particulars

Speer described Hitler's bunker in the Reich Chancellery as a building with 'an air-conditioning plant similar to the one installed in this courtroom'. It had been Speer's intention to introduce poison gas into this system through the ventilator in the garden. First he had to solve a technical problem. If the anti-gas filter were kept running, his material would have to be exploded to be effective and an explosion might shatter the chimney on the ventilator and dissipate the gas. Speer analysed various gases and persuaded the Chancellery engineer to run the filter only occasionally and so found a means to avoid an explosion. The plan was perfected, the most effective gas was supplied and the date was fixed. At that moment Hitler suddenly ordered a three-metre high chimney to be installed and Speer's plan had to be aborted.

Flachsner then emphasised the point that Speer was the only one of Hitler's ministers whose name was included on the list of new ministers by the leaders of the military rebellion.

Speer 's final speech has been taken as being an attempt to warn the world of the possibility of another Hitler. It could also been seen as showing his guilt over his role during Hitler's rule and the moral changes he had undergone. Nevertheless it also largely negates the concept that the leaders of Hitler's government were personally responsible for the events of his rule by blaming technology and it contains, at the end, a reference to the growing split that led to the cold war.231

In his final plea in Speer’s defence Flachsner said:

Hitler declared to Speer that he would have to take the consequences customary in such cases if he continued to declare that the war was lost. In spite of this Speer travelled for two days to Seyss Inquart, the Reich Commissioner for the Netherlands, in order to explain to him that the war was lost. This led finally to the handing over of undestroyed Holland to the allies.

Speer was then cross-examined by Jackson and gave the impression that he had not really undergone a moral conversion.

He described his threat to send slacking workers to the concentration camp as an effective method to cut absenteeism.

Jackson asked Speer:

230 Persico Nuremberg – Infamy on trial, p 353

231 See Document 10
You have said to us that you did use and encourage the use of forced labour from the concentration camps.

Speer:
Yes we did use it in the German armaments industry.

Jackson:
And I think you recommended that persons in labour camps, who were slackers, be sent to the concentration camps, did you not?

Speer:
Workers who did not get to work on time or who pretended to be ill (we took) severe measures against such workers during the war and I approved of these measures.

Speer had said of the rounding up of foreign workers:

In view of the whole war situation ... I had no objection to them being brought to Germany against their will.'

In spite of announcing his general sense of responsibility, Speer said that the recruitment and transportation of forced labourers was the responsibility of others. He suspected that the statistics on sickness among these workers were unreliable as enemy propaganda had told workers how to feign illness. He assumed that most workers with tuberculosis had arrived in Germany suffering from it and 'presumably through the health offices we tried to alleviate it'. It was enough for Speer that he could say he had drawn Hitler's attention to starvation among Russian prisoners of war in his factories and he was not disturbed when told that food had not been sent. Nor did he worry about the working conditions in slave labour camps: not even 'the head of a plant could bother about conditions in such a camp'. These were mere details, he said; among leaders there must be a common responsibility for fundamental matters, but this does not extend to the details which are the concern of other departments.

Faced with some more details, Speer began to lose his relaxed manner. He called Dr Jaeger's affidavit on the conditions at Krupp's works 'exaggerated', and became angry when read an affidavit from German workers in Essen describing recalcitrant workers being fired at by SS guards or locked in steel cabinets for up to forty-eight hours. He cheered up when shown photographs of these cabinets; they were standard factory lockers, he said – as if that made any difference. He attacked the affidavit: since 'many untruthful statements have been made'. Faced with a hundred statements from workers about Krupp's factories, Speer recovered his thick skin, 'you would not expect me to be intimately acquainted with what happened'.

Jackson caught Speer off guard and he revealed more about himself than in any other remark he made at Nuremberg. Jackson produced records of eighty steel whips used at Krupp's for disciplining workers. Speer replied:

These are nothing but replacements for rubber truncheons, we had no rubber and for that reason the guards probably had something like this...and...they are like the night sticks used by American policemen.

Was the use of the steel whip the kind of method Speer had used to produced an industrial miracle with an increased labour force of only 30 per cent?

Speer intentionally differentiated himself from Sauckel as he realised that his relationship with him was the one thing that could harm him. He attacked him at every opportunity, saying that he should be at the top of any list of war criminals.

At the end of his cross-examination Jackson asked Speer to explain what he had meant by 'responsibility'. Jackson asked:

Your point is, I take it, that you as a member of the Government and a leader in this period of time acknowledge a responsibility for its large policies, but not for all the details that occurred in their execution. Is that a fair statement of your position?232

Speer answered: 'Yes, indeed.'

However Flachsner was given permission to question Speer again:

232 Persico Nuremberg – Infamy on trial, p 356
I refer once more to the answer you gave to Justice Jackson at the end of the cross-examination, and to clarify that answer I would like to ask you this: in assuming a common responsibility, did you want to acknowledge measurable guilt or corresponsibility under the penal law, or did you want to record a historical responsibility before your own people and before history?

Speer replied:

That question is a very difficult one to answer; it is actually one which the Tribunal will decide in its verdict. I only wanted to say that...the leaders must accept a common responsibility ... after the catastrophe, for if the war had been won the leaders would also presumably have laid claim to common responsibility. But to what extent that is punishable under law or ethics I cannot decide, and it was not my purpose to decide.

The decision to find Speer guilty on counts three and four relate entirely to his participation in the slave labour program.

The court accepted that Sauckel was in charge of the forced labour program and that Speer had no control over him and in its decision said.

The evidence introduced against Speer under counts three and four relates entirely to his participation in the slave labour program. Although he had advocated the appointment of a Plenipotentiary General for the Utilisation of Labour because he wanted one central authority with whom he could deal on labour matters, he did not obtain administrative control over Sauckel. The latter was appointed directly by Hitler with the decree of March 21, 1942 which provided that he should be directly responsible to Goering as Plenipotentiary of the Four Year plan... there is no doubt... that Sauckel had overall responsibility for the slave labour program. At the time of the events in question Sauckel did not fail to assert control over fields which he now claims were the sole responsibility of others. He was aware of ruthless methods being taken to obtain labourers and vigorously supported them on the ground that they were necessary to fill quotas.

