

Ruth Weiss

„Nuremberg Speech“

July 5, 2022, Nuremberg, Documentation Center Nazi Party Rally Building

Honoured Lord Mayor König, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My heartfelt thanks to everyone, who made this celebration in this room possible: the City of Nuremberg, the documentation centre of the Reichs-party grounds and Dr. Astrid Betz, the PEN Centre of German speaking writers abroad, the RW Society as well as Herr Quelle for his unique **musical** contribution – and of course to you, Prof. Dr. Andrei Markovits dear Andy! – my sincere thanks for your amazing laudation! My deep thanks to Prof. Dr. Frederick Lubich, who conceived and produced this magnificent and impressive “Festschrift” (commemorative publication), with which I will spend a great deal of time to come! My thanks to Verlag Königshausen und Neumann who published it – and of course to the many, who contributed to this - though I truly don’t really know that I deserved this! I have to confess that I am overwhelmed --

In this historic room in which we are assembled, the first of the Nuremberg trials of the Allied Military Tribunal had been held against the 24 top Nazi leaders from the 20th November 1945 to the 1. October 1946. The charges levelled at the accused covered war crimes and crimes against humanity, whereby human rights took their place in international law. Later critics regretted that the Shoah, the systematic genocide of European Jews had not been featured as prominently in terms of justice, that it deserved, also that pre-war crimes had not been considered.

Nonetheless the importance of this first trial cannot be overlooked.

I have been asked to speak about hatred. It cannot be ignored that the root of the incredible, unbelievable and hard to understand Nazi crimes was deep and unfathomable hatred. Adolf Hitler left no doubt of his hatred of political opponents, Jews, Slavs, Sinti and Roma, the handicapped, homosexuals and so-called asocials. Even before he came to power he spewed out his hatred in his early speeches, once he had been instructed to address the troops from 1918 in the barracks and which he continued to address in his Beer Cellar talks and the book he wrote in his comfortable confinement after his failed 1923 coup.

He continued his hate-laden speeches as Germany’s leaders to the enthusiastic cheers of the majority.

Nor did the Führer attempt to hide his intention to commit crimes to achieve his end. In a private discussion in 1932! with two of his acolytes, he said that the old rules of law no longer existed. He ended his diatribe with two chilling sentences: “War is what I choose. I am war”.

Unsurprisingly he used a lie to trigger off the war against Poland on the 1. September 1939 he had planned step by step over years. Concentration camp prisoners dressed in Polish uniforms allegedly attacked a radio station, naturally to be subsequently murdered. In the end, when Adolf Hitler was about to face his own death, he nonetheless spitefully ordered the murder of a number of great men such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the brave cleric of the Confessing Church. He even hated his own people, such as refusing the exhausted army at Stalingrad to withdraw, then abandoning the men to their fate.

It is said that by repeating a lie often enough, one ends up believing it oneself. Herr Hitler proved that a demagogue supported by masterful propaganda can rouse the enthusiasm of others and turn them into collaborators. Hitler's war was devastating also for his people. Over 60 million people died, 17 million were missing, Europe lay in ruins.

I wish to return to the first trial in this historic place and to two other men who were the personification of hatred.

TWO EXTREME ANTISEMITIC “GAULEITER” (DISTRICT CHIEFS)

In this former courtroom 600 it is impossible not to speak of one of the accused, who with 11 others had been sentenced to death: Julius Streicher, the “Bloody Czar of Franconia”, as a Russian historian called him, who was considered as Enemy No. One of Jews. This one-time primary school teacher turned publisher, founded in 1923 his virulent antisemitic “Der Stürmer” with its slogan: “Jews are Germans’ misfortune”, a weekly that appeared regularly with its vicious caricatures of Jews and fake tales of Jewish crimes, often using obscene language. After Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, “The Stürmer” became obligatory reading and was an important propaganda tool with its vicious caricatures, displayed in cities and villages in so-called “Stürmer boxes”, so that passersby could stop and inform themselves of the latest heinous Jewish crimes. The paper gained wide distribution that reached Latin America, turning Streicher into a multi-millionaire. As Gauleiter, first of Middle Franconia, then all Franconia he knew how to benefit from Jewish possessions. He owned 13 houses where he lived in Nuremberg and Fuerth and a much-loved estate named Peikershof. He fell foul of other Nazi leaders, only Hitler protected his friend of a disciplinary hearing in 1940, when he was replaced as “Gauleiter”.

Streicher intended to expel all Jews from Franconia as swiftly as possible. This too affected my family, as he had made it plain to major ‘Aryan’ companies to dismiss their Jewish employees. Among others, my father was sacked in early 1933 and forced to emigrate to South Africa, where he happened to have relatives. Other Franconian Jews were overtaken by a similar fate. Though at the time it caused great distress, Streicher’s virulent antisemitism in fact it saved lives, when the politics of expulsion was displaced by the politics of extermination.

