**The Reichstag Fire**

On 31st January, 1933, [Joseph Goebbels](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERgoebbels.htm) wrote in his diary about the plans to deal with the [German Communist Party](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERkpd.htm)(KPD): "During discussions with the Führer we drew up the plans of battle against the red terror. For the time being, we decided against any direct counter-measures. The Bolshevik rebellion must first of all flare up; only then shall we hit back." (1)

On 24th February, the [Gestapo](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERgestapo.htm) raided Communist headquarters. [Hermann Göring](https://spartacus-educational.com/2WWgoring.htm) claimed that he had found "barrels of incriminating material concerning plans for a world revolution". (2) However, the alleged subversive documents were never published and it is assumed that in reality the Nazi government had not discovered anything of any importance. (3)

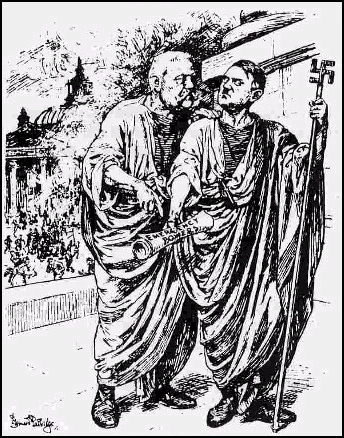
Three days after the KPD raid, the [Reichstag](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERreichstag.htm) building caught fire. It was reported at ten o'clock when a Berlin resident telephoned the police and said: "The dome of the Reichstag building is burning in brilliant flames." The Berlin Fire Department arrived minutes later and although the main structure was fireproof, the wood-paneled halls and rooms were already burning. (4)

Göring, who had been at work in the nearby Prussian Ministry of the Interior, was quickly on the scene. [Adolf Hitler](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERhitler.htm) and [Joseph Goebbels](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERgoebbels.htm) arrived soon after. So also did [Rudolf Diels](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERdiels.htm): "Shortly after my arrival in the burning Reichstag, the National Socialist elite had arrived. On a balcony jutting out of the chamber, Hitler and his trusty followers were assembled." Göring told him: "This is the beginning of the Communist Revolt, they will start their attack now! Not a moment must be lost. There will be no mercy now. Anyone who stands in our way will be cut down. The German people will not tolerate leniency. Every communist official will be shot where he is found. Everybody in league with the Communists must be arrested. There will also no longer be leniency for social democrats." (5)

[Adolf Hitler](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERhitler.htm), [Hermann Göring](https://spartacus-educational.com/2WWgoring.htm) and [Joseph Goebbels](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERgoebbels.htm) at the scene of the fire (28th February, 1933)

Hitler gave orders that all leaders of the [German Communist Party](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERkpd.htm) (KPD) should "be hanged that very night." [Paul von Hindenburg](https://spartacus-educational.com/FWWhindenburg.htm) vetoed this decision but did agree that Hitler should take "dictatorial powers". Orders were given for all KPD members of the Reichstag to be arrested. This included [Ernst Torgler](https://spartacus-educational.com/Ernst_Torgler.htm), the chairman of the KPD. Göring commented that "the record of Communist crimes was already so long and their offence so atrocious that I was in any case resolved to use all the powers at my disposal in order ruthlessly to wipe out this plague". (6)

Torgler was interviewed by the [Gestapo](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERgestapo.htm). He was able to give details of having left the Reichstag building at 8.15 p.m. and arriving at the Aschinger Restaurant at 8.30 p.m. Witnesses confirmed this but his alibi was rejected and he was placed in custody and for the next seven months he was "fettered day and night". (7) Torgler complained: "It was left to the warders' discretion either to tighten our chains until the blood circulation was gravely impeded, and the skin broke, or else to take pity on us and to loosen the chains by one notch." (8)

[Bernard Partridge](https://spartacus-educational.com/Jpartridge.htm), published this cartoon on 8th March, 1933: [Paul von Hindenburg](https://spartacus-educational.com/FWWhindenburg.htm) to [Adolf Hitler](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERhitler.htm): "The red peril – This is a heaven sent opportunity my lad. If you can't be a dictator now you never will."

Hitler told [Franz von Papen](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERpapen.htm): "This is a God-given signal, Herr Vice-Chancellor! If this fire, as I believe, is the work of the Communists, that we must crush out this murderous pest with an iron fist." Hitler claimed that this was clearly an attempted coup and that leading members of the [Social Democratic Party](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERsdp.htm) (SDP) should also be arrested. (9) [Seftan Delmer](https://spartacus-educational.com/Jdelmer.htm) claimed he heard Hitler say: "God grant that this is the work of the Communists. You are witnessing the beginning of a great new epoch in German history. This fire is the beginning.... You see this flaming building, If this Communist spirit got hold of Europe for but two months it would be all aflame like this building." (10)