



20.01.1942

20 January: Meeting of the 'Wannsee Conference'

If you were simply to take a cynical look at the number of victims, without consideration of the circumstances and motives behind the atrocities, the Holocaust would not be the worst crime in human history. As a direct consequence of the forced collectivisations in Stalin's USSR through the 1930s, and in China between 1958 to 1961 when Mao Tse-tung wants to initiate the 'Großen Sprung' (Great Leap Forward) in the 'Middle Kingdom', approximately 40 million people die of starvation. Belgian colonial rule in Congo costs the lives of around ten million people. What makes the Holocaust so depressingly unique is that, unlike the examples mentioned above, it was a targeted, ideologically motivated, systematic and bureaucratically organised desire for annihilation, with the specific goal to murder an entire ethnic group. In the Holocaust, an attempt is made, without any effort to conceal the objective, to implement a plan whereby a group of people selected on the basis of entirely arbitrary and pseudo-scientific criteria is to be completely wiped out. It cannot in any way be claimed that the murder of millions of Congolese, or the starvation of Soviet or Chinese farmers, were in any way the expressly intended result of operations. These human disasters are the accepted tragic side effects of wrong decisions, racist attitudes and immoral political or economic goals. In contrast, the planned mass murder of six million Jews is no mere side effect; it is the specific goal of Nazi policy.



Just like the beginning of the war and the invasion of the Soviet Union, the murder of the Jewish population follows Nazism's ideological fundamental convictions almost compulsively and obsessively. The Jews are described as 'parasites', and their extermination is presented as a service to the German nation. However, before the Jews are wiped out entirely, every individual person of the Jewish faith is to be systematically financially and physically exploited as far as humanly possible.



When 15 senior officials of Nazi Germany meet in a villa in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee at the invitation of the Chief of the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA), Reinhard Heydrich, the extermination of Europe's Jewish population, or what is referred to as the 'Final Solution', is essentially a 'done deal' as far as Hitler is concerned, and has been since the previous year. The meeting's aim is not specifically to decide on the Holocaust, the objective is, in point of fact, to finalise decisions about the administration of and practical details for killing the European Jews. With a cold sense of efficiency, participants determine time schedules for the mass-killings and clarify various responsibilities and logistical questions. In

..... addition to Heydrich, participants include representatives from the General
..... Governments, the Nazi Party Chancellery, Reich Chancellery, and State
..... Secretaries from the relevant Reich Ministries of the Security Police and Security
..... Service. Adolf Eichmann, the SS-Obersturmbannführer (Lieutenant Colonel) and
..... Referent für Judenangelegenheiten (Advisor for Jewish Affairs) in the RSHA, takes
..... the minutes for the meeting. Thanks to Eichmann's meticulous minutes, the
..... conference's discussions were recorded and have survived in great detail. In total,
..... the murder of 11 million Jews from the European territories occupied by the
..... German Army, or Wehrmacht, is anticipated and planned. The Jewish population
..... is to be deported to extermination camps. Those who are capable of working are
..... first to be exploited and, then, ultimately killed as a result of malnourishment, the
..... lack of medical care and the extreme hardness of the work. Those who are not
..... capable of working – children, the sick, weak or elderly – are to be killed
..... immediately. The conference discusses the classification of the Jewish population
..... in great detail, and debate the differing treatment of Voll-, Halb- oder Vierteljuden
..... (Full-, Half- or Quarter-Jews).

An aspect of the conference's minutes that is particularly striking is the complete lack of any sense of wrongdoing among the participants; there is a total absence of any hint of empathy or humanity. It is a conspicuous example of technocrats planning the implementation of an atrocity that has been determined by the highest political ranks and, in the process, they do not demonstrate even the slightest trace of human emotion or feeling. No dictatorship is able to survive without compliant technocrats who have no interest in any moral aspects of the crimes. Instead, they are only concerned with the pure feasibility, with a single-minded view to their own career and not the consequences for others. [The participants at the 'Wannsee Conference' are particularly repulsive examples of this timeless human species.]

Translated into English by Heather Rae, proofread by Maria-Philippa Wieckowski



Prof. Dr. Tobias Arand



References:

- Arendt, Hannah (1963) *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York
Gerwarth, Robert (2011) *Reinhard Heydrich. Biographie*. München
Longerich, Peter (1998) *Die Wannsee-Konferenz vom 20. Januar 1942. Planung und Beginn des Genozids an den europäischen Juden*. Berlin