The Soviet prosecutor explained the verdict by saying:

Speer was not only aware of the methods employed for the forcible deportation into slavery of populations from occupied territories but took part in decisions on the abduction of millions from their countries to Germany. Speer worked closely with Himmler; Himmler delivered to him concentration camp prisoners for labour in the armaments works and branch camps of concentration camps were established in many factories, which were under operated under Speer's control. This is the true face of the accused Speer and the real role he played in the crimes of Hitler.

Even so, the US Attorney-General Francis Biddle said:

In mitigation, it must be recognised that...he was one of the few men who had the courage to tell Hitler that the war was lost and to take steps to prevent the senseless destruction of production facilities, both in occupied territories and in Germany. He carried out his opposition to Hitler's scorched earth program in some of the Western countries and in Germany by deliberately sabotaging it at considerable personal risk.
In 1977 Werner Maser in his book *Nuremberg – a nation on trial* claimed that Speer had made a secret deal with Robert Jackson, the chief US prosecutor before the trial opened. Speer had a well thought out plan and part of it was to exploit the growing rift between USA and the Soviet Union. He stated that there were delicate issues that he did not want raised in court and given to the Russians. Meaning his analysis of the effectiveness of the allied bombing campaign against German industry.

Speer wrote to Jackson on 17th November (just three days before the trial began) saying:

> I am of the opinion that various items of knowledge about defence technology that I have should not become known to third parties...I am in possession of certain information as to military and technical questions that should be made known to the right persons...I should not fall into Russian hands. My knowledge should stay in this side of the fence...[in the event of his death]...all that I know would be lost.

Maser believed that Jackson did not press Speer during his court cross-examination in return for Speer not passing information to the Russians. Speer denied this.

Dan van der Vat *The Good Nazi – the Life and Lies of Albert Speer* argues that at Nuremberg Speer deliberately created a legend of himself by manipulating history. He argues that Speer’s presentation of himself as ‘the Good Nazi’ was a lie designed to save his life at the Nuremberg trials and to protect his reputation.

Dan van der Vat argues that by 1944 Speer’s influence with Hitler was declining as:
- He was no longer in close personal contact
- He was no longer the architect building Hitler’s dreams
- As a minister he was now just one of Hitler’s political team and was subject to Hitler’s policy of limiting the power of his officials
- Bormann remained in close contact with Hitler and was Speer’s enemy

Van der Vat believes that:

> The quasi friendship between Hitler and Speer was at an end. From now on Speer’s own agenda would be paramount. His overweening ego was fully engaged in a campaign for the preservation of Albert Speer.

On 9th April 1944 the British newspaper the Observer published a profile of Speer. It argued that Speer was an example of the managerial revolution and that he would have joined any political party that promised him a job. It was the first presentation of Speer as the non-political technocrat who was prevented, by his commitment to his work, from being aware of the moral implications of the policies of the Nazis and therefore personally not guilty of their crimes.

The Observer said:

> He rather symbolises a type which is becoming increasingly important in all belligerent countries: the pure technician, the classless bright young man without background, with no other original aim than to make his way in the world and no other means than his technical and managerial ability.
> It is the lack of psychological and spiritual ballast, and the ease with which he handles the terrifying technical and organisational

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machinery of our age which makes this slight type go extremely far nowadays.

The fate of nearly all these young men is circumscribed by the fact that they first find it very difficult to earn a living and then find it very easy to run the world. This is their age; the Hitlers and the Himmlers we may get rid of, but the Speers, whatever happens to this particular specimen will long be with us.  

Speer had this article translated and showed it to Hitler. Van der Vat believes that this article came at a critical turning point in Speer’s career when it was obvious to him that Germany was about to lose the war, and its leaders would be held accountable for their actions. Van der Vat believes that this article became the ‘foundation stone, if not the inspiration of his defence at Nuremberg’.

In Matthias Schmidt’s *Albert Speer* he believes that Speer had determined his line of defence before he had met his lawyer Dr Hans Flachsner. Flachsner wanted to present Speer as a man who had done his professional duty according to professional standards. Schmidt believes that Speer had already decided that his best defence was to completely disassociate himself from Hitler’s system but to accept a ‘collective responsibility’ for the actions of the Nazis. He decided to present himself as a gentleman and an architect who had ‘accidentally’ become an ‘apolitical’ politician. This opinion is supported by the first document Speer presented for his defence – his evaluation of his role to Hitler on 20th September 1944.

The task that I have to fulfil is an unpolitical one. I have felt very happy in my work so long as I personally, and also my work, was judged solely according to technical performance.

Speer dramatically raised the issue of his attempt to assassinate Hitler. Schmidt writes that this electrified the court and that his lawyer skilfully encouraged him to ‘reluctantly’ recount the story. Schmidt notes that Speer’s fluent and coherent description shows that it was well prepared and his claim to be unwilling to tell the story was a sham.

Schmidt concludes that Speer’s cultivated manners and his air of remorse made a favourable impression and one of the journalists at the trial said that he was ‘the only one of the defendants whom I respect for his personal honesty and courage’.

However there has to be considerable doubt about two key claims Speer made

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236 Speer’s defence document 43
during his defence statement which did much to make him very different from the other accused. Both of these points are discussed in the section on his reliability as source material.

The first is his claim to have planned the assassination of Hitler. Speer tells that he planned to put poison gas into the ventilation system of Hitler’s bunker. Although those he consulted at the time support this story there have to be doubts as to its accurate. If he had been successful had he made any preparations for what would happen after Hitler’s death? Goering was the designated successor to Hitler and as the two were not good friends there seemed little point in Speer assisting Goering to power.

The second doubtful claim is Speer’s account of his flight to Berlin to make his last farewell to Hitler. His personal loyalty to Hitler, while doing all that he could to prevent his scorched-earth policy, made a favourable impression during the trial. However, Speer is the only source of information on this meeting and there is the very real possibility that he went to see Hitler to ensure that his future career would not be hindered by being too closely associated with National Socialism.

Did Speer deliberately exaggerate both of these stories in an attempt to save his life by gaining the sympathy of the court?
Some historians’ opinions of Speer

At Nuremberg it was Major Neave who delivered the documents outlining the charges against Speer. He writes that he considered Speer to be the only “civilised” man among the group of accused Nazis.

