

## Lernen aus der Geschichte e.V.

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Das mehrsprachige Webportal publiziert fortlaufend Informationen zur historisch-politischen Bildung in Schulen, Gedenkstätten und anderen Einrichtungen zur Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Schwerpunkte bilden der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg sowie die Folgegeschichte in den Ländern Europas bis zu den politischen Umbrüchen 1989.

Dabei nimmt es Bildungsangebote in den Fokus, die einen Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte herausstellen und bietet einen Erfahrungsaustausch über historisch-politische Bildung in Europa an.

### **The "Final Solution of the Jewish Problem." – A State Secretary who knew nothing.**

*Erich Neumann, born 1882, started his career as a civil servant in 1920 in the Prussian Department of the Interior, after completing law school and his military service. After various positions as a civil servant, he became the head of a government agency in 1932, and in the summer of 1938 he became Secretary of State under the official in charge of the Four Year Plan, Hermann Göring. As head of the "Foreign Exchange Affairs" division, he participated in planning the "Aryanization" of the economy as well as the marking and isolation of Jews. At the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942 on the "Final Solution of the Jewish Problem", to which Heydrich summoned the highest ranking officials of the Reich's Administration, Neumann represented the Ministries for Economy, Labor, Finance, Nutrition, and Commerce, as well as Armament and Munition. He was confined in 1945. In early 1948, he was released, and died soon after in the same year. The only surviving copy of the protocol from the participants' handouts, that of the State Department's Undersecretary, Martin Luther, was not found until the autumn of 1947, shortly before the interrogation by Neumann documented here. Regardless of this evidence, those of the conference participants still living continued to follow the defense strategy that such a protocol had never existed.*

Dr. Kempner: We haven't met for quite a while; do you remember me?

State Secretary Neumann: In the interrogation center at Oberursel/Taunus.

Kempner: Correct. It has been almost two years since we last met. Soon we will have to discuss

your own fate. There aren't many people who participated in crucial meetings, as you

did.

Neumann: I really can't judge that ...

Kempner: Mr. Neumann, let me tell you something: If you try to minimize the importance of your previous position and status as a former State Secretary, that is certainly your prerogative. You do not have to talk to me if you do not want to. But I will tell you something else: I won't even consider talking to you if you tell me such nonsense. How many State Secretaries were there during the Third Reich? About fifty, isn't that right?

Neumann: Yes.

Kempner: Those were the men who knew about everything. Everything was made absolutely clear in their meetings. Our late Reich Marshall (Göring) did not mince words.

Neumann: Göring said a great deal that can only be judged in light of his particular personality.

Kempner: Did you have anything to do with Jewish matters, or was that outside your jurisdiction?

Neumann: That was not part of my duties.

Kempner: Did you know that Jews were killed in the East?

Neumann: I heard this only recently.

Kempner: When did you first know that such a program would be officially implemented?

Neumann: When I was arrested.

Kempner: You never officially heard about this earlier?

Neumann: Never.

Kempner: I mean as State Secretary for the Four Year Plan.

Neumann: The Four Year Plan had nothing to do with Jewish matters.

Kempner: Wasn't this really known by everyone?

Neumann: No.

Kempner: Meetings must have been held to prepare such matters.

Neumann: Possibly.

Kempner: Weren't you perhaps once invited to such a meeting?

Neumann: No.

Kempner: Who, do you believe, would have been invited? Which departments?

Neumann: The political departments. I assume the Interior Ministry and the Reich Chancellery.

Kempner: Who else?

Neumann: Those were the main political agencies. The Reich Economics Ministry had jurisdiction

for financial matters, including Aryanization.

Kempner: Did you know Himmler? Did you attend a meeting with him?

Neumann: Never.

Kempner: Did you know Heydrich?

Neumann: Yes.

Kempner: Did you have discussions with him?

Neumann: Never.

Kempner: You had absolutely nothing to do with Jewish matters?

Neumann: No, not with those matters. After the 1938 pogrom, Göring was authorized to clean

things up and I also heard about several meetings.

Kempner: Did you participate in any of them?

Neumann: I took part in a meeting at the Aviation Ministry.

Kempner: When?

Neumann: After the events of November 1933.

Kempner: Was that the well-known meeting that Stuckart attended?

