

Genocide

Raphael Lemkin

Professor Lemkin was born in Poland in 1900 and died in the United States in 1959. In 1944, in his book Axis Rule in Occupied Europe, Lemkin analysed the laws of the Nazi Reich and showed they were intended to facilitate the destruction of whole populations. Lemkin coined a word for this – genocide. Following the creation of the United Nations, he worked to establish the 1946 Declaration and the 1948 Convention on Genocide and have them adopted by the General Assembly. This excerpt is taken from Professor Lemkin's essay 'Genocide' which he published in 1946.

The last war has focused our attention on the phenomenon of the destruction of whole populations – of national, racial and religious groups – both biologically and culturally. The German practices, especially in the course of occupation, are too well known. Their general plan was to win the peace though the war be lost, and that goal could have been achieved through successfully changing the political and demographic interrelationships in Europe in favour of Germany. The population not destroyed was to be integrated in the German cultural, political and economic pattern.

In this way a mass obliteration of nationhoods had been planned throughout occupied Europe. The Nazi leaders had stated very bluntly their intent to wipe out the Poles, the Russians; to destroy demographically and culturally the French element in Alsace-Lorraine, the Slavonians in Carniola and Carinthia. They almost achieved their goal in exterminating the Jews and Gypsies in Europe. Obviously, the German experience is the most striking and the most deliberate and thorough, but history has provided us with other examples of the destruction of entire nations, and ethnic and religious groups. There are, for example, the destruction of Carthage; that of religious groups in the wars of Islam and the Crusades; the massacres of the Albigenses and the Waldenses; and more recently, the massacre of the Armenians.

While society sought protection against individual crimes, or rather crimes directed against individuals, there has been no serious endeavour hitherto to prevent and punish the murder and destruction of millions. Apparently, there was not even an adequate name for such a phenomenon. Referring to the Nazi butchery in the present war, Winston Churchill said in his broadcast of August, 1941, 'We are in the presence of a crime without a name'.

The word 'genocide'

Would mass murder be an adequate name for

such a phenomenon? We think not, since it does not connote the motivation of the crime, especially when the motivation is based upon racial, national or religious considerations. An attempt to destroy a nation and obliterate its cultural personality was hitherto called denationalisation. This term seems to be inadequate, since it does not connote biological destruction. On the other hand, this term is mostly used for conveying or for defining an act of deprivation of citizenship. Many authors, instead of using a generic term, use terms connoting only some functional aspect of the main generic notion of the destruction of nations and races. Thus, the terms ‘Germanisation’, ‘Italianisation’, ‘Magyarisation’ are used often to connote the imposition by a stronger nation (Germany, Italy, Hungary) of its national pattern upon a group controlled by it. These terms are inadequate since they do not convey biological destruction, and they cannot be used as a generic term. In the case of Germany, it would be ridiculous to speak about the Germanisation of the Jews or Poles in western Poland, since the Germans wanted these groups eradicated entirely.

Hitler stated many times that Germanisation could only be carried out with the soil, never with men. These considerations led the author of this article to the necessity of coining a new term for this particular concept: genocide. This word is made from the ancient Greek word *genos* (race, clan) and the Latin suffix *cide* (killing). Thus, genocide in its formation would correspond to such words as tyrannicide, homicide, patricide ...