Despite this Major Neave also writes, ‘he was a man I could never trust’. He always felt uncomfortable in his presence and believed that he was the ‘real architect of the slave labour program’ and that he, and not Sauckel, was ‘the greatest slaver of all time’. Neave wonders if it was fair to hang Sauckel while giving Speer a twenty-year sentence. He believes that Speer was obviously guilty of the use of slave labour, but he made a favourable impression on the judges, and although two of the four recommended that he be given the death sentence, he was only saved from the death penalty by mitigating circumstances.

I remember the first sight of this gifted and compelling man. He was waiting for me (in his cell as I gave out the indictments) with a nervous smile. Behind that smile there was the patronising look of the court artist. I am glad we did not get to know other well. His smoothness repelled me…even today he seeks to persuade us that he was ‘different’ and indeed he was.

Speer was the strongest in character and most genuinely courageous of all the prisoners at Nuremberg. Yet he was a man never trust…he was to maintain at Nuremberg that his task was not political but technological and economic. He was asked if he realised that the forcible transportation of foreign workers was contrary to the law of nation. He replied that he was an architect. His objection to the use of violence was not on humanitarian grounds, but because it hindered his efforts to increase war production.

Speer was an impressive figure among the broken-down politicians of the Nazi Party. His appearance was striking, even in his prison clothes. He was tall and dark with a strong, intelligent face. His manner was persuasive and he seemed like an athletic university professor who had turned to public administration. His eyes were very large and thoughtful. He was…a man of considerable distinction.

Education, intelligence and also unusual firmness of character made Speer a genuine exception…and the contrast with the tattered wrecks of once-powerful men was striking…i was at first impressed. Speer’s charm and apparent integrity seemed to shine in that sordid place…He was at once frank about his responsibility. ‘The trial is necessary,’ he said as he took the indictment. He returned to this theme many times before the trial was over, both in and out of the dock. But I felt uneasy in his presence. Why had this polite and intellectual person become so close a confidant of Hitler?

Joseph Persico, author of Nuremberg infamy on trial, believes that Speer’s life was only saved because of a brilliant defence case. He argues that Speer realised that he could not defend his actions as the armaments chief and so decided to use his actions in the last few months of the war as the reason for reducing his sentence.

Persico describe a meeting between Albert Speer and his lawyer, Hans Flachsner writing:

The escort guard took Speer to the visitors’ room, where Flachsner was waiting behind the wire mesh. Speer spoke quietly, guiding his lawyer through his defence strategy – how, for example, they should play the mistreatment of conscript workers and the visit to the death camp. Understatement and contrition were to be the watchwords. He had one strong, persuasive case that Flachsner must hammer at. Here was a man who stood up to Hitler and his diabolical orders, fully aware that others had been shot for just such disobedience. The judges must see him as a man who risked his life to salvage his nation’s future. And he had a more compelling story to tell. Speer’s voice dropped to a whisper. Did Flachsner know that Speer had once tried to assassinate Hitler?237

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237 Persico, Nuremberg – Infamy on trial, pp 195/196
Dan van der Vat

Dan van der Vat looked at the early influences of Speer’s personality and believes that his physical weakness, his bullying brothers, and an absence of any affection from his parents, turned him into an emotional cripple. He believes that as a result of his childhood Speer developed an ability to manipulate people, to compartmentalise unpleasant events, as well as being able to ignore anything that he considered unpleasant or irrelevant.

The story of his childhood is sparse but bleak with scraps of affection from Gretel’s family failing to make up for an indifferent father, a cold mother and two bullying brothers. The result was a calculating introvert who soon learned to use his considerable manipulative gifts to get his own way without exposing himself emotionally.

When considering Speer’s knowledge of the Final Solution van der vat says:

Albert Speer managed to prevent his personal war crime from emerging in his lifetime and did everything he could to stop the inevitable revelation from ever being made. He admitted his personal share of collective responsibility for Nazi criminality. He vindicated the objection of his friend Wolters by accepting that such responsibility was indeed indistinguishable from guilt. He eventually admitted that he knew rather more about the Holocaust than he had let on at Nuremberg.

Until his death only Wolters knew what Speer was really concealing, and to Wolters alone, in his own defence against his oldest friend’s complaints, he confessed that the continual confession of guilt and the monotonous chant of repentance were only a sham.

Matthias Schmidt

Schmidt believes that Speer was never a narrow technocrat. He believes that Speer’s rapid climb to the top of the hierarchy, his abrupt moral about-face at the end of the war and his self-created image at Nuremberg shows that he only had one goal and that was to become a great historical figure. He quotes the comment about Speer’s memoirs by a high-ranking officer who been had a member of Speer’s circle and who said ‘we are dealing with a Speer whom we did not know in those days’.

Schmidt then states that he was ‘Hitler’s loyal paladin and minister and he masterfully manipulated the instruments of power politics in the National Socialist state’.

Gitta Sereny

Draws a comparison between the personality of Speer and Hitler:

Both...were bedevilled from childhood by...withheld love, a deficiency which rendered both virtually incapable of expressing private emotions. Both...though surrounded by people remained alone. Both...capable of great charm and courted by women, could barely respond, though neither were homosexual. Both not only shield away from but despised manifestations of feelings, and yet, for each of them in his different way, it was emotion that ruled their decisions and dictated many if not most of their acts. It is doubtful that...excepting one strange message from Hitler to Speer, they ever consciously thought of each other with affection. Yet it was a kind of unspoken love, needed, demanded and received that bound them to each other.

Sir Hartley Shawcross, the British prosecutor

Speer was quite lucky to have avoided the death sentence. My own view was one of great surprise that Speer was so leniently dealt with, and I still think that it was quite wrong that his subordinate Sauckel, who worked under his instructions, was sentenced to death while Speer escaped.

John Galbraith

Above all Speer, very early on...had made a conscious plan for survival. While all of them, virtually without exception, said they knew nothing of any crimes, whether slave labour or concentration camps, a manifest lie, and they all declined to take any responsibility whatever, Speer from the word go admitted a universal kind of responsibility. At the same time, he adroitly avoided anything that touched even marginally upon these dangerous subjects.

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238 Van der Vat, *The Good Nazi* p36
239 Van der Vat, *The Good Nazi* p365
240 van der Vat, *The Good Nazi* p 364 /9
241 Schmidt, *Albert Speer* p 14
242 Schmidt, *Albert Speer* p 14
243 Sereny, *Albert Speer* p 13
244 Sereny, *Albert Speer* p 30
We tried to lead him towards them many, many times, but he very, very cleverly managed to divert us to other things, by flooding us with more and more details on air attacks and production statistics, which he knew were of immediate interest to us. I always had the distinct feeling he was holding such things in reserve, against the times he needed them for these, to him, so necessary diversions.

