

Analysis of Editorial Opinion on War Trials and Criminals

September 7, 1945

Number of editorials: 68

Time Covered: August 15-September 4, 1945.

Emphasis on German Trial

The Allied trial of German war criminals was the main topic in this group of editorials. 30% commented upon it. Six of these approved the new definition of war criminality.

"It is a historic precedent to be established as a just device to help promote a lasting peace." (Washington, D.C. Star)

"...thus closes the avenue by which the Kaiser escaped prosecution and his officers escaped conviction 26 years ago." (Boston, Mass., Globe)

The Washington, D. C. Post dissented from this unequivocal approval and accepted the new definition as a compromise measure:

"Yet the trials must go forward as a basis that is satisfactory to all of the cooperating Allies. That fact necessitates compromise and improvisation. Our attitude toward these proceedings must be determined, therefore, not by what is ideal under our constitutional system, but by what is practical in the existing circumstances."

Six praised the Allied list of war criminals, two specifically approving the inclusion of Schacht, Funk, Ribbentrop, Von Papen, and Krupp, "the smoothies in frock coats who built up the Nazi party, men who made Hitler's power possible even though they never wielded a whip in a torture camp."

The need for speed was again emphasized by three papers. Two greeted the lack of censorship promised for the future trials.

"This is a wise decision. People throughout the world can judge as to the quality of justice being dispensed. They will have an opportunity of settling in their own minds the degree of guilt of the defendants." (Reno, Nev., Gazette)

Petain's Sentence Approved

Comment upon the Petain trial was continued by 18 papers with much the same emphasis as in previous weeks. Seven approved of the court's decision; four disapproved; eight approved of its commutation.

The conduct of the trial was criticized by five. The Columbia, S. C., State declared that Petain would not have been convicted in America, where the case against the defendant must be made beyond a reasonable doubt, and continued:

"It does not give the impression of a fair and impartial trial when jurymen go to sleep, read newspapers and day dream during the presentation of evidence in favor of the defendant, as the Petain jury is reported to have done."

Quisling Guilty

With the discussion of the Quisling trial increasing, 16 papers mentioned it. Of these 15 had no doubts he was guilty.

"A sorry spectacle staged by a man a thousand times more vicious than our own Benedict Arnold, a modern Iscariot who was not even sure of his 12 pieces of silver, a cornered rat without even the courage to fight back.-that was Vidkun Quisling when he was called to justice."
(Little Rock, Ark., Arkansas Democrat)

Two stated that the proceedings "kept within the bounds of reason and decency."

Japanese War Criminals Named

Thirteen editorials dealt with Japanese war criminals, five of these stressing that they must be punished. The following were named as war criminals:

Hirohito: 4 papers
Present Cabinet: 3
Government leaders in war years: 2
Puppet rulers, Minami, Yamashita: 1

One doubted if Hirohito should be tried because his retention would make surrender easier.