



NAZISM AND MASONRY
(An Oration given by Dr. Bing Johnson, 32° KCCH
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Simon Wiesenthal a survivor of the holocaust who spent the rest of his life bringing Nazi war criminals to justice and reminding the world of the horrors of the holocaust lest it be repeated, died this year. Despite this there are those who say the holocaust never occurred, including the President of Iran. This caused me to wonder how Masonry faired during this terrible period. None of this is ancient history it has all occurred during our life time.

In his political statement *MEIN KAMPF* Adolph Hitler charged that the Jews used Masonry to achieve political ends. In 1928 Adolph Rosenberg published *THE CRIME OF FREEMASONRY: JEWRY, JESUITISM AND GERMAN CHRISTIANITY*. Five years later Gen. Erich Ludendorf published *EXTERMINATING FREEMASONRY BY REVEALING ITS SECRETS*, in which he alleged that the Freemasons initiation and rituals trained the Christian members to be artificial Jews and condemned Masonic support of Jewish emancipation for bringing alien influences into German culture. In the 1920s signs were placed in German parks and buildings that said: No Jews, dogs or Masons allowed.

When the Nazis came to power, policy towards Freemasonry was equivocal. Those lodges that espoused tolerance and equality and had international connections or connection to Social Democrats were subjected to persecution and often pressured to dissolve. A few German lodges that were willing to accommodate the regime were able to last for a little longer. Nevertheless, the regime intended to exclude those who refused to give up Masonry.

In 1934, the chief of the Nazi party court system held that Masons who did not leave their lodges prior to 1933 could not join the Nazi party. Herman Goering, Minister of the Interior, issued a decree calling upon lodges to "voluntarily" dissolve, but required such voluntary actions to be submitted to him for approval. In addition, lodges throughout Germany were exposed to violence from local SS and SA units.

Increasing pressure in public, professional and civil service sectors forced many Masons into retirement. The Minister of Defense banned membership to all personnel. In 1934 Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich centralized the Gestapo and the German police forcibly closed down many Masonic lodges and confiscated their assets.

On Oct. 28, 1934 Reich Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick issued a decree defining lodges as "hostile to the state" and hence subject to having their assets confiscated.

Nazi propaganda continued to link Jews and Freemasons. Chief of Security Police Reinhard Heydrich counted the Masons along with the Jews and political clergy, as the "most

implacable enemies of the German state". In 1935 Heydrich argued for the need to eliminate every visible manifestation of these enemies and root out from every German the indirect influence of the Jewish, liberal and Masonic infectious residue that remains in the unconscious of many, above all in the academic and intellectual world.

Heydrich created a special section of the SS Security Service to deal specifically with Freemasonry as the SD believed that Freemasonry exercised political power, shaped public opinion through control of the press and was in a position to provoke war, subversion and revolution. A special section took over the investigation of Freemasonry.

As Nazi Germany prepared for war in 1937 the regime relaxed pressure and Hitler gave amnesty to members who renounced their former loyalties. Many civil servants who had been forced to retire due to their Masonic connections were recalled into service after the war began, but the Nazi party continued to ban former Masons.

As Germany conquered Europe they forcibly dissolved Masonic organizations and confiscated their assets and documents. Often when a lodge was closed, it was ransacked for membership lists, library and archival items, furnishings and cultural artifacts. Items seized were sent to Germany. The Gestapo frequently used Masonic Temples as their headquarters. They desecrated them by building fires on the floors, indoor target practice shooting holes in the walls, filth was disposed of in them etc. There was much more damage to Masonic property by Nazi vandalism than by bombs or artillery.

As a part of the Nazi propaganda against Masonry, anti-Masonic exhibitions displaying Masonic ritual and cultural artifacts stolen from lodges were aimed to ridicule and direct hatred towards Masons and to heighten fears of a Jewish-Masonic conspiracy. German wartime propaganda charged that Jews and Masons had provoked World War II and were responsible for the policies of Pres. Roosevelt who was identified as a Mason.

The Vichy French, Germany's axis partner issued a decree declaring Masons to be enemies of the state and authorized police surveillance of them. A card file was created that identified all members of the Grand Orient of France; the card file survived the war and was later microfilmed for the US Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives.

In 1942 Hitler authorized Alfred Rosenberg to wage an intellectual war against Jews and Masons. Hitler permitted Rosenberg to seize and evaluate Masonic archives and libraries to equip them to carry on the methodical and intellectual fight that was necessary to win the war.

After the end of World War II, vast collections of Masonic archives and collections that had been seized by the Germans were captured by Allied and Soviet forces. The Soviet authorities sent the records to Moscow, where they were held in secret archives. Since the end of cold war, many Masonic collections have been returned to their countries of origin, while others continue to be held in foreign countries.

Many Masons and Jews were arrested and sent to Nazi concentration camps and subsequently murdered. Freemasons were one of the most reviled groups in the axis nations, and

being a member was a criminal offense regardless of a Mason's ethnicity or heritage. Masonic lodges were shut down and Masons were imprisoned, deported or killed—in Spain, Portugal, Italy and Austria. When the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia, they arrested 3,000 to 4,000 Masons. Fewer than five percent of Czech Masons were able to escape; most of the others were killed in camps.

One of the holocaust's greatest crimes was that it didn't simply kill millions; it robbed them of their humanity before they died. There is a monument to a most remarkable lodge at the Nazi concentration camp at Esterwegen. Loge Liberté Chérie, which means beloved liberty, was founded in 1943 by seven brothers in Hut 6 of Emslandlager VII in Belgium. The hut was reserved for political prisoners and resistance leaders whose only crime was opposition to the Nazi party. After their arrest they were sent to Germany for investigation and torture before being sent to the camps. The Nazis went to great pains to make sure that these prisoners would disappear, leaving no trace of their whereabouts. They were forced into hard labor. Nutrition was so poor prisoners lost almost nine pounds a month.

In a profound way these seven brethren in Hut VII fought back by founding a Masonic lodge. To protect their secrecy, a Catholic priest volunteered to watch the door.

The ceremonies and ritual were simple, but they were able to initiate, pass and raise Bro. Fernand Erauw. Once Bro. Erauw was raised they set different programs for each meeting, such as discussing the symbol of the Great Architect, etc. Only two brethren survived the war.

These brethren were more than just martyrs for everything Masonry stood for: free and open societies and opposition to totalitarianism. The fact that these brethren who tried to recover their humanity by founding a lodge is some thing that should resonate with every Mason.

What Masons do so casually—hold a meeting—was for Loge Liberté Chérie a proud and dangerous act of defiance against fascism and the best way for these Brethren to preserve their humanity.

SOURCE:

1. Nadeau, P., Beloved Liberty, Scottish Rite Journal, Mar/Apr 2007, p 13
2. Kornblum, A., Freemasonry and Conspired Theories, STB, Sept. 2005
3. Kornblum, P., Freemasonry Under the Nazi Regime, STB, Aug. 2006
4. Berman, R., Out of Ashes, California Freemason, v 55, Jan 2007, p 12