



Report of the British Embassy in Berlin to the British Foreign Ministry, 16 November 1938

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BERLIN,
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My Lord,

On November 7th Herschell Grynszpan a young Polish Jew was admitted to the German Embassy in Paris and fired a revolver at the first member of the staff whom he chanced to meet, a Secretary named Herr vom Rath. The assailant on arrest is reported to have justified his deed as an act of revenge for the cruel treatment meted out by Germany to his own parents and to the Jews in general. On November 8th Herr vom Rath who was attended by Herr Hitler's own personal doctor and a surgeon specially sent to Paris by the Chancellor, died of his wounds.

2. This was the signal for a national persecution of the Jews in Germany on a scale and of a severity unprecedented in modern times. Before the victim died certain punitive measures such as the suspension of Jewish newspapers and a ban on the possession of firearms had been taken and plans no doubt were laid for further action, should the worst occur. This unfortunately was the case and on the password "Fackelzug ohne Fackel" the attack was launched in the small hours of the morning of Thursday, November 10th. Until midnight on the 9th life in the capital was normal. On the morning of the 10th the general public awoke to witness an orgy of destruction and terror. All over Germany synagogues were burnt or damaged and Jewish shops and business offices were broken into, their stocks in many cases looted, their furniture and fittings smashed. At many places particularly Vienna and

Munich....

The Right Honourable
The Viscount Halifax, K.G., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.,
etc., etc., etc.,

Munich the Jews were threatened, assaulted and turned out of their homes. There were certainly many cases of suicide and I think some of murder. I myself and members of the staff were witnesses of the later stage of the excesses in Berlin which lasted until well into the night of the 10th. Gangs of youths in plain clothes and armed with poles, hammers and other appropriate weapons were visiting the Jewish shops and completing the work of destruction, done in the early morning. In some cases the premises had been entirely looted, in others the stock in trade was only mishandled and scattered. And at one or two places a crowd was gaping in silent curiosity at the efforts of the owners to tidy up the débris. I especially noted the demeanour of the groups which followed each band of marauders. I heard no expression of shame or disgust but in spite of the complete passiveness of many of the onlookers I did notice the inane grin which often inadvertently betrays the guilty conscience. All the time, with one exception, Messrs. Israel's premises, no police were in evidence and the fire brigades were turned out only to prevent the flames of burning synagogues and other buildings from damaging Aryan property. Nevertheless the police were near enough at hand to arrest would be photographers of the wreckage. Amongst those detained was the new Colombian Minister who, escort and all, made a dramatic appearance at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The Minister was to have presented his credentials next week. I now hear that Herr Hitler will not receive him. In the evening of the 10th Dr. Goebbels issued a proclamation expressing sympathy with the people's indignation against the Jews but enjoining that these demonstrations...

demonstrations should cease as the answer to the Paris murder would take the form of legislation or decree. This order was gradually complied with and thus ended a day of controlled mob violence which not only involved the sacrifice in some cases of innocent life but caused immense damage to private property, the amount of which cannot yet be estimated.

3. In the meanwhile the police who had studiously shut their eyes to the pillage of the day, were arresting hundreds of male Jews on charges unspecified. It is believed that they have been sent to concentration camps. All through the week-end and even at the present moment private flats and houses are being raided and the men taken away under arrest. Terror stricken Jews fearful of capture have abandoned their homes and are wandering about the streets or hiding in the woods around Berlin. I hear that conditions are even worse elsewhere.

4. On November 12th the first instalment of anti-Jewish decrees as announced by Dr. Goebbels was published. The Jewish community in Germany are fined one milliard marks (£84,000,000) in punishment for the murder of Herr vom Rath. They are excluded from all economic activity in the Reich as from January 1st, 1939. They must repair at their own cost all damage done to their premises and forfeit to the State any insurance claims. They are forbidden to attend theatres, cinemas or cultural occasions of any kind. The possession by Jews of weapons was also prohibited under severe penalties. Further supplementary decrees are expected. In addition to this, the sufferings of the Jews are aggravated by the fact that thousands are not only wandering and homeless but also their
wives....

wives and families are denied the very necessities of life, as so many people are terrorized against furnishing either supplies or funds to Jews. Increasing numbers of such cases are coming to my notice. I also learn, though I have no present means of checking the numbers, that hundreds of Jews are, in desperation smuggling themselves across the frontier and that the Jewish suicide rate never low in these times, has alarmingly increased.

5. I will now offer some comments on the present position and on the immediate future. I think that the murder of Herr vom Rath by a German born Polish Jew has only accelerated the process of elimination of the Jews which has for long been planned. This project had it proceeded according to schedule was cruel enough, but the opportunity offered by Grynspan's criminal act has let loose forces of mediaeval barbarism. Modern civilisation has certainly not changed human nature. Much stress is also laid on the point that this murder was an act of aggression against the German Reich on the part of international Jewry, for which German Jews in the power of the Reich will pay dearly now and in the future. Dr. Goebbels has clearly announced that any attack on the German Government by international Jewry or their alleged associates will without fail be visited on the Jews in Germany. In spite of statements to the contrary there can be no doubt that the deplorable excesses perpetrated on November 10th were instigated and organised by the Government. The attacking parties commenced operations at a given hour and singled out with uncanny precision Jewish shops, buildings and places....

places of business and it seems that not many mistakes were made. In the same way as they had begun, the attackers ceased operations on the word being given by Dr. Goebbels who in his public utterances condoned what had been done. Inarticulate though the mass of the people may have been, I have not met a single German of whatever class who in varying measure does not to say the least disapprove of what has occurred. But I fear it does not follow that even the outspoken condemnation of professed national-socialists or of senior officers in the Army will have any influence over the insensate gang in present control of Nazi Germany.

6. The present position of the Jews is indeed tragic. In spite of Dr. Goebbels grudging admission to Reuters Agent on November 15th that he had allowed certain Jewish cultural associations to be reopened, the civilised world is confronted with the sight of over 500,000 people deliberately excluded from all trades and professions and consequently unable to earn a living. They dwell in the grip and at the mercy of a brutal oligarchy, which fiercely resents all humanitarian foreign intervention. Misery and despair are already there and when their resources are either denied to them or exhausted, their end will be starvation. The Jews of Germany are indeed not a national but a world problem which if neglected contains the seeds of a terrible vengeance. They are to be find ⁴ £84,000,000. The question of utilizing the proceeds of this levy to assist Jewish emigration from Germany is one which merits serious examination.

7. The action I have taken to protect British interests forms
the....

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the subject of a separate despatch. I am glad to report that the cases of damage which have so far been brought to my notice are few.

I have the honour to be,

With the highest respect,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient,
humble Servant,

George Bingham - Innes

Source: Documents on British Foreign Policy, Third Series, Vol. III, No. 313.