Don’t forget we had exceptional opportunities for comparison: we eventually saw all the key figures who were still alive: Goering; Funk; Ribbentrop; Keitel...and Jodl...Speer was simply totally different, and his strategy from the beginning had been to highlight this difference whenever he could. He started this when he talked to us in Flensburg in May, and he maintained it through his many weeks of debriefing, first at Chesnay in Versailles, then Frankfurt...and finally for nearly a year in Nuremberg. If he hadn’t succeeded in these meticulously thought out...tactics he would have been hanged.

Dr Julius Flachsner

When asked by Gitta Sereny about Speer’s knowledge of the Final Solution he replied:

In this matter I don’t think Speer was entirely open with me. Perhaps it was better that way...if he had told me he knew what would I have done?...But I must admit I don’t believe that it is possible that he knew nothing. I liked Speer. But I don’t think that is possible

When asked about Speer and Nuremberg Flachsner said:

Perhaps one of the most extraordinary things about him during that year when, I can assure you, he was fully aware of the danger that he was running was that he remained exactly what he had always been, a game player. Of course this means that he used people, but in a way, only intellectually or strategically. Because he was emotionally so distant from others, he never played with them emotionally, if he liked you he liked you and nothing would change it... For anyone who loved him this was difficult, for he didn’t love. But game playing, which he most certainly and brilliantly did at Nuremberg, was almost an exercise for him ... it served as a reassurance ... that he was still what he had always been

Rudolf Wolters

Schmidt quotes Wolters as saying:

Had I been forced to become the administrator of Speer’s literary estate, the true facts would have produced an entirely different picture of Speer in the eyes of history.

Sereny quotes Wolters writing to Speer saying:

When one gets to the end of your book, one is led to believe that the author would now walk through life wearing a hairshirt, distributing his fortune to the victims of National Socialism and renouncing all vanities and enjoyment’s of life, live on locusts and wild honey

Van der Vat quotes Wolters as saying that when he heard the sentences after the Nuremberg trials announced live on the radio that he heard Speer ‘sighed with relief’. He also quotes an unpublished confession by Speer to Rudolf Wolters in 1971 which is in file number forty-four of the Wolters Bequest at Koblenz. It refers to Speer’s memoirs which, Wolters wrote:

Showed the author to have been no real Nazi but ‘a man for whom the need for Geld und Geltung was decisive’. The outsider might find all his admissions of responsibility and failure to notice what was going on disarming but Wolters, once again reaching for an English word, went on to declare: ‘er selbst nannte sie mir gegenüber seine “Tricks”.

Margarete (Gretel) Speer

Sereny quotes her comment after his release

I really thought that he would come back as my husband, the father of his children, ready to live in Heidelberg, open an architect’s office and live the small life. I knew he wanted to write but I had no idea it would lead to the sort of conspicuousness which he immediately, I soon realised, sought and of course received

244 Schmidt, Albert Speer p 167
245 Sereny, Albert Speer p 552
246 Sereny, Albert Speer p 582
247 Sereny, Albert Speer p 587
248 Schmidt, Albert Speer p 167
249 Sereny, Albert Speer p 681
250 Van der Vat, The Good Nazi p 282
251 “Money and prestige”
252 He himself called them directly to me his tricks
253 Sereny, Albert Speer p 666
A review of
Henry King
“The Two World’s of Albert Speer”

The historian Henry King totally disagrees with Matthias Schmidt’s interpretation of Albert Speer. King was a member of the US prosecution team at Nuremberg and at the time he wondered how a man who seemed decent and as honest as Speer could be involved with the brutal murderers who were on trial.

King believes that Albert Speer failed to develop a set of personal ethical beliefs early in life that would sharply define moral choices and avoid self-deception or self-inflicted blindness. Speer slipped into decisions without really identifying his point of choice. In so doing he crossed the bridge between good and evil without fully realising what he had done, and this proved to be disastrous for him.

The story of Albert Speer is the story of a man who allowed another individual to take over his soul. It is the story of a man who failed to maintain a balance between his working life and his life with his family and friends. Speer's life story carries a message that should never be forgotten.

Speer had everything materially when he came into the world. His family was extremely wealthy, and he lived a very protected childhood with no family worries over money. He was given the finest possible education. Speer was also a gifted person with great intellectual power. There were no limits as to what he could have accomplished. In essence, Speer was an unfinished gem waiting to be shaped and polished to perfection, but something was lacking. Speer's incubator existence, coupled with lack of parental guidance, produced in him an incredible naivety, an inability to think critically, and a lack of ethics. He was a man whose ambition blinded him to the needs of others and he could not tell the difference between good and evil. However, he was not intrinsically evil, but had a narrow intelligence, which meant that he could concentrate solely on his work to the exclusion of other things.

Speer's first real encounter with the outside world was with the politically sophisticated Hitler and he rapidly fell under the spell of his magnetic personality and was then dazzled by his building program and foreign policy successes. Hitler's world quickly became Speer's world, and he obeyed Hitler until 1945 and the scorched-earth policy.

In return Hitler always regarded Speer as being different from the others, he was always ‘my architect' and he could not punish him even when Speer negated his scorched-earth policy.

King points out that Speer became Hitler’s chief architect and the Minister for Munitions only by luck and after the deaths of Troost and Todt. He certainly did not get either of these positions because of his ambition and Hitler personally made the appointment in both cases.

Speer began to question Hitler’s actions when he was in hospital and he threatened to resign when Hitler refused to dismiss Dorsch. Although he returned to Hitler’s side Speer was beginning to question his decisions. As Germany’s defeat became more certain he devoted himself to sabotaging Hitler’s orders to destroy all of the industrial facilities of Germany. His attempt to assassinate Hitler was genuine, in that he had consulted Stahl, and in doing so risked Stahl informing on him.

King disagrees with the belief that Speer’s ‘conversion’ and opposition to Hitler’s commands was opportunism and done in the hope of becoming the Minister for Economics (or Reconstruction) in the post war government. King believes that he finally saw Hitler for what he was and that his conversion only occurred because of Hitler’s actions. King believes that Speer had woken up spiritually and as he now saw Hitler, as he had never seen him before he genuinely wanted to do
something to save his country. He was a patriot who finally realised that loyalty to Hitler was not the same as loyalty to the German people.

