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Marinus van der Lubbe

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On the evening of February 27th, 1933, a fire which caused considerable damage developed in the Reichstag building, in Berlin.

A political campaign for the election of a new parliament was in full swing. Since January 30th, a coalition Government was in power, composed of members of the Nazi and Nationalist parties, under the leadership of Chancellor Hitler. the Nazi chief.

The Nazi Party, aspiring to the absolute and exclusive control of the government, seized on the Reichstag fire as a campaign weapon to defeat its opponents who had already been cowed to a large extent by the furious violence of its storm troops. Holding all the keys of power, the police and the press, under their control, the Nazi chief had only to conceive the idea and give adequate orders to crush their enemies. So they did. They elaborately dramatised the Reichstag fire in such a way that they not only won by a slight majority at the polls a few days later – which was a foregone concluusion, since the ballot is for the German Fascists only an empty ceremonial – but they soon succeeded in driving the Social-Democratic and Communist Parties from Parliament and from the country – the sixteen

or seventeen million votes cast in their favour by the electorate notwithstanding – and in imposing themselves on the German people, with a semblance of formal lawfulness, as the saviours of the Fatherland from the Marxist-Semite scourge.

As soon as the fire alarm had been given, a young man scantily dressed was arrested on the premises of the Reichstag building. He gave his name as Marinus Van der Lubbe, brick mason from Leyde, Holland. He promptly admitted having caused the fire by the means of "Kohlenanzuender" (coal-fire-lighter), some curtains found on the premises, and part of his own clothes. He stated that he had no accomplices abd that all by himself had he conceived and executed his act. He added that he was a dissident Communist, expelled from the Party since 1931 and that by destroying the Reichstag he meant to protest against a political institution which was being used as an instrument to submit the workers to the yoke of a fascist dictatorship.

This was enough for the Nazis to attempt to involve the Communist and Social-Democratic Parties in a huge conspiracy to spread revolution over the Reich.

The conspiracy theme was played up to fantastic proportions from the first moment. During the night of February 27th thousands of Communists, Socialists and other revolutionaries were arrested – without warrant, of course. The news was given out that Van der Lubbe was a member of the Communist Party, a party-card – it was said – having been found on him when arrested, that the Reichstag fire had been ordered by the Communists as a signal to start a Bolshevik revolution, that the Social-Democrats had participated in the plot, that Van der Lubbe was but one of the incendaries, the others having succeeded in escaping immediate arrest, that the damaged caused by the fire was so great it was impossible to conceive it as the job of a single person. The discovery of huge quantities of incendiary materials – hundreds of pounds – in the neighbourhood of the destroyed building was announced. The dramatic

niuses – at lying and calumniating – but are at heart merely opportunist politicians.

a pitiful case of devotion to legality at a time when the so-called revolutionary parties – of Social Democracy and Communism – proved themselves to be the only lawful parties. There was no law in Germany on the 27th February 1933. The Weimar Constitution had long since been destroyed by President Hindenburg and the reactionary parties he had called to power of his own choice, against the will of the people and Parliament. The Hitler government was then given a free hand for its private troops which were conquering the country by force of arms. The police at the service of a minority government were aiding and abetting the fascists in violation of all constitutional guarantees. Honest Republicans, honest Social-Democrats and sincere Communists had at that moment no means of defence from the Nazi reaction under the protection of the law, because no such protection or law existed. Social-Democrats and Communists seem to have remained so utterly blind to the real nature of the events which were taking place that they still believed that their political problem could be solved through an electoral campaign. And the electoral campaign absorbed them so completely that they failed to preceive that nothing short of a revolution could possibly save them.

Van der Lubbe – whom they are at pains to describe as an idiot because his acts and words differ so profoundly from their opportunist policies – understood what they proved themselves unable to understand: that the electoral campaign about which they were raving was nothing but an ineffectual exercise destined to give an appearance of popular approval to the Fascist terror, that Parliament is always impotent against the brutal force of the dominating classes; that the workers should have had recource to action to save themselves; that an example was urgently called for, even at the price of life.

This does not mean that Marinus Van der Lubbe is a genius. It means only that he is a real revolutionist at heart, while the Social-Democratic and Communist leaders may well be ge-

zeal for speculation was pushed to such an extreme that by the beginning of March a pilgrimage had been organised through the ”ruins” of the Reichstag to give the god-fearing and law-abiding Germans of ”Aryan” blood an opportunity to witness the extent of the disaster and contemplate the unused quantities of incendiary materials which had been ”discovered”.

All this was utterly false. The sensational make-up was perfected in an atmosphere of terror. Thousands upon thousands of subversive suspects or Jewish citizens were being arrested all over the country. Assassinations were taking place by the score-abetted and fostered by the Government itself. Torture was resorted to. Censorship of news made reporting and criticism of acts and deeds by the Government and its partisans dangerous and impossible. The fantastic accusations piled up by the dominating faction against their enemies went unchallenged and were made to appear truthful by means of suppressing all attempts at discussion.

