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PICTURE OF A BUREAUCRAT

The general line of defence which Eichmann will take is already clear from the opening of his evidence. As forecast he is claiming that he was a subordinate official, working always under superior orders or even duress.

It would be interesting to know whether the defence considered not putting Eichmann in the witness box at all; but for a matter of practical and psychological reasons they probably felt there was no alternative.

His answers give a vivid picture of a bureaucrat who not only executes the orders of superiors but adores them for their superiority to him; it is this picture of German bureaucracy which perhaps gives the trial its meaning.

Two points in his evidence deserve notice.

First, he stressed that in joining Nazi organisations he could not foresee all the consequences of membership or the excesses into which it would lead him.

This was designed to answer counts 13-15 of the indictment, which charge Eichmann with membership of those German organisations which have since been declared unlawful.

As has been remarked before, these counts do not appear to be easy to sustain, since membership of a German organisation can hardly in itself be an offence under Israeli law.

Acts done as a member of these organisations are, of course, another matter.

Further, the fact that he did not foresee all the consequences of membership when he joined does not excuse such acts.

The second point is the description of his treatment by his captors in Argentina and the alleged extraction from him of a signed statement consenting to trial in Israel.

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He denies that he signed this statement voluntarily.

Since the jurisdiction of the Israeli court to try him is quite independent of his consent or absence of consent, it matters not whether he signed the statement voluntarily or under duress.

But it is not easy to understand why the prosecution put the statement in evidence, particularly if there is truth in Eichmann's assertion that it was obtained from him under duress.

—J.E.S.F.