Speer no longer blindly obeyed authority and he had turned full circle and was now willing to risk his life for his country after coming to a moral decision.

This was recognised by the judges at Nuremberg who said:

He prevented the senseless destruction of industrial facilities in Germany and in the occupied countries...and in the closing stages of the war Speer was one of the few men who had the courage to tell Hitler that the war was lost.

In this ‘second world’ Speer had broadened his horizon and had undergone a spiritual change and redemption. This is shown in his final speech to the court, which was his warning to the world. This ‘second world’ explains the title of Henry King’s book.
Hitler entered and was tempestuously hailed by his numerous followers among the students. This enthusiasm in itself made a great impression upon me. But his appearance also surprised me. On posters and in caricatures I had seen him in military tunic, with shoulder straps, swastika armband, and hair flapping over his forehead. But here he was wearing a well-fitted blue suit and looking markedly respectable. Everything about him bore out the note of reasonable modesty. Later I learned that he had a great gift for adjusting, consciously or intuitively, to his surroundings.

As the ovation went on for minutes he tried, as if slightly pained, to check it. Then, in a low voice, hesitantly and somewhat shyly, he began a kind of historical lecture rather than a speech. To me there was something engaging about it - all the more so since it ran counter to everything the propaganda of his opponents had led me to expect: a hysterical demagogue, a shrieking and gesticulating fanatic in uniform. He did not allow the bursts of applause to tempt him away from his sober tone.

It seemed as if he were candidly presenting his anxieties about the future. His irony was softened by a somewhat self-conscious humor; his South German charm reminded me agreeably of my native region. A cool Prussian could never have captivated me that way. Hitler's initial shyness soon disappeared; at times now his pitch rose. He spoke urgently and with hypnotic persuasiveness. The mood he cast was much deeper than the speech itself, most of which I did not remember for long.

Moreover, I was carried on the wave of the enthusiasm which, one could almost feel this physically, bore the speaker along from sentence to sentence. It swept away any skepticism, any reservations. Opponents were given no chance to speak. This furthered the illusion, at least momentarily, of unanimity. Finally, Hitler no longer seemed to be speaking to convince; rather, he seemed to feel that he was expressing what the audience, by now transformed into a single mass, expected of him. It was as if it were the most natural thing in the world to lead students and part of the faculty of the two greatest academies in Germany submissively by a leash. Yet that evening he was not yet the absolute ruler, immune from all criticism, but was still exposed to attacks from all directions.

Others may afterward have discussed that stirring evening over a glass of beer. Certainly my students pressed me to do so. But I felt I had to straighten things out in my own mind, to master my confusion. I needed to be alone. Shaken, I drove off into the night in my small car, stopped in a pine forest near the Havel, and went for a long walk.

Here, it seemed to me, was hope. Here were new ideals, a new understanding, new tasks. Even Spengler's dark predictions seemed to me refuted, and his prophecy of the coming of a new Roman emperor simultaneously fulfilled. The peril of communism, which seemed inexorably on its way, could be checked, Hitler persuaded us, and instead of hopeless unemployment, Germany could move toward economic recovery. He had mentioned the Jewish problem only peripherally. But such remarks did not worry me, although I was not an anti-Semite; rather, I had Jewish friends from my school days and university days, like virtually everyone else.
Document 2

Hitler’s memorandum of 3rd December 1941

Nazism 1919 – 1945 volume 4 pp 221/222

The current and future war and economic situation require the planned concentration of all our design and production capacity in order to fulfil the armaments tasks ordered by me. An increase in armaments production simply by the use of labour measures can only be achieved in Germany through the employment of more prisoners of war unless the remaining productive capacity in Europe is effectively integrated into our economy either directly to produce armaments or to relieve our own industry by producing essential articles of everyday use.

The required increases in the performance of our production of arms and equipment must, therefore be achieved:

1. Through an alteration in the design of our weapons and equipment in the sense of facilitating as far as possible mass production on modern lines
2. Through the allocation and concentration of contracts on factories that are best equipped for the required purpose and, therefore will operate in the most economic fashion
3. If necessary, through the establishment of new factories which are confined to the production of a single piece of military equipment, which is most suitable for mass production.

The task is to examine the design features of our weapons…and alter them in such a way that they are suitable to be produced with much simpler methods…and save on raw materials, skilled labour and time.

This will require the careful examination of individual weapons…and in the light of the materials available to us, the performance that can be reasonably expected of them and the simplest design appropriate to their function.

I therefore order

(A) The Wehrmacht branches must examine the existing performance requirements for weapons and equipment with the aim of limiting their technical requirements to those which are sufficient to ensure adequate performance on the battlefield

(B) To ensure that these demands for simplified production are met the relevant experts must be involved at the development stage of new weapons

(C) All firms producing military equipment…and individual experienced engineers are to be requested to make suggestions for improvements in production which should cover

1. removal of obvious technical flaws and weakness in design
2. simplification of design features in favour of simple forms suitable for mass production
3. extension of the standardisation of individual parts
4. avoidance of excessive requirements which will delay production

Above all proposals for the saving of labour through stopping the exaggerated reworking of inessential parts of weapons which is primarily designed to please the eye rather than serve a useful purpose.
Document 3

Karl Saur’s explanation of the increase in armaments production

Nazism 1919 – 1945 volume 4 p 232

In the further course of our work under Reich Minister Todt, up to winter 1941/1942 following the takeover of munitions and tank production Special Commissions led by industrialists were also created for weapons, motor vehicles and general Wehrmacht equipment. This form of organisation was characterised by the fact that leading figures in industry each took over responsibility for the entire planning and implementation of production in a particular sphere of military equipment. It was an essential task for the Committee through rationalisation to find ways of securing significantly more production, from the existing amounts of material, labour and plant. The Fuhrer's decree of December 3rd 1941 was of fundamental importance in this respect.

