

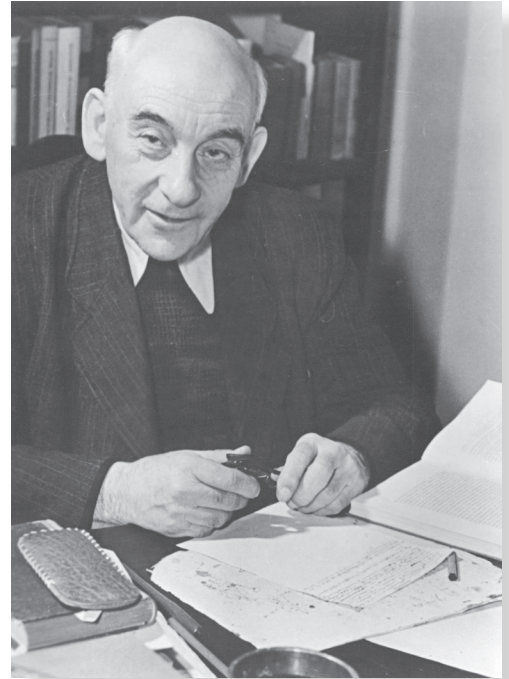
EXTENSION: THE DIARY OF VICTOR KLEMPERER

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Victor Klemperer (1881-1960), a veteran of the First World War, was a professor at the University of Dresden when the Nazis came to power in 1933. Recognizing the danger of Hitler's regime, Klemperer began to keep a diary chronicling daily life in Nazi Germany.

Although Klemperer converted from Judaism to Protestantism in 1912, he was stripped of his academic position and citizenship according to the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. He was eventually forced to work as a labourer in a factory and in 1940 was rehoused under miserable conditions in a ghetto, where he was routinely questioned, humiliated and beaten by the Gestapo (Nazi secret police). Married to a non-Jew, Klemperer remained free until receiving his deportation notice on February 13, 1945. That night the massive Allied bombing raid of Dresden took place. In the confusion caused by the firestorm, Klemperer was able to escape.

After a terrifying run-in with police in 1941, he wrote about the significance of his secret diary: "This is my heroics. I want to bear witness, precise witness, until the very end." When a neighbour noted that he alone could not cover the main events of the war, Klemperer wrote: "It's not the big things that are important, but the everyday life in tyranny, which may be forgotten. A thousand mosquito bites are worse than a blow on the head. I observe, I note, the mosquito bites."



Victor Klemperer, 1954.
– Bundesarchiv Bild 183-26707-0001

DIARY ENTRY | THURSDAY, AUGUST 13, 1936

"The Olympics will end next Sunday, the NSDAP [Nazi] Party Rally is being heralded, an explosion is imminent, and naturally, they will first of all take things out on the Jews. ... In Barcelona four Germans have been 'murdered' as martyrs of National Socialism..., and even before that, they were saying that the German-Jewish émigrés were stirring up hatred against Germany there. God knows, what will come of it all, but surely and as always a new measure against the Jews. I do not believe that we shall keep our house.

[...]

"The Olympics, which are now ending, are doubly repugnant to me. (1) as an absurd overestimation of sport; the honour of a nation depends on whether a fellow citizen can jump four inches higher than all the rest. In any case, a Negro from the United States jumped the highest of all and the Jewess Helene Mayer won the fencing silver medal for Germany (I don't know which is more shameless, her participating as a German of the Third Reich, or the fact that her achievement is claimed for the Third Reich).

[...]

"And (2) I find the Olympics so odious because they are not about sports – in this country I mean – but are an entirely political enterprise. 'German renaissance through Hitler' I read recently. It's constantly being drummed into the country and into foreigners that here one is witnessing the revival, the flowering, the new spirit, the unity, steadfastness and magnificence, pacific too, of course, spirit of the Third Reich, which lovingly embraces the whole world."