Hitler and his acolytes succeeded in getting a bare majority at the polls – which was a foregone conclusion. Any party in power can fabricate a majority – or make it appear – for itself. But they did not succeed in their attempt to involve the Social-Democrats in the so-called Reichstag fire plot. German Social-Democrats are too well known as ”respectable” politicians of a safe nature to be suspected of complicity in such an ”outrage”. Hitler could impose anything on the gullibility and cowardice of the Germans, except this impossible suspicion. Besides, German capitalists and junkers owed the Social-Democrats, who had saved them from the Revolution in 1918-1919, a debt of gratitude. Hinderburg saved the widow of his Socialist predecessor from the molestations of fanatic Hitlerites. Grateful German capitalism and junkerdom saved Social-Democracy from the Reichstag fire conspiracy frame-up.

German Communism had not so powerful protection. Herr Toergler, horrified by the accusations hurled against his party, went to the police, accompanied by his lawyer, using his par-

liamentary prestige, to defend it against so intolerable an accusation. He was arrested and later implicated in the conspiracy case. As all the other defendants – Van der Lubbe, a Netherlander; Popoff, Dimitroff and Taneff, three Bulgarian exiles – are all aliens and as such not members of the German Communist Party. Toergler was made into the vital link of the whole frame-up which is now being tried by the Reich's Supreme Court, in Leipzig and Berlin.

That neither the German Communist Party nor the regular Communists – Toergler, Popoff, Dimitroff and Paneff – had any part whatever in the Reichstag fire, was amply proved: by the fact that Marinus Van der Lubbe consistently affirms he acted alone, that his co-defendants were completely unknown to him and he has had no relation whatever with the Third International Communist Parties since 1931. It is further proved by the alibi that each of these four has produced, and finally, by the character of the deed which was meant to be as much a protest against Nazism as against Parliamentary Communism.

The Communist Party – all its revolutionary verbiage notwithstanding – is at heart a party of law and order. Discipline is its byword; the State its fetish. Communists aim at the conquest of the State through discipline. They abhor individual initiative and action as vehemently as any bourgeois bureaucrat – if not more. They want to conquer power through ordered mass action – which means trade-union pressure, parliamentary politics, peaceful penetration and so forth. They are orthodox Democrats who claim their right to rule in the name of the majority of the people – who belong to the working class. Parliament is one of their means of propaganda and political action. Elections are their most coveted opportunities to reach the people and gather votes. Parliamentary emoluments are one of their sources for financing party leadership. Parliament is as sacred to them as to any other political party in a Parliamentary system. Don't let yourselves be deluded by the dissolution of the Russian

who is supposed to have been the originator of this story, has denied at the Leipzig trial that any record exists of Van der Lubbe's having ever been in that town. Dr. Bonhofer, an expert who vidited the prisoner soon after his arrest, said before the tribunal that he had not found in him any symptom authorising the presumption that he might be an homosexual. Van der Lubbe's friends and relatives back in Holland deny it absolutely. What is more, Van der Lubbe was not in Germany at the time he as accused of having been a guest of the Brockwitz Nazi chiefs. From June 12th to October 2nd, 1932 he was in jail in his native land where he had been sentenced to three months for political activity of a seditious nature, as appears from an official document – it being a release from the Utrecht House of Correction – which was published by the French paper *Le Semeur*in its September 15th issue.

3. The Reichstag fire could not possibly serve any purpose but the Nazis'; therefore the Nazis must be the incendaries and Van der Lubbe their conscious or unconscious tool.

That the fire actually served mostly as a political speculative matter for the furtherance of the German Fascists' political interests, need not be demonstrated at this late date. But if it served no better purpose – as it was undoubtedly meant to – it is not Van der Lubbe's fault. Neither is it the fault of the German workers who are said to have received the news of the Reichstag fire with gratification. It is the fault only of the Social Democratic and Communist politicians who refused to take advantage of it, who did even worse; instead of interpreting it as a rallying call for all friends of the republic, of liberty and of the revolutionary cause of the proletariat to make a concerted effort to resist the violent reaction of the fascist hordes, they condemned it as vehemently as the fascists themselves as an anti-social act, and thereby played the latter's game. It was

his deed was the consequence of honest conviction on his part, that he had been persistently persecuted by the police of his native country, that he would never say anything to damage anybody. Van der Lubbe's behaviour before and during the trial absolutely confirms his comrades' and friends' opinion of him. He has said nothing that might in any way damage his co-defendants. He has not even tried an elaborate exposition of his political and social views at the trial, most probably for fear they might be interpreted as akin to those of the four Communists the German government is trying to link to the Reichstag fire – who he wishes in all justice to exonerate. Now, everybody knows that the task of an *agent provocateur* is to involve others in his deeds. Van der Lubbe not only involves nobody by direct admissions, but shows himself extremely cautious in not damaging his co-defendants by indirect inference – and this to the extent of renouncing an attitude which might best respond to the interests of his moral and legal defence. "Let facts speak by themselves," he wrote to one of his friends back in Leyde who was acquainting him the Social Democrat-Communist calumny, "everything is as clear as crystal." Everything is so clear in fact that Ernest Togler – his German Communist co-defendant – has not dared to accuse Van der Lubbe of being an *agent provocateur* in open court, but has simply qualified him as an Anarcho-Syndicalist.

