

REICHSTAG FIRE COURSEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

SOURCE A: A photograph showing the Reichstag on fire on the morning of 28 February 1933



SOURCE B: Van der Lubbe's statement to the police, shortly after his arrest

At the outset, I must insist that my action on 27 February was inspired by political motives. I was a member of the Communist party until 1929. In Holland I read that the Nazis had come to power in Germany. Since the workers would do nothing, I had to do something myself. I thought arson a suitable method. I did not wish to harm people, but something that belonged to the system. As to the question whether I acted alone, I declare emphatically that this was the case. No one at all helped me.

SOURCE C: An extract from Goebbel's diary for 27 February 1933. Goebbels was entertaining Hitler to dinner on the evening of 27 February 1933.

At nine the Führer came for supper. We had a little music and talked. Suddenly the telephone rang. The Reichstag is burning. I thought the news pure fantasy and wouldn't even tell the Führer about it. After a few more calls I got the terrible confirmation it was true. I informed the Führer, and we raced downtown at 70 m.p.h. The whole building was in flames. Göring met us, and soon von Papen arrived. It had already been established that the fire was due to arson. There was no doubt that the Communists had made a final attempt to seize power by creating an atmosphere of panic and terror.

SOURCE D: A cover of a book called 'Armed Uprising' published in Germany in 1933. The illustration shows armed communists and the Reichstag building on fire.



SOURCE E: The official announcement about the Reichstag Fire by the Prussian Government, 28 February 1933 [Berlin was in the part of Germany known as Prussia]

This act of incendiarism (arson) is the most monstrous act of terrorism so far carried out by Communism in Germany. Government buildings and essential factories were to be burned down. The burning of the Reichstag was to have been the signal for a bloody revolt and civil war. Today was to have seen throughout Germany, terrorist acts against individual persons, against private property, and against the life and limb of the peaceful population.

SOURCE F: From a journalist's interview with Hitler, March 1933

It is nothing but a damned lie and a malicious libel. It is ridiculous. Europe, instead of suspecting me of false play, should be grateful to me for my drastic action against the Bolsheviks. If Germany went Communist, as there was every prospect of it going until I became Chancellor, the rest of civilised Europe would fall prey to this pest. The attack on the Reichstag was just one of a whole series of terrorist activities which the police are able to prove were planned by the Communists. We have seized hundred-weights of material in the secret cellar of the communist headquarters proving that these fires were to be the beacon signals for a nation-wide campaign of dynamiting and mass murder.

SOURCE G: The report of Martin Sommerfeldt, Göring's press officer, about the fire and how the news was received by Göring, 1947.

I heard that the fire was discovered at 9 p.m. by a civilian who notified the nearest policeman. The latter alerted a police patrol, the police alerted the fire brigade. The policeman saw a man tugging wildly at a curtain over one of the large panes in the lobby and fired a shot at him. When the people entered the building they found burning firelighters everywhere, which suggested arson. They managed to collect about a hundredweight of this material and arrested a man who seemed to be running berserk in the corridors.

Göring looked at it. 'That's sheer rubbish [he said]. It may be a good police report, but it's not at all the kind of communiqué I have in mind. One hundredweight of incendiary material? No, ten hundredweight or even a hundred.' And he added two noughts to my figure.

'That is quite impossible minister! No one can possibly believe that a single man can have carried that load!'

'Nothing is impossible! Why mention a single man? There were ten or even twenty men! Don't you understand what's been happening? The whole thing was a signal for a Communist uprising! They must have come through the tunnel.'

SOURCE H: The testimony of Karl van Ernst, S A Gruppenführer. He was killed in a purge in 1934. His testimony turned up in Paris soon afterwards.

I suggested to Göring that we use the subterranean passage because that would minimise the risk of discovery. Goebbels insisted on postponing the fire from 25 February to 27 February because 26th was a Sunday, a day on which no evening papers appeared so that the fire could not be played up sufficiently for propaganda purposes. Göring and Goebbels agreed to throw suspicion on the Communists. The Dutchman had to climb in the Reichstag after we had left and the fire was already started. Van der Lubbe was to be left in the belief that he was working by himself.

Where a question does not mention a particular source, candidates may refer to any of the sources which they consider to be appropriate, or use their own knowledge.