Neumann: I can't say. It was a meeting where Göring stated that he had been authorized to prevent the repetition of such things.

Kempner: Because that was so horrible?

Neumann: Yes.

Kempner: When did you speak with Himmler or Heydrich?

Neumann: I never had conversations with them. One greeted them at receptions and that was all.

Kempner: Did you live near the Botanical Gardens in Dahlem?

Neumann: In Lichterfelde.

Kempner: Do you know the Wannsee?

Neumann: Of course.

Kempner: Do you remember the street "*Am Großen Wannsee*"?

Neumann: Yes.

Kempner: Was this an office?

Neumann: I think that is where Funk (Reich Minister of Economics) lived.

Kempner: Where was that?

Neumann: I can't swear to that. I assume that was the street.

Kempner: What did you understand as "the Final Solution of the Jewish question"?

Neumann: Our official duties had nothing to do with that.

Kempner: Unofficially?

Neumann: Nothing either. I tried to help any Jews who turned to me. Fourteen people.

Kempner: Do you really believe that it is significant that someone helped fourteen Jews, but participated in the Final Solution?

Neumann: Since I couldn't do anything else, I did my utmost for these individual Jews.

Kempner: I can't understand why you knew nothing as State Secretary for the Four Year Plan.

Neumann: This can be explained by the Four Year Plan's scope of work. We were concerned with

economic, not with political matters.

Kempner: Contrary to your sworn statement today, you were present on January 20, 1942 at 56 *Am Großen Wannsee* during the conference about the Final Solution of the Jewish question, where you were informed that the Jews would be killed off slowly but surely

...

Neumann: Most certainly not.

Kempner: You didn't participate in the conference at Wannsee, where Heydrich developed his program?

Neumann: No.

Kempner: How unpleasant to say this, but you were there. We can prove it. It was January 20, 1942.

Neumann: I don't understand that. I can't imagine that, since in May 1942 I completed my last assignments before retiring. (He became general director of a state-connected factory for an annual salary of 150,000 marks.)

Kempner: That was in January. The conference about the Jewish question occurred in January 1942. It is useless to attempt to talk your way out of it. You were there. It was stated then that Jews able to work would perish through labor, the others would be killed.

Neumann: This is the first time I have heard this.

Kempner: After you already heard it from Heydrich on January 20, 1942.

Neumann: No, I never heard that.

Kempner: Moreover, you lived in a villa in Berlin-Dahlem that had been expropriated from a Jew. You kept this property, isn't that true?

Neumann: No. It had been empty for two years.

Kempner: You most certainly knew that it was an expropriated Jewish house?

Neumann: I am hearing it for the first time.

Kempner: If you want to speak openly with me, I am willing to talk to you again; otherwise I don't have any more time for you. Thank you. Write to me, if you wish to speak with me again.

Neumann: I am, of course, prepared to respond to anything you wish to ask me.

Kempner: I expect better answers from a former State Secretary; a former Prussian State Secretary stands up for what he did.

State Secretary Erich Neumann was under arrest during his interrogations at Nuremberg on April 18 and 23, 1947, but was released because of illness early in 1948. German criminal justice was supposed to continue this case. However, there were no further proceedings and Neumann died several years later. Criminal prosecutions of the other state secretaries, who also could not remember attending the "murder conference," were suspended by the Ulm prosecutor's office. State Secretary Wilhelm Stuckart of the Reich Ministry of Interior, another participant at the Wannsee conference, was given a lenient sentence of three years and ten months in the Wilhelmstraße trial and died in a car accident several years after he was released.

The protocol of the Wannsee conference was first discovered by my colleagues in the records of the German Foreign Office during the Wilhelmstraße trial and became one of the most important documents for the prosecution. If this document had been found earlier for the International Military Tribunal of Göring and others, it would have incriminated them even more. The complete protocol of the Wannsee conference is reprinted in my book "*Eichmann und Komplizen*" ["Eichmann and His Confederates"]. The book also contains some of the more important documents about the murder of European Jews.

(In: *Das Dritte Reich im Kreuzverhör. Aus den unveröffentlichten Vernehmungsprotokollen des Anklägers Robert M.W. Kempner.* [The Third Reich in Cross-Examination. From the Unpublished Interrogation Protocols of Prosecutor Robert M.W. Kempner] Munich, 1969.)