LENI RIEFENSTAHL, film star and producer, Hitler's alleged mistress.

Leni Riefenstahl (wife of Wehrmacht Major Jacob) was arrested by American troops in her house in Kitzbühel, where she has been living and working for years. It is difficult to recognize the leading actress of the films "Das Blaue Licht", "Die weisse Hölle von Pitz Palu", Stürme Über dem Mont Blanc" and "SOS Iceberg" in this ageing, seriously ailing woman. Arrest, interrogations, and internment have strongly affected her mental state, and she gives one the impression of a broken human being. Her greatest worry is the film "Tiefland", a movie on which she worked for many years, and which was nearing completion. She now thinks that the film is lost "as everything in Germany has come to a stop".

Since her visit to the USA in November 1938 she knows that the international movie world boycotts her and considers her finished. She expected this boycott, although she could not understand why it was done. Here is what she had to say in her defense and to the clarification as far as her relations to Hitler and the Party are concerned. She says that is a "gross injustice" when she is being told again and again that "she only made the grade by going to bed with Goebbels". She states that she had never had any sexual relations with either Hitler or Goebbels. She says further that she had a reputation as movie artist before the world ever heard the names of Hitler and Goebbels. Even after 1933 she never tried to maintain relations with Party Offices (according to her statement). Mrs R. states that during her entire career she was never obliged to take any assignments from anybody, and, as a matter of fact, rejected more offers than she accepted. "If I, as so many other colleagues, would have worked for the sake of money, I could have become a millionaire." "But money was of no importance to me, I worked on a film for years until I thought it artistically perfected. I was my own boss, nobody could tell me what to do. Had I ever had the impression that my freedom as creative artist would be limited, I would have gone abroad."

Her Relations to Hitler:

About her first meeting with Hitler and about her later connections with him she says the following: "Beginning 1933 I received a phone-call from the Reichs Chancellory asking me to appear at Hitler's house for tea. We were sitting on the terrace of the Chancellory, and during the conversation Hitler stated: "I have great respect for your knowledge, but I believe that you could accomplish something in the organizational field too. That is why I should like to see you take charge of the entire German film production." This offer I rejected without even bothering to think about it, because my main interest was to retain my freedom as creative artist. This freedom I have kept until the last day of my work. At a later date Hitler again approached me, and asked me to take over the production of the Horst-Wessel-Film. This offer too, I rejected emphatically. During 1934 I only met Hitler at occasional receptions in the Chancellory. Early 1935, after my return from Madrid, where I had been ill for a long time, I was again called to Hitler, and this time he gave me the task of the production of the Party Rally Film "Triumph des Willens".

He stated, that the Party Film Authority could not accomplish this task the way he (Hitler) wanted it. He would like to see the Party Rally filmed "as the artist sees it". I accepted this offer under the express condition...
that I’d be my own boss as far as the production of the film was concerned, and that I could not have any consideration of persons, position, and rank. Hitler agreed to these terms. Had I known, however, what difficulties I would encounter in Nuremberg, and how much aggravation I would have with this film, I would have rejected this offer of the Führer too. The people of the Party Film Authority, who were envious of my independence and of the production of the film, tried to sabotage my work in Nuremberg with all means. It came to regular fights between my cameramen and those of the Party, some of my cameras were destroyed, and several of my employees were even arrested. I had the greatest difficulties to even finish the production. Shortly afterwards I was ordered to appear before Hess who received me as if I were a criminal, and questioned me on account of my behaviour during the Party Rally. I then intended to complain to Hitler about this treatment, but for weeks it was impossible for me to get an audience, as the Party men around him made things difficult for me. Finally I was able to present my complaints at a reception, with Goebbels present; Hitler was furious and promised to investigate the matter. The following day I was asked to appear before Goebbels who received me with the following words: "How dare you complain about my men to the Führer? If you were not a woman I would throw you down the staircase." Then the activities against me began. Everybody was insulted because my film did not contain sufficient propaganda for the individual Party - and Wehrmacht - leaders. Shortly after these incidents I met Udet with whom I had friendly relations. He said to me; "Leni, watch out, I believe these people are after your life." Again I was called to Hitler who proposed that I come to a compromise. I ought to call together all the people who had not been considered in the film, take their pictures and paste them in front of the already finished filmstrip. It came to a rather heated discussion during which Hitler insisted that I compromise. In the heat of the discussion I jumped to my feet, stamped my foot, and shouted "I won’t do it!" Hitler replies: "Are you forgetting who you are talking to?" There was no addition to the film, however, and it was performed the way I had filmed it.

Mrs. R. claims that she last saw the Führer on March 21st, 1944 at the "Berghof". Mrs. Schaub, the wife of the Führer’s adjutant, had told Hitler about Mrs. R.’s marriage to Major Jacob, and he wanted to meet R.’s husband. The conversation supposedly lasted for 45 minutes. - Mrs. R. admits that she entertained a certain admiration for the personality of the Führer. (she added "if that was a crime, then many people in the democratic countries are guilty too, because they have committed the same crime during the years from 1933-1939") She further says that she had never thought about the Führer’s policy, because she does not have the slightest idea about these things. Mrs. R. claims that she had refused all offers to join the Party, although Hitler had advised her to do so. Her personal impression of Hitler was the following: He was always polite and helpful, but never asked her any questions of a personal nature. "He did not recognize the human and personal aspect of life." She states that he, for instance, never asked her about her parents or other personal or family matters. He only spoke of objects, of problems, of work, of the future; everything was presented in a way as if he were speaking to a great mass of people. "I could not imagine that great people could stand being around him", is the closing remark of Mrs. R. But once more she emphasizes strongly that her relation to Hitler could at no time and in no form be considered intimate.

