

Interpretations of the reichstag fire



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

i) Van der Lubbe was a madman, and he set fire to the Reichstag all by himself, but the Nazis genuinely believed the fire was the start of a Communist uprising.

ii) The Reichstag Fire was started by the Nazis to give them an excuse to take emergency powers and lock up or kill the Communists. Van der Lubbe was used by the Nazis.

Which interpretation is best supported by the evidence in these sources and your knowledge of the period? Explain your answer.

It's difficult to incline the balance to any of both interpretations because both of them have evidence to backup them.

Source A for instance, supports the first interpretation, it suggests that Lubbe acted alone and Diels to backup his words tells that it would be easily set the fire because the old furniture, dry wood, and heavy curtains would made the fire spread rapidly, while Lubbe could be starting fires elsewhere in the building running through the long corridors. In the other hand Source I contradict directly the other source, because it says that a man who was handicapped both physically and mentally, without knowledge of the place and with the brief time given couldn't possibly set the fire on its own.

As we can see both of the sources use well supported theories, however, Source I seems to be best well supported because despite the inflammable materials which were there, he was handicapped, didn't know the place and he didn't even have time, also, Source I its from an history book what

suggest me that the theory would be well studied by historians to arrive at that conclusion.

In support of statement i) Source B shows Lubbe's confession which tells " I set fire to the Reichstag all by myself", here we could say that Lubbe set the fire on his own, and due to his madness he could set the fire on his own for then boast about his " great job". However there are too many reasons where he could be lying to take in favour of this source, he could be protecting communists, or maybe under pressure by the own Nazis, or simply despite he was helped he would prefer to tell everyone he set the fire on himself to " show off".

In the other hand, we have other sources suggesting that the Nazis were implicated in the fire, Source E for example shows General Franz telling that on Hitler's birthday three years before, Goring said " The only one who really knows about the Reichstag building is I, for I set fire to it", General Franz could have reasons to tell the truth because he didn't have any kind of Nazi pressure on him and also he might have had nothing to lose. Anyway, he also could be lying so the reliability here is very questionable, he could be telling that for saving himself, to revenge on him. However, it was at Hitler's birthday, so Goring could be easily drunk and say that in a joke (despite there was the possibility that the alcohol could make him say what he shouldn't say).

Goring in Source F describes the statement before as " ridiculous", he could be telling the truth and said that in the sense of a joke while he was drunk, which explains why he didn't remember anything he said, so maybe the two are

telling the truth - Halder could take too seriously what for Goring was a joke while he was drunk to make some fun on Hitler's birthday. However it Halder was telling the truth and Goring said that seriously its obvious that Goring would have defend himself as shown in Source F. Most likely Halder could misunderstand Goring's joke so the value of his evidence could hardly support the second statement.

D and G are two of the less reliable Source shown here, they are both pieces of propaganda by blaming the enemy for the fire. The two of them were published in convenience of the party and both of them lack of evidence to backup them so we cannot consider them seriously.

It appears that Source H the best well supported source contradicting the second statement though its took from an history book so the evidence on it is most likely to be true. It suggest that the Nazis didn't expected the fire at all because the measures taken after it couldn't be plan, most importantly the fact that the Nazi party had to use out-of-date lists to arrest the communists and that the Nazis had hoped to destroy the Communists after the election (however, this last statement is very subjective). Obviously, the Nazis would have made ample preparations if they planned the fire and this source shows they didn't, this possibly one of the bests pieces of evidence (if we assume the book is telling the truth) against the theory that the Nazis were behind the fire.

In conclusion we can say that none of both interpretations is more supported by the sources than other because they almost balance equally with sources in favour or against. We have to say that some sources suggest that that

Lubbe didn't act alone which in the same way that suggests that could be helped by communists they could be also helped by the Nazis. The most important thing is the weight and reliability that each source have, and all of them have reasons to not be true.

For my interpretation of the sources and my knowledge it would be more likely that the Nazis took part in the fire. The first statement isn't very well supported because despite the evidence in their favour (such the fact that the fire could be spread very rapidly due to the materials inside) Van der Lubbe couldn't make such a high damage and devastation as shown in source J, it's very hard to believe that all that damage could be done a person who hardly had any time (before being caught), who didn't have any knowledge of the place, and who had a severe sight problem and so mentally ones. The curious thing that makes you think is that the fire was made just one week before the elections, very possibly the Nazis could have planned the fire as an excuse to use the emergency powers, by blaming the Communists of an uprising and so crushing the opposition in favour for their elections. Because we got to remember that Hitler's greatest fear at that time was the Communism.