Streicher no doubt turned in his grave at the irony that concentration camp survivors were based on his Pleikerhof to prepare themselves for their emigration to Palestine.

My aunt – one of my mother’s two sisters – was the secretary of the Jewish congregation in Fürth, who was able to join us in Johannesburg after the 1938 Pogrom night- She later told me that one of her classmates by the name of Albert Forster, who had only got at as far as O-levels. Streicher introduced him to Hitler, who took to the young man, so that he became Gauleiter of the Free City of Danzig from 1930, after 1939 state governor. Forster loathed Jews and Poles, whom he considered subhuman and subjected both groups to brutal cold-blooded campaigns of an nihilation. He committed war crimes during the war against Poland which had been initiated at Danzig and even after it ended, continued to attack Poles. He went as far as saying Poles, should be wiped out from birth. At another occasion he said Poles had to be taught, who was the master. One historian spoke of blood orgies, in which Forster personally took a hand. Another described him as a man without mercy or conscience.

He was careful to shield his extravagantly luxurious life. Apart from his townhouse, he owned an estate where he hunted regularly. Greatly feared, he was known as King Albert of Poland. In Danzig he had protected his private life. He was little known, even his death had been controversial until Dieter Schenk, a former member of Interpol for Germany published a meticulously researched biography “Hitler’s Man in Danzig” in 2000. Little was known about him until his biography was published in 2000 by Dieter Schenk, a former Federal Criminal Police Office at Interpol. The British arrested him in Hamburg and after a trial handed him over to the Poles, who executed him in 1952. As the son of Fuerth’s senior prison administrator, he was born and died in prison.

In his book Schenk spoke of 1701 men, who were known as perpetrators of atrocities: only ten were ever brought to justice.

This reminded me of my first visit to Germany in the early fifties. We met no Nazis, only resistance fighters. No one had known anything of the horror of the Shoah, the Holocaust. It was no coincidence that in the British zone of at the end of the 50ties of 47 top police officials 33 had been former SS leaders. The first director of the Ludwigsburger structure created to investigate Nazi crimes had been an SS man, who had to resign in 1966. The State Secretary Globke close to Chancellor Adenauer was a co-author of the Nuremberg Laws of which he had written a legal opinion and the official responsible for the 1938 law forcing Jews to accept the names of Sarah and Israel. In the immediate post-war era the Shoah was not discussed. The end of the war was not seen as liberation but as capitulation. The desire of Germans was to turn that page to a new beginning and forget what had happened.

Recently I’d been researching the last days of the Reich, the three weeks of Admiral Dönitz as President, when the government resided in Flensburg. I had known little about the period. I’d read about the escape routes of Nazis, which in the 80s became known as the ‘ratlines’. I’d seen one was named Ratline North and assumed it had led from northern Germany via Italy or Spain to the Americas. Nothing of the sort: “Rattenlinie Nord” – ended in Germany! Top Nazis including Heinrich Himmler turned up in Schleswig Holstein. They laid low and in due course filtered back into what had come the Federal Republic – between one to two thousand.

I read that the reason for the lack of prosecution of Nazis was due to the overwhelming number of murders and massacres. It seemed impossible to charge anyone by proving to a Court his precise actions in these events. Moreover, experienced men were needed in the civil service and private sector. Mild punishment, amnesties and no prosecutions became the order of the early post-war era. The Auschwitz trials were an exception thanks to the Jewish judge and prosecutor Fritz Bauer, who was also instrumental for the capture of Eichmann. Finally the recent judgment in the trial of an aged concentration camp guard made other inquiries possible, as this trial ruled that it was sufficient to charge any perpetrator “because he was present” during atrocities. As late as February 2021 “ZEIT ONLINE“ reported that Ludwigsburg was now investigating crimes in prisoner of war camps and others. No doubt a little late to finally charge anyone.

In the light of all this and more, it is not surprising that the ideology of the 12 brown years survived and attracted followers, enabling antisemitism alongside racism and anti-foreigner views to emerge during the current political climate and its swing to the right to reach expression even in the Bundestag. It explains that the word “Jew” emerged as a curse in the playgrounds of schools. No child could have invented this. It is something picked up in its environment, beginning with its home.

HATRED

The men I’ve mentioned personified hate. Unfathomable, deep hate that is often negative and destructive, fostering tension and suffering, injustice and intolerance. Fed by prejudice and lies, hate leads to discrimination, exclusion of opponents and foreigners.

Unfortunately the current political climate is also contaminated by extremism both from the right and left, as well as by extremist Islamist views. Hatred stalks the planet. The post-Second World War hope of “no more war” turned into “forever war”, with constant conflicts bedeviling the world. At present the eyes are focussed on Ukraine. Hate is linked to contempt for human beings, anger, violence and destruction. It dominates the hater and blinds him to truth and logic.

Throughout certain rulers were driven by hate even of their own subjects. Thus Nero comes to mind, who made music while Rome burned or Basher al-Assad, in our day, whose brutal suppression of peaceful protests led to a complex, lengthy war, ex-President Trump is said to have encouraged the violent protests on January 6, 2021.