On the basis of this decree engineers acquired a large sphere of operations. Within the framework of Commissions every piece of armaments equipment was examined by the military procurement agencies, the technical experts and the practical men in the plants. However, additional to savings on labour and material an essential task of our technical experts was to find ways of solving the raw materials problem. Locomotive provides an example of our mode of operation. At the beginning of 1942, a locomotive needed 2.3 tonnes of copper. After this action had been implement in 1943 it only needed 237kg, ie the amount of copper was reduced to 10%. At the same time, the construction of locomotives was expanded from 117 per month on average in 1941/1942 to 500 in June 1943. Thus, these 500 locomotives used only half the amount of copper needed to produce the 117 before.

Previously, there were constant alterations. No programme ran for longer than two to three months…and as a result, in 1944, the air force was still continually altering its contracts. We had plants, which as a consequence, for years on end never produced a single plane. When we formed the Fighter Staff on 1st March 1944 we had about 45 different types. In the first three months we came down from 45 to 20, then to 9 and finally to 5 types of planes.

In 1943, Speer had to take civilian production away from the Economic Ministry and place it under the Armaments Ministry…but, in order not to kill off civilian production in the process we had to take it over ourselves and increase its performance through rationalisation. For example, we had 117 carpet factories of which 5 produced 90 per cent of the demand and the remaining 112 firms 10 per cent. To close these 112 firms and transfer their workers to armaments production would only produce a loss of 10 per cent, particularly since the other five firms were far more economical in their use of materials than the smaller firms. And so, despite extensive reallocation of plant capacity and raw materials to the armaments industry, we succeeded through countless similar measures in sufficiently sustaining the production of other goods vital to the life of the population.
Remarkable results were achieved in the rationalisation of the munitions industry through the introduction of the self-administration of industry. The compulsory cooperation of firms using the same equipment and with the same categories of products was ensured.

The manager or the technical director of the most efficient firm was appointed head of the respective committee. It was the duty of the head of the Committee to raise the production of other firms of the same category to the same level as his own. By this means the experience gained in the various factories was discussed in a way that was impossible in the military procurement offices on account of the lack of people with practical experience and specialised knowledge. In this way specialists, engineers and technicians of proven ability were appointed as honorary members to work with the committees, and all trade secrets, private improvements and methods which might have been withheld by firms were made public for the benefit of all.

This idea of compelling firms of the same category to cooperate under the leadership of the most competent one was the first big step towards the realisation of successful rationalisation...I recall that, as a result of the rationalisation of the munitions industry the total average saving in materials, machinery and labour amounted to 30 or 40 %
Goebbels wrote in his diary on 2nd March 1943 his account of the plan to reactivate the Defence Council

Here's the same trouble about our domestic policy. Everybody does and leaves undone what he pleases, because there's no strong authority anywhere. The Party goes its own way and won't have anybody interfere.

Here's where I introduce my proposals. I express the opinion that we'd be 'over the hump' if we succeeded in transferring the political leadership tasks of the Reich from the 'Committee of Three' to the Ministerial Council for the Defence of the Reich. This Ministerial Council would then have to be composed of the strong men who assisted the Fuhrer in the Revolution. These will certainly also muster the strength to bring this war to a victorious conclusion.

Goering was very much impressed with my statement that I had not come to get something from him but rather to bring something to him. I talked to him with all the persuasiveness at my command and finally succeeded in bringing him over to our side.

The Party must again be put on its toes and its ranks straightened out...we must no longer waste time on side issues, but keep our eyes fixed on the main issue, war itself. Only thus can we succeed in concentrating the strength of the nation on a single aim.

While talking I gained the spontaneous impression that my presentation visibly peppe up Goering. He became very enthusiastic about my proposals and immediately asked how we were to proceed specifically. I suggested that he make a number of nominations and I would try to win over the rest. We won't tell any of these about our real intentions: namely, of gradually putting the Committee of Three on ice and transferring its powers to the Ministerial Council. That would only create unnecessary trouble ...

We have no other ambition than that of supporting each other and of forming a solid phalanx around the Fuhrer. The Fuhrer sometimes wavers in his decisions if the same matter is brought to him from different sides. Nor does he always react to people as he should. That's where he needs help.

Goering is fully conscious of his somewhat weak position today. He knows that it is decidedly to his advantage for strong men to come to his side and take upon themselves the task of relieving the Fuhrer of his worst worries. We are all determined to make a new contribution to the war by our action. Goering himself wants to win over Himmler. Funk and Ley have already been won over by me. Speer is entirely my man. Thus we already have a group that can be proud of itself. It certainly includes all those who today enjoy the greatest prestige and the highest authority in our political life.
Re: The armaments situation February-March 1945
While the loss of Upper Silesia has meant some reduction in armaments production capacity, its effects are being felt exclusively in terms of the loss of coal production; for Upper Silesia was still the only area on which the economy could rely for the production and transport of quality coal in large quantities.

All armaments production capacity in the Reich can now only be partially exploited, since it can neither be provided with the necessary coal and electricity, nor with the necessary gas.

Because of the currently unfavourable transport situation in the Ruhr area which has not improved as a result of the recent air raids, the coal production capacity can only be exploited to the extent of 5.5 to 6 million tons per month = 26% of that of January 1944.

In order to spare the population the serious effects of an economic collapse the following amounts of coal must be diverted from the coal supplies currently available. It is impossible to maintain German economic life in the long run with the available coal supplies and with the amount of steel that can still be produced ...

This impending collapse of the German economy can be delayed for a few months. That will mean that armaments production in January, February, and March will simply be using up the large supplies previously built up...The future output figures, can only be a fraction of the January output.

After the loss of Upper Silesia German armaments production will no longer be remotely in a position to fulfil the requirements of the front for munitions, weapons and tanks or to make up the losses at the front and equip new forces. As a result, the courage of our soldiers can no longer compensate for the enemy's material superiority.
Document 7

Hitler’s ‘Destruction order of 19th March 1945
Nazism 1919 – 1945 volume 4 pp 659/660

The fight for the existence of our nation compels us to exploit all means, even within the Reich, which can weaken the enemy's fighting capacity and impede his further progress. Every possibility of doing lasting damage to the striking power of the enemy must be taken advantage of. It is an error to believe that after the recapture of lost areas it will be possible to use undamaged or only temporarily paralysed transport, communications, industrial and supply installations again for one's own purposes. During his retreat the enemy will leave only scorched earth behind him and will abandon all concern for the population.

I therefore give the following instructions:

1 All military, transport, communication, industrial and supply installations as well as equipment within the Reich which the enemy might use for the continuation of his struggle now or in the future must be destroyed.