Assignment 1: Assessment Objective 1

1. Describe the effects of the Reichstag fire on Germany. (12)
2. Why did the Nazis set fire to the Reichstag? (18)

Assignment 2: Assessment Objectives 2 and 3

1. What can you learn from Source A about the Reichstag fire? (3)
2. Use Source B and your own knowledge to help you describe how the fire started. (6)
3. Use Sources C and D and your own knowledge to explain why the Nazis blamed the communists for the fire. (9)
4. Source E claims that the fire was the signal for a communist revolt in Germany. Do you agree that this was the case? (12)

Markscheme

Assignment 1: Assessment Objective 1

1. Target: Recall of knowledge

Level 1: Simple statements supported by some knowledge, e.g. the building burnt down, shock, the communists were blamed etc.

(1-4)

Level 2: Developed statements supported by relevant knowledge, e.g. details of the fire, raids on Communist Party, Nazi reactions, election results etc.

(5-8)

Level 3: Developed exposition supported by selected knowledge showing understanding of a range of effects, e.g. significance in terms of election, change of government, rival Nazi claims to have started the fire etc.

(9-12)

2. Target: Causation/Recall of knowledge

Level 1: Simple statements supported by some knowledge, e.g. they were frightened of the communists, wanted to get rid of them etc.

(1-5)

Level 2: Developed statements supported by relevant knowledge, e.g. the Nazis had just come into power, wanted to increase support, communists were the main opponents, situation in the Reichstag after November 1932 elections etc.

(6-10)

Level 3: Developed explanation supported by selected knowledge showing understanding of interrelationship of factors and making links between them, e.g. Hitler was chancellor of a coalition government, wanted to use the election to win an overall majority, hated communists (next largest party in Reichstag) etc.

(11-15)

Level 4: Sustained argument supported by precisely selected knowledge assessing importance of factors, e.g. Hitler had two aims, to win an overall majority and to eliminate opposition, he used the fire to outmanoeuvre von Papen and the other politicians, who had simply under-estimated him, fire probably started on Goebbels' orders for propaganda value etc.

(16-18)

Assignment 2: Assessment Objectives 2 and 3

1. Target: Comprehension of a source

Level 1: Points taken at face value from the source, e.g. details of the fire, still blazing in the morning etc.

(1-2)

Level 2: Inferences made, e.g. scale of the fire, people standing and gazing, clearly had considerable impact etc.

(3)

2. Target: Comprehension of source/recall of knowledge

Level 1: Simple statements using the source at face value supported by some own knowledge, e.g. van der Lubbe started the fire, broke into the Reichstag, Nazis helped him etc.

(1-2)

Level 2: Developed statements making inferences from the source supported by relevant knowledge, e.g. details of van der Lubbe's activities, Nazis used him as a scapegoat, details of Nazi plot to burn Reichstag etc.

(3-4)

Level 3: Developed explanation supported by selected knowledge, e.g. van der Lubbe was chosen as the scapegoat because he was mentally subnormal and could be exploited, the SA was used to break into the Reichstag and van der Lubbe was left to take the blame.

(5-6)

3. Target: Comprehension of sources/recall of knowledge

Level 1: Simple statements taking the sources at face value supported by some own knowledge, e.g. Nazis were frightened of the communists, wanted to gain seats in the elections, people would not vote for them if they were to blame etc.

(1-3)

Level 2: Developed statements making inferences from the sources supported by relevant knowledge, e.g. communists next largest party, Hitler hated communists, wanted to destroy them fire was an excuse etc.

(4-6)

Level 3: Developed explanation making inferences from the sources supported by selected own knowledge, e.g. shows understanding of the range of factors, fire was used by Nazis to strengthen their position, with communists out of the way they could win a majority at the March election and destroy the coalition government, Hitler would then be free to act as he liked etc.

(7-9)

4. Target: Evaluation of an interpretation/recall of knowledge

Level 1: Simple statements using the sources at face value, supported by some own knowledge, e.g. no there was no plot, Hitler wanted to get rid of the communists etc. (1-3)

Level 2: Developed statements making inferences from the sources supported by relevant own knowledge, e.g. yes/no D, E and F support the idea of a plot and communists had tried to seize power in the past, other sources do not support that idea etc. (4-6)

Level 3: Developed explanation making inferences from the sources supported by selected own knowledge, e.g. can make a judgement, the tone of the sources suggesting a communist plot is dubious, there is very little evidence to support the claims etc. (7-9)

Level 4: Sustained argument using the sources supported by precisely selected knowledge, e.g. reaches a balanced judgement etc. it is unlikely that there was a plot, the sources that support the idea of a plot are from Nazis, it appears that the plot was just an excuse to crush the communists, G and H, both from Nazis, suggest that the Nazis deliberately tried to plant evidence to make sure that the communists were blamed etc. (10-12)