

# ***Incendiary Fire Wrecks Reichstag; 100 Red Members Ordered Seized***

***Alleged Communist Said to Confess Setting Blaze as Main Chamber Is Ruined—Cabinet Drafts Law to Bar Disseminating Proscribed News Abroad.***

**By FREDERICK T. BIRCHALL.**

Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

BERLIN, Tuesday, Feb. 28.—An attempt was made last night to burn down the Reichstag building and it almost succeeded.

The great glass-ceilinged chamber in which parliamentary sessions are held was completely burned out, the cupola surmounting the building directly above the glass ceiling of the chamber was burned through and rendered so insecure that it appeared early this morning it might fall at any moment and the velvet-carpeted stairways up which firemen ran their hose lines were discolored by flame and smoke and soaked with water. The library and other rooms in the large building are, however, intact.

The fire was attributed to Communists and the police have in custody a man who, they declare, has confessed he is a Red of Dutch extraction and admits setting fire to many parts of the great chamber. It is also asserted he had confederates who escaped.

Why Communists should desire to burn down the empty Reichstag building on the eve of an election that their opponents declare to be unimportant in that it will not affect their retention of power is one of the mysteries of the present situation. The sole theory that seems plausible is that the perpetrators hoped that the fire would be attributed to the National Socialists and that the odium of it would fall on that party.

A session of the Communist party was held in their committee room in the Reichstag yesterday afternoon and this is regarded as having some significance in the light of the later event.

[Hermann Wilhelm Goering, Minister Without Portfolio, ordered the arrest of the 100 Communist members of the Reichstag early this morning, according to an Associated Press dispatch.]

The fire was discovered soon af-

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Times Wide World Photo.

The Beautiful Government Structure in the Heart of Berlin Which Was Swept by a Blaze Alleged to Have Been Set by a Dutch Communist.

## INCENDIARY FIRE WRECKS REICHSTAG

By **FREDERICK T. BIRCHALL.**  
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ter 9 o'clock when a patrolling policeman, smelling smoke, hurried toward the parliamentary chamber. He met a group of men who failed to halt on his demand and fired on them but missed. The last fugitive the policeman succeeded in seizing. He is the alleged Communist now in custody. His name is given as van der Lurgg. It is asserted he refuses to reply to questions—he only grins.

Other policemen running to the help of their comrade found the great hall afire in a dozen places, from several of which the flames were making rapid headway. Rugs and chairs had been piled together over bundles of rags and excelsior, and the whole set ablaze.

An alarm was promptly sent, but the firemen were some time in arriving, and meantime the flames spread rapidly despite efforts of the police, who were handicapped by intense smoke. The chamber is paneled in wood, and the benches, chairs and desks are of wood thirty years old and dry as tinder. These readily caught fire and the blaze, extending to the wooden galleries, soon made the place a veritable furnace.

### Glass Ceiling Crashes Down.

The glass ceiling quickly crashed down and flames spouted through the gilded cupola bearing the imperial crown. By 10:30 the whole structure seemed doomed. What saved it was the extent of ground it covers, enabling the firemen to isolate the burning chamber and gradually subdue the fire.

The first effort was to save the library, containing thousands of irreplaceable parliamentary documents, and the reading room, with separate valuable records. In this the firemen were wholly successful. Under their united efforts the flames gradually died, and by 11 o'clock only a few smoldering embers in the wrecked cupola indicated to the crowd outside that there had been a fire at all. All approaches to the building were entirely cut off.

Until then the assembling fire engines and the flames spouting from the cupola had spread alarm throughout the near-by section of Berlin and at least 10,000 people had crowded behind the police lines. Chancellor Adolf Hitler, Vice Chancellor Franz von Papen and Hermann Wilhelm Goering, Minister without portfolio, rushed by motor to the Reichstag and hurriedly conferred, although nothing could be done except await the outcome of the firemen's efforts and isolate the Reichstag so that any miscreant who might have been unable to escape and been hiding in some recess of the huge building would be trapped there.

### Prussian Diet Guarded.

Early this morning nobody but policeman was permitted to approach within a block of the building. The damage is impossible to estimate in terms of money. What is important is that the new Reichstag when it is elected will not be able to meet in its own building and probably will be forced to use the Prussian Diet Building, which is unsuitable for so large a body. The Diet Building also is being patrolled and searched.

The government's activities aimed at silencing all opposition and rendering powerless all foes meantime has taken on an increased pace. If the Communists desired to protest their innocence in the fire they have no means for doing so. Their newspapers have been suppressed, their headquarters closed, their meetings prohibited and they are forbidden to collect money.

Die Rote Fahne, the chief Communist newspaper, has been suspended until April 15. When a previous suspension order expired Sunday, its printing plant in Liebknecht House having meantime been confiscated, it printed an issue in Leipzig and attempted to bring copies to Berlin by truck. The truck was seized by the police and the new suspension order was imposed.

Yesterday other suppressions included all Socialist papers in East Prussia, the Socialist Post in Munich and the Jung Deutsche, organ of the Young German Order, an organization far from "Marxist," but suspected by the Right of "liberalism." Under new regulations newspapers in reporting suspensions are forbidden to specify the grounds for suppression or cite the offending passages.

### Socialist Meeting Suppressed.

Last night the Socialists attempted to hold a mass meeting at the Sportpalast in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Karl Marx. The meeting was suppressed by the police before it got fairly under way and Artur Crispian, a member of the Reichstag, who had been booked as the chief speaker, was not permitted to open his mouth. Friedrich Stampfer, editor of Vorwärts, who stepped into the breach, was muzzled when he essayed to eulogize Marx.

The Cabinet approved last night the draft of a law imposing the death penalty for "treasonous activities" and high treason so far as they involve betrayal of military secrets. The same statute will also be directed against "subversive activities" especially as regard the circulation of false news abroad. The latter provision is aimed at the recent practice of the government's opponents whereby news items were supplied to the foreign press then

cabled back and republished here as privileged matter coming from abroad.

Under this ruling Germans who supply proscribed news to foreign correspondents are liable to penitentiary sentences under charges of carrying on "subversive activities." As revealed last night the law as drafted also applies to the propagation and dissemination abroad of such news, thus indirectly placing correspondents themselves under penalty.

It is announced that the Cabinet is preparing a pre-election proclamation in the nature of a political recapitulation of events since 1918 covering the records of the successive governments.

The Cabinet furthermore has adopted a draft decree authorizing reduction of the salaries of leading officials of business concerns that are subsidized by public funds. This is in accord with the demand of the Nazis that officials of private concerns should not be treated better than civil servants so far as salaries are concerned.