

## HOLOCAUST AND THE ARMENIAN CASE

An important part of Armenian propaganda efforts in the last few decades has been directed toward establishing a linkage between their own historical experiences and those of European Jewry during the Second World War. The cornerstone in their case has been Adolf Hitler's purported remark which cites the precedent of the world's lack of reacting to the fate of Armenians during the First World War as a justification for his planned extermination of European Jewry throughout the Second World War. The events in the Ottoman Empire in 1915 and those in Germany in 1939-1945 are of course not related at all. The Armenian case offers no similarities or parallels to the Holocaust. There is no evidence that Nazi leaders took the Armenian relocations as a model for the Final Solution. There are clearly no factors common to both events. They must be considered on their own terms.

Hitler's oft-quoted address given to the three supreme commanders of the three branches of the armed forces, as well as the commanding generals bearing the title commanders-in-chief at his mountain headquarters at Obersalzberg on 22 August 1939, a few days prior to the invasion of Poland, "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" is a myth. Professor Heath Lowry clearly demonstrated that there is no proof that Hitler ever made such a statement; nor did the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg accept during its 23 November 1945 session, or in any other session, the above-mentioned faked quotation, which also appeared in *The Times* of London on 24 November 1945. The quotation actually first became before the public in *What About Germany?* (New York:Dodd, Mead & Co., 1942), pp.1-4 by Louis Lochner, the Associated Press' Berlin bureau chief in 1921-1942. Lochner, like *The Times* author, never disclosed his source. Regardless, the Nuremberg transcripts do not contain the alleged quotation. In fact, the transcripts show that the tribunal examined and then rejected Lochner's third-hand version of Hitler's address. Instead, the tribunal entered into evidence two official versions of the 22 August 1939 address found in captured German military records quoting those who were present at Obersalzberg. These bear document numbers US-29/789 PS and US-30/1014 PS. Neither document contains any reference to Armenians. Moreover, neither document refers to the Jews; Hitler's address was an anti-Polish invective.<sup>1</sup>

Other scholars did not also believe that Hitler could possibly have uttered the aforesaid statement. For example, Robert John, a historian of Armenian descent, in his letter of 8 June 1985 to the editor of the *New York Times*, argues persuasively that the reference to Hitler's remark is a dubious one. John suggests that those who issued it did so with a deliberate intent to deceive the world in 1945. He said: "I wrote to Louis Lochner, inviting him to tell for the record what he knew about the material, but he did not reply and died soon after. Much later in the trial, the German defense lawyers were able to introduce the most complete account of Hitler's address, taken down by Admiral Hermann Böhm, which runs twelve pages in translation. There is no mention of the Armenians or the rest of the quotation."<sup>2</sup>

No minutes were taken during the Obersalzberg meeting. Those listening were explicitly told not to make any record of the proceedings. One or two of those present, including, Böhm, Admiral of the Fleet, thought what they heard was so important that they quickly compiled a summary of what had gone on that day.<sup>3</sup> Böhm took the notes during the speech and transcribed

<sup>1</sup>For a thorough discussion of Hitler's statement, and its falsity, see Heath Lowry, "The United States Congress and Adolf Hitler on the Armenians", *Political Communication and Persuasion*, Vol.3, No.2(April 1985),pp.111-140.

<sup>2</sup> Robert John, Letters, "Did Hitler Say It?", *New York Times*, 8 June 1985, p.22. See also "Historian of Armenian Descent Says Frequently Used Hitler Quote is Nothing But a Forgery", *The Armenian Reporter*, 2 August 1984, p.1.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-45: Nemesis* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), p.207.

them on the same evening in the Vier Jahreszeiten Hotel in Munich. The correctness of the copy was certified. The original was in the handwriting of Böhm. The defense lawyers in the trials of German Major War Criminals called Böhm as a witness and he confirmed that the speech was made in this form.<sup>4</sup>

In a second letter of 6 July 1985 again to the editor of the *New York Times*, John went further and stated emphatically: "This document would not satisfy the United States Provost Marshal at Nuremberg as acceptable in court, and it has not been substantiated since."<sup>5</sup>

Professor Michael Gunter maintains that by associating the Turks with Hitler's genocidal actions, the Armenians who choose to cite Hitler's alleged statement seek to make a telling but misleading emotional appeal. He goes on and concludes that "it is just one example of how many Armenians are willing to believe the worst about the Turks without objectively analyzing what really happened."<sup>6</sup>

In another instance, in the Fall 2006 issue of *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Professor Jonathan Markovitz writes that "the authenticity of Hitler's oft-quoted reference" that "(W)ho remembers the extermination of the Armenians? has been challenged on the grounds that the statement appears in a document of questionable origin."<sup>7</sup>

Heated debates arose regarding the inclusion of the Armenian case within the parameters of the United States Holocaust Commission. Contrary to those rewriting the Armenian history using a "Holocaust paradigm," Steven Katz, a leading authority on the subject, declares Armenian incidents of 1915 bear no resemblance to the Holocaust and rejects the comparison between the two. He has written on the Armenian episode: "My understanding of its causation, unfolding, and consequences, not least in terms of its demographic proportions, does not support a fully genocidal reading of this event."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal Nuremberg 14 November 1945- 1 October 1946*, Vol.14, (Nuremberg: International Military Tribunal, 1947), p.46.

<sup>5</sup> Robert John, Letters, "Hitler's Armenian-Extermination Remark, True or False?", *New York Times*, 6 July 1985, p.20.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Gunter, "Pursuing the Just Cause of Their People" *A Study of Contemporary Armenian Terrorism* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986), p.27 fn 55.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Markovitz, "Ararat and Collective Memories of the Armenian Genocide", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol.20, No.2 (Fall 2006), pp.244 and 253 n.29.

<sup>8</sup> Steven Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, Vol.1: *The Holocaust and Mass Death before the Modern Age*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.22. Also idem, "The Uniqueness of the Holocaust: The Historical Dimension", in Alan Rosenbaum, ed., *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), pp.19-38.