2. Van der Lubbe is an homosexual pervert and as such had been a paid guest of some Nazi chiefs in the Saxe town of Brockwitz between the months of June and August, 1932.

This accusation has been repeated at the London mock trial, but E. Sylvia Pankhurst, after listening to all the evidence there produced, says that she does not believe that the witnesses brought from Holland to testify on this account said the truth. As a matter of fact, the former Socialist mayor of Brockwitz,

Duma in 1917. When they dissolved the Duma, the Russian Communists – who, by the way, were forced to take that step by the revolution they could not otherwise have controlled – were already in power. No party in power likes to be controlled by Parliament, even though they may be forced to tolerate it.

But the main reason that makes the Communists defendants in the Reichstag fire trial innocent of the deed they are accused of is also the main reason that made their whole party incapable of counteracting the Nazi colossal speculation of that event.

Had Communists been a true revolutionary party, they would have hailed the Reichstag fire as a signal for the German working class to rise against the bloody dictatorship of the Nazis – what it obviously was meant to be. Had they placed human common sense above political strategy, they would at least have pointed at the accusation of the Nazis the fact that the destruction of an empty building was after all a very secondary happening at a time and in a country where the paid agents of the government and of the ruling party were torturing and murdering inoffensive citizens by the hundreds, aoutawing more by the thousands.

Since Communists are not revolutionists but mere politicians, since they are more interested in political strategy than human common sense, they were – or pretended to be – horrified by the profanation of that sacred temple of politics. They joined the Social-Democrats – who have used it for decades to divert the toiling masses from the path of revolution – in deprecating the crime and vied with the Nazis themselves in showing their indignation against the outrage. This means that they played into the hands of Hitler's gang.

Communists and Social-Democrats resorting to a belated united front, validated all the lies the Hitler government was feeding out to the German public. So it became an undisputed fact that the firing of the Reichstag had been the "greatest

crime of our times", that Marinus Van der Lubbe was an irresponsible person incapable of sound thinking, a tool in the hands on political intriguers. From this point of view it may be safely said that the "united front" went beyond the pale of Socialist and Communist politics – it clearly involved the Nazi Government itself in the pursuit of a common purpose: to present Marinus Van der Lubbe as an anti-social individual, a criminal of the basest sort and equally inimical to the German "Arayan" race and to the working classes, by repudiating his claims to revolutionary ideals as insincere and by divesting his deed of any revolutionary implication.

Social-Democrats, Communists and Anti-Fascists of all descriptions took for granted anything the Nazi press said. So it was taken for granted that Van der Lubbe had qualified himself as a member of the Communist Party; that he had denounced prominent leaders of the same as his accomplices, that the Reichstag fire could not possibly be the work of a single man; that huge quantities of unused incendiary materials had been found on or near the premises... and so on. All of which has been demonstrated to be utterly false by the evidence produced at the trial opened on September 21st in Leipzig. Van der Lubbe has consistently declared from the beginning to the end that he had been expelled from the Dutch Communist Party in 1931; he has never admitted having any accomplice; he has never accused anybody but himself; he has always stated that each and every one of his co-defendants was absolutely unknown to him; no incendiary material has ever been found on the premises or nearby; finally it has been proved that the extent of the damage has been exaggerated and that the job could have been the work of a single person.

Thus, while the Nazis, in their effort to build a case against the Communists, were creating these now totally exposed lies – an easy task under a system of censorship, domesticated press and intimidated public – the Communists and their allies, far from casting any doubt upon the fabricated news stories which

the Nazis were giving out, used them as if they were proven facts in their own effort to build a case against Nazidom.

The Nazi frame-up is now crumbling at their own trial in Leipzig and Berlin. The Social Democrat-Communist frame-up is crumbling also before the larger audience of the world, to whose final judgement their lies and perversions are being exposed by friends of Van der Lubbe's and of the truth.

The Social Democrat-Communist frame-up stands exclusively on the assumption that Marinus Van der Lubbe is an *agent provocateur*. To prove this assumption the Social Democrats-Communists have sponsored a book written by an English lord* – a member of the most obtusive aristocracy the world has ever known – and a mock trial conducted in London by a body of bourgeois lawyers and politicians prior to the opening of the Leipzig trial. The conclusions arrived at by this body were announced on September 20th and are to the effect that the four regular Communist defendants are wholly innocent of the deed they are accused of, and that Marinus Van der Lubbe is most probably an *agent provocateur*, a tool of the Nazis.

The main reasons adduced by Communists and their allies to prove that Van der Lubbe is an *agent provocateur* are the following:

1. Van der Lubbe was expelled from the Dutch Communist Party in 1931 as a suspected police informer.

That this affirmation is not true is proved by the young Dutch mason's friends and comrades who were the first ones to protest – since last April – against the malicious insinuation spread by regular Communists. They sent then a letter to the Paris Anarchist paper *Le Libertaire* stating that Van der Lubbe had left the Communist Party for theoretical dissension, that all honest persons who knew him were bound to believe that