Hitler’s attitude toward her and toward other persons could only be explained by a certain "complex of faithfulness", she says, and it was very hard for Hitler to part with people whom he had once chosen as friends or collaborators. In the case of Röhm he only then made up his mind to take action, when he had definite proof that Röhm and his friends had betrayed the Führer and the Party.
On Goebbels and other PARTY leaders:

Her statements about Goebbels are made in a disparaging and contemptuous way. "I always was in bad standing with him, he was cold and forbidding toward me, I almost hated him." With all other Party men I had no contact whatever, I saw them occasionally at official celebrations. I never received an invitation from any Party man, and if I had I would have rejected every one of them. The only decent man whom I met in these circles was Dr Speer." Her opinion about the other Party men, whom she does not know personally, as she claims, are based on those of the flier Udet, who told her that the Führer is surrounded and isolated by men, who do not grasp the scope of their actions. "This Bormann was such a primitive man."

Her Opinions about other Artists:

She is not prepared to pass judgment about other artists who had closer connections with the Party, and only reluctantly admits that there were many who would have done anything for money. She reports about a conversation with the well-known actor Veit Harlan, who was scheduled for the role 'Jud Süss' in a film of the same name. He was in desperation about this assignment, but saw no possibility to turn down the role. R. claims to have told him: "Who can force you to have anything to do with such trash, you are a man, aren't you? I would rather die than play a role which I despise." Harlan, according to R, however could not make up his mind to fight the issue, and finally played the role.

Persecution of Jews and Concentration Camps:

During all these years R. had heard of KZs now and then, but had no actual conception of what they really meant. She thought them to be a kind of prison where criminals had to serve their sentences. "Otherwise I knew nothing about them." Today, when I hear all these dreadful things which happened in Germany, I could cry. And I cannot grasp how any of the people who shared Hitler's political ideas have the courage to continue living. I would have committed suicide, had I felt that I shared the responsibility for these crimes."

Similarly, R. claims never to have represented anti-Semitic ideas. She claims to have worked together with many Jews, to have been on very friendly terms with the Director Sternberg, and to have maintained these friendships with Jews even under the Nazi Regime. In a number of cases she states that she placed sums of money at the disposal of Jewish artists who had become penniless. She mentions the case of the editor of the "Filmkurier" Ernst Jaeger, who, because of his Jewish wife, was expelled from the "Schrifttumskammer" and fell into debt. She says that she supported him financially on several occasions, and finally succeeded to persuade Goebbels to permit J.'s readmission into the "Schrifttumskammer". She also engaged him as press chief for the "Olympiafilm", and had him accompany her on her trip to America. J. watched over her wherever she went, and took notes on everything she said or did. She goes on to say that he borrowed money in her name, and then decided to stay in America, where he released scandal stories about her in which, she claims, there was no truth whatever.

The pogroms against the Jews took place as she found herself on the trip to America (Nov 38). As she left the ship she saw the headlines in the newspapers. She considered the reports so fantastic that she refused to believe them. Questioned by reporters about her opinion on the matter, she explained that she did not believe that the reports were correct.

After her return to Berlin she asked Hauptmann Wiedemann whether there was any truth in these reports. Wiedemann replied that unfortunately everything had taken place just as the foreign papers reported it. She was terribly upset over this, but calmed down when she learned that those responsible for the pogrom had been punished.
Olympia-Film:

The production of the Olympia film was another assignment given her personally by Hitler. She states that she dedicated herself with all her strength and faculties to this work. It never entered her mind that the event of the Olympic Games could have been a grand propaganda-enterprise of the NS Regime. She saw in the Olympic Games youth, strength and beauty - in the same sense as it had been pictured by the majority of the world press. In this film too, she wanted to express no more than her art, her artistic interpretation, and her desire to erect a monument to the youth, and beauty of all lands and races.

She points out that she received no directives of any sort for the production of this film, and could select her own co-workers. The premiere of the film, for which she received many international awards, was not preceded by any kind of censorship. The film did not favor any race or nation in particular. The American Negro sportsmen were given all the credit due them, and Jesse Owens is mentioned in the introduction, as well as pictured together with other Negroes, in the book about the Olympic Games which she published. The entire book contains not the slightest shade of propaganda, she goes on to say, and the word "Deutschland" received not a single mention. "If I have a conviction, then it is expressed in this introduction (of the book) which is simultaneously the expression of my conception of the art to which I have dedicated myself, and for which I have lived."

One may or may not consider R.'s statements reliable. Nevertheless, they give one the impression of honesty, and dread which she expresses about the Regime and its leaders seem sincere. It is possible that she actually was not aware of what went on. That was her sin of omission, which appears all the more serious due to the fact that she, more than any other person, had the opportunity to go to the truth. She is a product of the moral corruption which characterises the Regime. But it would be false to picture her as an ambitious female who wanted to attain fame and wealth on the NSDAP bandwagon. She is certainly no fanatical National Socialist who had sold her soul to the regime. Admiration for Hitler had closed her eyes to all that his Regime meant for Germany. His protecting hand insured her artistic activities - contrary to those of so many others. His hand offered protection from the political clutches, and built a dream-world for her in which she could live with "her art". Now and then this dream was interrupted by a flicker of reality. One may judge her reaction, which perhaps, has not always been without strength of character, as being unimportant when compared to her lack of moral poise. However, one fact remains. This moral poise did obviously not spring from opportunistic motives, but from the desire to continue dreaming her dream of a life "fully dedicated to art". If her statements are sincere, she has never grasped, and still does not grasp, the fact that she, by dedicating her life to art, has given expression to a gruesome regime and contributed to its glorification.