Lies also dominate Russia's war against Ukraine, instigated and cruelly waged against civilians by the Russian ruler, who is also guilty of war crimes and offences against humanity. One can only admire the courage of the Ukrainians and stand by them!

Today antisemitism is openly expressed, also in attacks on Jews. This is often expressed in criticism of Israel in support of Palestinians. Even the Covid epidemic has been laid by conspiracy theorists at the feet of Jews – or one Jew, take your choice. It is odd that it is overlooked that one who was born a Jew is regarded by Christians as the Redeemer, who is also respected by Muslims.

Refugees

The ugly emotions expressed also generate greed, corruption, envy, injustice which lead to exploitation of others, nature including animals and resources.

The subsequent conflicts, the states suppression of its population and freedom of expression has caused the issue of refugees as a permanent presence. In November 2021 the number of refugees had topped 100 Million. This continues to increase. The suffering so many undergo during their search for asylum is indescribable. The tragic death of 23 refugees in Marocco is unforgettable and merely one of numerous incidents. It proved how difficult it is to obtain and reach a safe haven. In the 30s it was no different. The 1938 conference in Evian, France attended by 32 governments ended after a week without result.

The refugees in South Africa – which had been represented in Evian – had also been unwelcome. Not only because we had the right skin hue but the wrong religion, but allegedly because we “would steal” poor Whites jobs. Statistics later proved that the opposite was true and that the immigrants had created jobs for Non-Whites and Whites. This is the experience in all waves of immigrants, who arrive with their experience and knowledge to contribute to development and welfare of the asylum country.

It would be useful for citizens of countries allowing such immigration to, earn more of the background of the new arrivals, above all with regard to the reason for their despair. Understanding leads to acceptance and support in tackling the causes in the mother countries. Goodwill is also beneficial for those who assist the newcomers, it raises their self-awareness and could lead to new friendship.

Prevention

How can hatred be opposed?

A good beginning is the analysis of prejudice. I often say that no one is born with ingrained prejudice. However, little people try to make sense of the world in which they find themselves and accept simple ideas: mummy is loving, therefore all women are kind, Papa complained about a woman driver, so only men are good behind a wheel, every Non-White is untrustworthy, the religion of others is bad. Often such notions are indirectly strengthened by the environment. Sensible parents and understanding teachers are aware that they have to teach the growing child that such prejudices are simplified and unjust. Tolerance is best taught in childhood and youth.

In a democratic country it is possible, indeed necessary that open debate and discussion of controversial issues are taught, without condemning opposing views. It is possible to make it possible for the young to visit places of worship of others and learn about their faith. The South African comic actor Trevor Noah, who lives and works in the USA said at the end of his speech at the annual get-together of journalists at the White House, that he had made fun of President Biden in his presence, well aware that this would have no consequence. Hatred has no sense of humour.

It is useful for young people to meet their contemporaries of other cultures – indeed also for older adults. I don't demand love instead of hate, but understanding and comprehension – that is, tolerance: I may not agree with the views of another, but I would fight to the last drop of blood for his right to express his view.

No one is asked to change his belief or views, one is simply asked to accept that someone follows a different faith to oneself, has other views or other looks. Abusing others because of such differences is counter-productive. Tolerance eases one's own life as well as living alongside others.

Nationalism, fascism generates racism, rejection of foreigners and Xenophobia. For instance this was seen in recent years in South Africa, where the poorest of the poor –the jobless - turned against asylum seekers from African countries. Thus last February a mob attacked African „aliens“, in the course of which Elvis Nyathi was burned alive. He had been attacked for no other reason than his Zimbabwe nationality and like all “aliens” deemed to rob locals of jobs. The despair of his attacker was due to their distress at their situation, which was caused not by the newcomers but the corruption within the ruling party, which robbed the state of resources and thus the people of the delivery of services demanded of government. The Zondo Commission which investigated corruption has named names and the first steps have been taken to apprehend the guilty parties.

The journalist Trevor Grundy recently sent me an obituary of an 82-year old named Ray Hill. The deceased had been a convinced Neo-Nazi and activist, who had decided that South Africa with its apartheid system against Africans was the right country for him. He therefore settled there, only to be shocked when confronted with the reality of the social structures and their injustice, suppression and physical aggression against Non-Whites and also white opponents. He totally changed his previous views and returned to Britain as a changed man and became an activist against racism and extremism. He revealed his amazing story eventually in a book and an explosive TV film on Channel Four.

This proved that it is possible to change one's views when faced with facts and encouraged me to plead for actions to provide such proofs especially to the young. I quote the brave blind American Helen Keller, who declared the most important result of education is tolerance. I repeat that this calls for sensible parents, politicians and teachers, who accept this and pass it on to the young. I trust that in due course this will include the majority.

May I express my thanks once more for this day in this setting and for the wonderful gift of this great book –and also that you have shared the occasion and made it special for me!