

SCIENCE IN REVIEW

Genocide Is the New Name for the Crime Fastened on the Nazi Leaders

By WALDEMAR KAEMPFERT

Ten high officials and generals of the Hitler regime were hanged last week. They were not executed for mere murder or persecution but for crimes against humanity which are old but for which there was no name. That name cropped up during the Nuremberg trials.

On June 26, 1946, Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe addressed these words to Constantin von Neurath, one of the Nazis on trial:

"Now, defendant, you know that in the indictment in this trial we are charging you and your fellow defendants, among many other things, with genocide."

Sir Hartley Shawcross, Attorney General of Great Britain at Nuremberg, also used the term "genocide" several times in his summation. The concept appeared last November in Article III of the indictment. The court at that time charged the defendants with conducting "deliberate and systematic genocide—viz., the extermination of racial and national groups—against the civilian populations of certain occupied territories in order to destroy particular races and classes of people and national, racial or religious groups, particularly Jews, Poles, Gypsies and others." Genocide was also applied in different forms to the Czechs, the Yugoslavs, the Poles, the Belgians, the Dutch and the Norwegians. The techniques included sterilization, castration and the prevention of "undesirable" marriages.

Origin of the Word

Genocide is a word coined by Prof. Raphael Lemkin of Duke University, adviser on foreign affairs to the War Department, to designate the criminal purpose of the Hitler regime. "Mass murder" is inadequate, because no motive is implied. "Denationalization" is no better because it does not cover racial extermination and because it means to most of us loss of citizenship or country. Populations have been "germanized," "italianized" and "magyarized," but only in the sense that a conqueror has imposed his will on another people without actually destroying them. Besides Germany made no attempt to "germanize" Jews and Poles. A new word was needed to define the particular crimes of which the leading Nazis were found guilty.

Professor Lemkin hit on "genocide" by drawing on his knowledge of languages and biology. There was the Greek word "genes" and the Latin "gens," meaning "race" or "clan." And there was the Latin suffix "cide," which means killing, as we see in "suicide," "patricide," "homicide." On its face "genocide" means the crime of destroying national, racial, cultural or religious groups.

Attempts at the wholesale extermination of a population and the transmutation of its culture had been made before and after Rome reduced Carthage to ruins. The wars waged by the Crusaders and Mohammedans of old were largely wars of extermination. The Turks in their time did their best to destroy the Armenians. It was to identify such crimes that Professor Lemkin coined the word genocide. That the language needed the term Winston Churchill realized. In his broadcast address of August, 1941, he said that "we are in the presence of a crime without a name."

Cultural Debt of Nations

In arriving at the word genocide Professor Lemkin was impressed by the cultural debt that every nation owes to other nations. "If the peoples doomed by Germany, such as the Jews, had not been permitted to create the Bible, or to give birth to a Spinoza or an Einstein," he said, "and if the Poles had not had the opportunity to give to the world a Copernicus, a Chopin, a Curie, or the Czechs a Huss, or a Dvorak, or the Greeks a Plato and a Socrates, or the Russians a Tolstoy and a Shostakovich," every nation would have been the loser.

Since genocide is an international crime it must be dealt with by interna-

tional law. For centuries piracy has been an international crime. More recently trade in narcotics, counterfeiting and the traffic in slaves have been placed in the same category. All these crimes may be punished by any country.

In Professor Lemkin's formulation genocide is the result of a conspiracy. It should be punishable not only by an international court but by the courts of any country to which a defendant may have escaped. Like a pirate or a counterfeiter he would not be treated by such a country as a political refugee, so that he would not be immune to extradition if a demand for his apprehension were made by an international court. States, too, may be convicted of genocide, if Professor Lemkin has his way. He thinks that a prohibition of genocide should be included in treaties of peace soon to be signed.