2 The destruction of all military objects, including transport and communication installations, is the responsibility of the military command posts; that of all industrial and supply installations as well as other material is the responsibility of the Gauleiters and Reich Defence Commissioners. The troops must give Gauleiters and Reich Defence Commissioners the necessary assistance for the execution of their task.

3 This order must be made known to all commanders as quickly as possible. Orders to the contrary are invalid.

Document 8

The directive that Speer persuaded Hitler to issue on 30th March 1945
Nazism 1919 – 1945 volume 4 p 661

To ensure the uniform implementation of my decree of 19 March 1945, I hereby issue the following instructions:

1 The orders issued for destroying industrial installations are aimed exclusively at preventing the enemy from utilising those installations and facilities to supplement their combat strength.

2 No measures may be taken which would impair our own combat strength. Production must be continued until the last possible moment even at the risk that a plant may fall into enemy hands before it can be destroyed. Industrial installations of all kinds, including food production plants, may not be destroyed until they are directly threatened by the enemy.

3 Although bridges and other transportation installations must be destroyed in order to deny the enemy their use for a prolonged period, the same result can be achieved with industrial installations by crippling them. The total destruction of especially important plants will be ordered on my instructions by the Reich Minister of Armaments and War Production (eg. munitions plants, essential chemical plants etc.).

4 The signal for crippling or destroying industrial complexes and other plants will be given by the Gauleiter and Reich Defence Commissioner.

5 Implementation will be undertaken solely by the agencies and organs of the Reich Minister for Armaments and War Production. All the agencies of the Party, the state, and the Wehrmacht are to assist them as required. The Reich Minister of Armaments and War Production may, on my authorisation, give instructions for implementation. He may issue detailed regulations on procedures to the Reich Defence Commissioner.

6 These guidelines apply to plants and installations in the immediate war zone.
With its few words, the sentence, 'The Jews must he eradicated,' is easily said, gentlemen. For him who must carry out what it requires, it is the very hardest and gravest that exists...

I ask you truly just to listen to what I say to you in this circle, and never to talk about it. We were confronted with the question: what about the wives and children? I resolved to find a completely clear solution for this as well. I did not regard myself as entitled to eradicate - ie. to kill or cause to be killed - the men, and to allow the avengers, in the shape of the children, to grow up for our sons and grandsons [to deal with]. The grave decision had to be taken to cause this people to vanish from the earth ...

I felt it was my duty to speak quite openly for once, and to tell you, as the highest agents and highest dignitaries of the party of this political order, of this political instrument of the Fuhrer, how it has been. In the lands we occupy, the Jewish question will be dealt with by the end of the year...

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 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.
Mr. President, may it please the Tribunal: Hitler and the collapse of his system have brought a time of tremendous suffering upon the German people. The useless continuation of this war and the unnecessary destruction make the work of reconstruction more difficult. Privation and misery have come to the German people. After this Trial, the German people will despise and condemn Hitler as the proven author of its misfortune. But the world will learn from these happenings not only to hate dictatorship as a form of government, but to fear it.

Hitler's dictatorship differed in one fundamental point from all its predecessors in history. His was the first dictatorship in the present period of modern technical development, a dictatorship which made complete use of all technical means in a perfect manner for the domination of its own nation. Through technical devices such as radio and loudspeaker 80 million people were deprived of independent thought. It was thereby possible to subject them to the will of one man.

Earlier dictators during their work of leadership needed highly qualified assistants, even at the lowest level, men who could think and act independently. The totalitarian system in the period of modern technical development can dispense with them; the means of communication alone make it possible to mechanise the subordinate leadership. As a result of this there arises a new type: the uncritical recipient of orders.

We had only reached the beginning of the development. The nightmare of many a man that one day nations could be dominated by technical means was all but realised in Hitler's totalitarian system. Today the danger of being terrorised by technocracy threatens every country in the world. In modern dictatorship this appears to me inevitable. Therefore, the more technical the world becomes, the more necessary is the promotion of individual freedom and the individual's awareness of himself as a counterbalance.

Hitler not only took advantage of technical developments to dominate his own people, he almost succeeded, by means of his technical lead, in subjugating the whole of Europe.

But, if a modern industrial state utilises its intelligence, its science, its technical developments...it can, because of its technical superiority, completely overtake and conquer the world.

The more technical the world becomes, the greater this danger will be, and the more serious will be an established lead in the technical means of warfare. This war ended with remote-controlled rockets, aircraft travelling at the speed of sound, new types of submarines, torpedoes which find their own target, with atom bombs, and with the prospect of a horrible kind of chemical warfare. Of necessity the next war will be overshadowed by these new destructive inventions of the human mind.

A new large scale war will end with the destruction of human culture and civilisation. Nothing can prevent unconfined engineering and science from completing the work of destroying human beings, which begun in so dreadful a way in this war. Therefore this Trial must contribute towards preventing such degenerate wars in the future, and towards establishing rules whereby human beings can live together.

Of what importance is my own fate in comparison with this high goal?
During the past centuries the German people have contributed much towards the creation of human civilisation…It is not the battles of war alone, which shape the history of humanity, but also, in a higher sense, the cultural achievements which one day will become the common property of all humanity. A nation, which believes in its future, will never perish. May God protect Germany and the culture of the West
The Eichmann papers reveal the hand that wrote the Holocaust, says correspondents in Jerusalem

As he sat slumped in an Israeli prison cell awaiting execution after being convicted of crimes against humanity, the doomed Nazi whom Adolf Hitler had appointed to make sure the “final solution” was carried to its horrific conclusion set out, rather unsuccessfully, to try to explain himself

“I saw hell, death and the devil … I had to witness the insanity of annihilation” Adolf Eichmann said in his self serving memoir, handwritten in German on ruled, now yellowing paper. He said he wanted to convey a “warning to today’s and tomorrow’s youth.” He termed the “events concerning the Jews” the “greatest crime committed in the history of humanity”.

But in none of the 1,200 pages was there any genuine admission of guilt or remorse.

Eichmann was one of the principal architects of the Nazi genocide in World war Two. He was in charge of organising and coordinating the deportation of millions of Jews to the death camps assembled in Eastern Europe. He was captured by Israeli agents in Argentina in 1960, tried in Jerusalem and hanged in 1962 – the only time Israel had invoked capital punishment.

