

Norman J.W. Goda. *Tales from Spandau: Nazi Criminals and the Cold War.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. XIII + 390 S. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-86720-7.



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From Prison to Parking Lot

Norman J. W. Goda artfully situates the story of Spandau prison and its infamous inmates at the intersection of German domestic and Cold War international history. While all other Four-Power institutions crumbled under the weight of the Cold War, Spandau prison and the Berlin Air Safety Center continued to function jointly (p. 7). Keeping Spandau open was, however, a task fraught with political peril.

In their zeal to punish those National Socialist leaders who fell into their hands, the Allies failed to consider the consequences of imprisoning for long periods of time those defendants not executed by the Nuremberg tribunal. Goda is correct when he states that the tribunal's twelve executions were in a sense legitimized by the seven prison terms and three acquittals pronounced on October 1, 1946. The fact that the judges did not simply order the execution of all of the accused, as the Soviet legal team would have preferred, indicated that their deliberations had been authentic and that evidence and guilt had been carefully weighed. However, imprisoning men who were, in most cases, elderly and in every case prominent public figures meant that the Allies would, for

the next several decades, struggle with the terms of imprisonment and the fate of the prisoners. As Goda puts it, whereas those executed at Nuremberg rapidly became merely historical figures, those sentenced to prison became political figures and therefore political problems for their jailors.

Each of the four former Allies as well as the West German government had distinct interests in the Spandau prisoners. For the western Allies, Spandau, as one of the few functioning Four-Power institutions, served to legitimate the shared control of Berlin that they deemed vital. For the Soviets, "Nuremberg validated Soviet suffering on an international scale while justifying Soviet foreign policy in Europe and Germany. Its lessons could never be discounted, and its condemned could never legitimately be freed" (p. 18). Soviet warders always tried to make life more difficult for the prisoners. Control of the prison rotated among the four powers and few privileges, meager rations, and the threat of solitary confinement characterized the months when Soviet officials presided.

One of the few weaknesses of the book, for which the author can hardly be blamed, is the dearth of Soviet

sources. Like so many Cold War historians, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Goda must for the most part infer Soviet intentions from official statements. Whereas in the case of the western Allies, especially the United States, Goda had access to files from the State Department/Foreign Ministry, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Military Government (OMGUS), and other French and British documents, the material on Soviet policy is sparse. At best, Goda could work from very limited Soviet sources, often available online, which include memoirs, other records of western prison officials who had worked with the Soviets, or from official prison documents, which contained Soviet input. At worst, he has to intuit Soviet motives, as when he sensibly concludes that the Soviet obsession with the caloric intake of the prisoners, at the height of the Berlin Blockade crisis no less, “reveals the implicit Soviet belief that they could make Four-Power trusteeship over the prison unbearable for the Allies” (p. 73). Soviet policy regarding Spandau, for Goda, seems suspended precariously between the Soviets’ desire to push the western Allies out of West Berlin altogether and their wish to ensure that the inmates served the maximum sentence in the maximum amount of discomfort.

In all other respects, the work is richly and densely documented. Goda impresses with an eye for detail. He lucidly describes torturous negotiations over prison regulations. Goda weaves the actions of diplomats, doctors, prisoners, their families, and guards into a story that is part Cold War politics and part the memory and legacy of Nazism.

Equally commendable is Goda’s ability to write objectively about the conditions at the prison and the degree to which the inmates were pawns of both domestic and foreign relations without ever lapsing into sympathy for justifiably condemned men. Lengthy chapters demolish Albert Speer and Rudolf Hess, respectively. Speer’s lies have long been exposed, thanks to Gitta Sereny’s work, upon which Goda expands brilliantly. Goda relies heavily on the correspondence of Rudolf Wolters, a long-time friend and associate, to illuminate Speer’s continual and expensive efforts to escape the punishment that he publicly claimed to deserve. Goda writes of the many former associates and businessmen who worked unsuccessfully for Speer’s release that “today one can only be satisfied that they wasted so much of their time and money, in effect serving part of Speer’s sentence with him” (p. 220).

That Hess remained devoted to Adolf Hitler throughout his long imprisonment surprises no one, but Goda re-

veals the degree to which Hess clung to Nazi ideals. He shows the elderly, increasingly infirm Hess, serving the final twenty years of his sentence alone in the huge Spandau complex, no mercy. Nor was any deserved. Hess had narrowly escaped the hangman’s noose in 1946 in part because the British judge did not allow him to read his final hate-filled statement at Nuremberg. He remained a magnet for a small but radical far-right following. Before his suicide, Hess attempted to have smuggled out of Spandau a final political testament, based on his proposed Nuremberg statement, which (among other pernicious statements) blamed a Jewish conspiracy for the start of war in 1939. However tragic the pose that the aged Hess struck, he deserved to remain in prison.

Konstantin von Neurath receives significant attention because he was the first inmate to exhibit serious health problems and because his powerful connections in West Germany and abroad gave his condition a high profile. Admirals Erich Raeder and Karl Dönitz share a chapter and are examined in light of their connection to veterans’ organizations and the larger rearmament debate in Germany in the 1950s. The unrepentant Dönitz in particular endures salvo after salvo from Goda’s main guns. Goda weaves in a scathing critique of the admirals’ memoirs with material from his excellent article on Hitler’s bribery of senior military leaders to bolster his indictment.[1]

After Hess’s 1987 suicide, Spandau prison was demolished and literally buried, at Gatow Air Base, to prevent its rubble from attracting souvenir hunters. The British built a shopping center for their troops that was later turned over to the Germans. In that sense, Spandau prison is gone and the building and its inmates are now historical, rather than political, figures. But for Goda, the lesson of Spandau remains important for the fragile structure of international justice now in place: “In accepting the responsibility to punish notorious international criminals, the international community accepts a task of unknown proportions and unknown length especially since evidence against the accused becomes minimized over time by political advocates” (p. 277). Costs like those the Allies paid, especially in political terms, to imprison seven infamous men must be “accepted with open eyes” (p. 277).

Note

[1]. Norman J. W. Goda, “Black Marks: Hitler’s Bribery of His Senior Officers during World War II,” *Journal of Modern History* 72 (2000), 413-452.

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