

The New S.A.-Songbook
Franz Eher Verlag
Munich

Horst-Wessel Song

The prices high, the pie-hole firmly buttoned,
Starvation comes with firm assured tread,
Hitler and Goebbels, our two dear friends anointed,
Their spirit starves with us while they are fed.

Alarm bells sound, as jobs are disappearing,
And all the men are queuing for the dole,
But Bread and Work are just the Führer's phrases,
And if you speak, you're buried in a hole.

All the streets, they stink of brown battalions.
A lackey hails a strutting SA clown,
He'll join the party and he'll earn gazillions,
While we're left drowning in a wave of brown.

"Burning Secret"

One SA man whispers to another: "Have you heard? The Reichstag is burning!"

The other SA man replies: "Ssh! Not until tomorrow!"

*

The adjutant runs up to Goering: "Prime Minister!", he cries, "the Reichstag is burning!!"

Goering pulls out his watch, and says: “Already?!”

*

“Apparently Cläre Waldoff is in a concentration camp now too.”

“How come?”

“In answer to the question, who must have burned the Reichstag, she warbled her favourite tune: “They call him Hermann...”

*

“Do you know who set fire to the Reichstag?”

“Who was it?”

“The Brothers SASS.”*

*

On the isle of the immortals the Reichstag Fire is subject to hot debate. Illustrious spirits gather round to witness feisty Lessing in spirited discussion with dry Grillparzer. And here is Lessing as he breaks into rhyme:

A parliament house is set alight,
Brown-shirts run to stoke it more,
Two dozen of them at the door.
They were already on site...

A parliament house is set alight.

The immortals erupt into applause. But Grillparzer takes a pinch of snuff and suggests, “Or more simply: woe to him who lies.”

*

* The brothers SASS are the much-referenced burglars of Berlin. Their name – SASS – combines the initials of the SA and the SS!!

“Yesterday I saw Goering on Leipziger Straße!”

“Really? I didn't know there was a fire there!”

*

Hermann Goering invites some guests to a formal dinner. After dinner he offers the men cigars.

“A most excellent cigar!”, remarks Herr A.

“A most excellent fire!”, whispers Herr B.

“No wonder”, thinks Herr C, “after all, we're with an expert.”

*

Goering encounters the emperor Nero in the underworld and calls out to him:

“Hail, colleague!”

Nero hesitates: “Why colleague?”

Goering explains with a wink: “I am also, so to speak, an expert in arson...”

Nero eyes him disdainfully and says from above: “We are not colleagues by any stretch of the imagination; for I set fire to Rome all by myself, whereas you needed 60 SA men for the pitiful Reichstag.”

*

According to another story Goering – who knows how – reaches heaven, and there makes the acquaintance of Moses. Goering says to him:

“I have a question: How did you set fire to the thorn bush in your day?”

*

After the Reichstag is reconstructed, they are planning to change its dedication. Whereas up to now the words “For the German People” could be read above the doorway, in future the words “Burning Secret”^{*} will be visible.

* The name of a very popular novel by Stefan Zweig

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The well-known anthem had to undergo the following rewriting in March 1933:

No fire, no coals
Can burn as bright
As a fire in the Reichstag
Which Goering did light.

Commentary

The satire is notable both for its treatment of the Reichstag Fire in 1933, which was instrumental for the Nazis in securing control of all Germany, and for its parody of the Horst-Wessel Lied, a song which featured very prominently in German culture throughout the 20th century.

The satirist references great figures from the past in his jokes, placing them in juxtaposition with Goering. This is evidently not to increase Goering's fame, but rather to show how ridiculous he is in comparison to them. Even the Emperor Nero scorns him, and he was one of the worst tyrants ever to have lived.

The jokes combine humour with serious statements: Grillparzer's statement "weh dem, der lügt" pithily expresses the idea that the great Germans of the past judge the Nazis a discredit to the history of the nation.

The text of the Horst-Wessel Lied appeared in countless different versions, mainly satirical, and was known by all Germans: throughout the Nazi era numerous parodies existed, including the one translated above; Bertolt Brecht based the song "Kälbermarsch" from his drama "Schweyk im zweiten Weltkrieg" (1943) on the Horst-Wessel Lied. In the post-war period the song was again parodied to reflect dissatisfaction with life after the

partitioning of Germany into sectors. This satirised version from the *Liederbuch* is therefore part of an important tradition in parodying the original song which continued even after the end of the Third Reich.

In many satirical versions the line “Hungern im Geist..” is almost the same as in the *Liederbuch*, seemingly copied. Perhaps it was reused consistently because it conveyed the unrelenting suffering of the Germans, unchanged by whichever new regime came into power. From a piece of music firmly associated with the Third Reich, the song became through parody a cultural monument commemorating a terrible past, but equally the ability of the Germans to see humour in their harsh predicament.