After keeping Eichmann’s manuscript in a cardboard box for nearly 40 years, Israel’s state archive released it yesterday, providing a rare glimpse into the mind of one of Hitler’s top henchmen.

Israel’s Attorney General ordered the release of the Eichmann papers to aid American professor Deborah Lipstadt’s defence against a libel suit by British revisionist historian David Irving, under way in London.

Eichmann’s manuscript casts particular light on the origins of the Holocaust. He was present at the Wannsee conference in January 1942, where the “final solution” to “the Jewish question” was developed. Eichmann was in charge of writing the Wannsee protocol and observes that the matter was discussed in “unflowery language”

Eichmann additionally reveals the reality of life and death in the Auschwitz extermination camp. He witnessed the mass gassing of Jewish prisoners who were killed, according to him, using carbon monoxide. Eichmann avoids any mention of Zyklon B the gas historians believe he introduced to speed up the rate of killing in the death camps. He records that Auschwitz used “round wads of cotton” that were “soaked in a poison and thrown into a room”

“The things that Eichmann describes are well known. But here you have it from one of the major participants” says Israeli state archivist Evyatar Friesel. “It’s not an apology. He thinks that a terrible crime has been committed but the crime is not his responsibility and therefore he had nothing to apologise for – that he was a public servant who had to obey orders.
Friesel, who keeps his office computer perched on a black bound copy of The Trial of Adolf Eichmann, says Eichmann has not penned a personal diary. It was clearly written for public consumption, containing little in the way of private or spontaneous thoughts and was organised into three parts – a biography, an account of events during the Holocaust and “philosophical remarks”. The papers reveal an intelligent if not well educated man and a highly organised bureaucrat, he says

‘He was very efficient. I would say horribly efficient. It comes through all the way through the manuscript. Every page is signed.’

As he did in his 1961 defence, Eichmann conforms in great detail the genocide of the European Jewry from 1939 to 1945 – even using the German word for genocide Volkermord. But he tries to diminish his role, portraying himself as a small cog in a large operation that was the product of its place and time.

‘I was one of the many horses reigned in, who could not break out to the right or left against the will and the orders of the coachman’ he wrote.

Eichmann blamed Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Reich Security Main Office, for issuing the orders for the “final solution” and sending the Einsatzgruppen, the Nazi mobile killing squads into the field.

But, as Heydrich’s deputy in charge of Jewish Affairs and Evacuation Affairs, Eichmann was responsible for the mass deportations that fed the ovens of the Holocaust.

Eichmann never overtly admitted guilt or remorse but the diaries contain a retrospective, almost apologetic tone that acknowledges Jewish suffering. In several places, he says his nationalistic and anti Semitic views changed during his one and a half decades in Argentina after the war.

‘Much that was valid then has become invalid,’ Eichmann wrote. ‘I have discarded previous “philosophical values” as obsolete junk’.

Israeli Holocaust historians caution against taking the memoirs too literally or out of context – they were, after all, a calculated attempt to escape the noose. Historian Yehuda Bauer refers to the papers as “this silly thing of Eichmann’s” whose greatest interest would be for psychologists. Bauer cites an interview Eichmann gave five years before his trial in which he expressed regret that he had not managed to kill even more Jews.

Bauer says then Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion opposed releasing the memoirs in the 1960’s because “he didn’t want this book to detract from the verdict”.

Bauer and other officials involved in the trial say Israel also feared Eichmann’s family would profit from publishing his diaries. The manuscript had been made available by Israel on computer disk for perusal only because of uncertainty over the copyright.

In a foreword, Eichmann makes clear his hope that the manuscript be published. He requested a cover of “pearl or dove grey” and asked that the German title Gotzen – “idols” or “false gods” – be printed in a simple typeface.

While striving for literary flourishes and issuing various instructions to political editors, he makes excuses for not being a “qualified” author and complains he could not write freely, knowing that Israeli censors would read the work.

Eichmann suggested the book open with a quotation from the ancient Greek philosopher Plato’s classic parable about a man in a cave: “And he would consider his shadow world as true, but the real world as an illusion”.

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The harrowing diaries of a Nazi war criminal

Adolf Eichmann records his visit to see the Einsatzgruppen (mobile death squads) operating in Minsk

It was bitterly cold and I was wearing a long lined leather coat and I took with me the necessary reserves of alcohol, without which I would not have been able to do the job. But the alcohol clouded my mind. It’s obvious that I could never allow myself to get drunk. But it is astonishing how much alcohol a man needs to keep frayed nerves under control. As I arrived at the place of execution, the shots were ringing out incessantly in a pit, which was the size of several large rooms. They were shooting with machine pistols. As I arrived I saw a Jewish woman with a small child in her arms in the pit. I wanted to pull the child out but then the bullet hit the child’s head. My driver wiped small pieces of brain from my leather coat. I got back into the car. ‘Berlin’ I said to my driver. I drank schnapps as if it was water. I had to drink, I had to dull my brain

About the Holocaust

I said in court that what happened with the Jews which the government of the Reich brought about during the last great war, was the most enormous crime in the history of mankind … I witnessed the gruesome workings of the machinery of death; gear meshed with gear, like clockwork. It was the biggest and most enormous dance of death of all time.

About his beliefs

I had thousands of ideals and I slid, like many others, into a situation from which there was no exit. Time has given me distance to the events … Many things that were valid then are no longer valid now. Things I considered to be basic values I have thrown overboard over the years.

About his involvement in the Holocaust

Because I have seen hell, death and the devil, because I had to watch the madness of destruction, because I was one of the many horses pulling the wagon and couldn’t escape left or right because of the will of the driver, I now feel called upon and have the desire to tell what happened

About his relationship with the Jews

I was never an anti-Semitic
## Recommended teacher resources

### Highly recommended

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<th>Author</th>
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<th>Publisher</th>
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<td>King, Henry</td>
<td><em>The Two Worlds of Albert Speer</em></td>
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<td>van der Vat, Dan</td>
<td><em>The Good Nazi – the life and lies of Albert Speer</em></td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Weidenfeld and Nicholson</td>
<td>0 75380 137X</td>
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Note that this book is only available direct from the USA via an Internet bookseller. The cost is about $US60

### Video

- *Hitler’s Henchmen* vol. 3
- *Triumph of the Will*

### Other resources

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