

Witness Reports

Note to teacher: hand a copy (or several) to each group after their thoughts about who they should use as witnesses



Van Der Lubbe: Witness Report

Van der Lubbe was caught by the police starting fires in the burning building. This was his statement to the German police, 1933. During the trial he seemed incapable of speaking in full sentences or understanding what was being said to him. He was said to have possessed a red membership card, but the membership cards of the German Communist Party were black, and of the Dutch party blue-black. National Socialist cards were red.



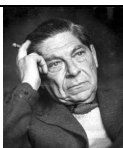
William Shirer: Witness Report

Shirer was an American journalist who had enjoyed living in Weimar Germany and returned in 1934 after Hitler took power. He hated Hitler and the Nazis, and thought that they were evil enough to commit any crime.



Fireman Roth: Witness Report

This was the report of Fireman Roth at the trial of Van der Lubbe in 1933. His evidence was used to prove that the fire did not need a lot of petrol and chemicals. Of course, he had been given his job, and asked to say this, by the Nazis.



Arthur Koestler: Witness Report

Koestler was a Communist and hated the Nazis. Koestler and the Communists did not believe that Van der Lubbe started the fire. Karl Ernst was an SA man who had been killed in 1934. This 'confession' was published. But in 1954, Koestler admitted that the confession was made up.



Herr Rauschning: Witness Report

Rauschning was a former Nazi official who resigned from the party in protest about the persecution of Jews. In 1959, he admitted that he hadn't heard Goering say these things himself; he had just talked to people who said that Goering had said this. Historian Wolfgang Haenel dismissed Rauschning's testimony as a "total fraud".



General Franz Halder: Witness Report

Halder was speaking as a witness against the Nazis at the Nuremberg trials after the war. Halder had fallen out with Hitler during the war and ended up in a concentration camp. At the same trial, Goering denied having anything to do with the Fires.



Alfons Sack: Witness Report

Sack was a lawyer who was representing other communists who had been accused of helping Van der Lubbe start the fire. His strategy was to convince the jury that Van der Lubbe acted alone. As an employee of the state his wages were paid by the Nazi government.



Herr Wingurth: Witness Report

Herr Wingurth was a locksmith. The Nazis asked him to give this evidence at the trial of van der Lubbe in 1933. Herr Wingurth would have known what happened to people who went against the Nazis.



Arthur Hays: Witness Report

Hayes was a Jewish American lawyer, who had worked in Berlin. He wrote this in 1942, in the middle of World War II. He was neither a Communist nor a Nazi.



Sefton Delmer: Witness Statement

Delmer was a half-German journalist with the English "Daily Express". He was with Hitler on the night of the fire. He wrote this in a letter to a German newspaper in 1959. He had close access to Nazi leaders before World War Two but fought against them in World War Two in the British Secret Service.



Witness Report: Hermann Goering

Goering was one of Hitler's most important henchmen. He gave this testimony at the Nuremberg War Trials of 1946, where he vigorously defended the Nazis against charges of war crimes.



Witness Statement: Bernd Gisevius

Hans Bernd Gisevius was a member of the SS who attended the trial of Van der Lubbe. During World War Two he became a double agent for the Allies. He gave this evidence against the Nazis in the 1946 Nuremberg War Trials.

Extra Exhibits (to be produced during the trial by the judges – either shown on the screen or handed to each group)

Exhibit A

John Heartfield, "Göring, the Executioner of the Third Reich," published in the communist magazine AIZ, September 14, 1933.



Exhibit B

A cartoon by David Low, cartoonist for the British "Daily Express". It was published in 1934, when Hitler was trying to disrupt the work of the League of Nations. Hitler protested about Low's cartoons to the British government.

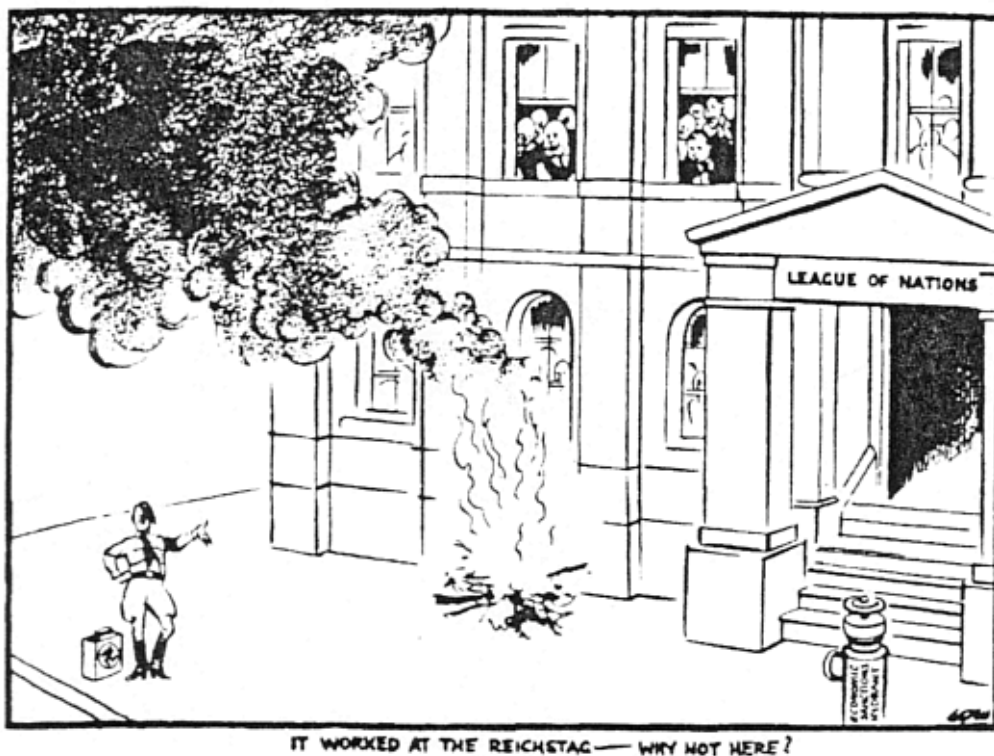


Exhibit C

Photographs of Van der Lubbe with a box of matches,
taken by police when he was in custody

Photographs of Van der Lubbe during his trial

Exhibit D

• Watch the four-minute extract from the drama "The Rise of Evil" which covers the Reichstag Fire. This was a film produced for American TV in 2003.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFFVMm9CfeQ>