

## **Reichstag Fire**

The trial before the federal court in Leipzig, during which the judges failed to maintain political neutrality, was no less dramatic than the Reichstag fire itself, on 27 February 1933. The judges were keen to issue a death sentence not only against the alleged culprit Marinus van der Lubbe, but also against four communists, including the Bulgarian Georgi Dimitroff, and found the KPD (German communist party) guilty of planning a campaign of terror. They deliberately overlooked the fact that the fire allegedly started by communists was highly convenient for the regime. It gave the national socialists a welcome pretext for the emergency decree 'for the protection of the people and state', which suspended civil rights and signalled the dismantling of the rule of law. Dimitroff's brilliant speech in his own defence forced the court to acknowledge the facts, and to acquit him and his three comrades for lack of evidence. The main defendant Van der Lubbe was however sentenced to death.