

Unlike the controversy over Nazi membership, there is now a consensus among scholars who have studied the Nazi electorate that the Nazi movement drew its support from a remarkably wide range of social groups, including a significant element from the working class. Indeed, it has been termed a *Volkspartei*, a people's or national party as opposed to a party representing a specific section of the population. The two leading authorities on the Nazi electorate have defined the party as follows: first, Thomas Childers in *The Nazi Voter*:

[By 1930] The NSDAP had become a unique phenomenon in German electoral politics, a catchall party of protest, whose constituents, while drawn primarily from the middle-class electorate [my italics], were united above all by a profound contempt for the existing political and economic system.

Secondly, Jürgen Falter in *Hitlers Wähler* called the NSDAP: 'a *Volkspartei* of protest with a middle-class badge' (*Bauch*) [literally stomach — my italics]. In the light of these definitions, one could say, therefore, that, despite the new emphasis on the heterogeneity of the Nazi electorate, the middle-class thesis still retains some validity, albeit in a significantly modified form. In my view the same is true of the party's membership.

Finally, it is important to emphasise once more how unstable support for the Nazi Party was. We have already seen that, as far as the membership was concerned, the party was like a revolving door with people joining and leaving all the time. The party's electorate was also highly volatile. Indeed, after the November 1932 election, in which the NSDAP lost support for the first time (4%), there were good grounds for thinking that it might disintegrate. In the regional and local elections in Thuringia and Saxony in December 1932 the NSDAP lost heavily; in its previous stronghold of Thuringia it was 40% down from its already substantially reduced vote of November. The Party's Reich Propaganda headquarters summed up the situation by stressing 'it must not come to another election. The results could not be imagined'. The modest success in the Lippe state election in January 1933 was only possible because of Lippe's tiny size and the amount of resources thrown in by the party. What would have happened if Hitler had continued to be denied office will remain one of the big ifs of history, but at the time the party's prospects appeared bleak.

FURTHER READING

- Allen, W. S. (1981) *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town*, Penguin.
 Bessel, R. (1984) *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism: the Stormtroopers in Eastern Germany 1925-34*, Yale University Press.
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 Hamilton, R. F. (1982) *Who Voted for Hitler?*, Princeton University Press.
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PERSPECTIVES

OPPOSITION IN THE THIRD REICH

The Nazi regime successfully crushed political opposition and cowed opponents in the churches. However, although organised opposition disappeared, opposition and allegiance to pre-Nazi state forms remained, helping to explain the vigorous revival of democracy in postwar West Germany.

Let me just remind you very quickly of the steps by which Hitler's dictatorship was established, because the obvious thing about Hitler's dictatorship was that it happened after he came to power. To christen 30 January 1933, when he was appointed Chancellor by President Hindenburg, as the day of the seizure of power is a nonsense. He was appointed Chancellor as one of only three Nazis, with the President over him and a Vice-Chancellor who was a Catholic. The idea was that he would re-establish a majority in the Reichstag, so that the President no longer had to go on using the emergency powers referred to him by the Weimar constitution to govern, as he had had to do since 1931, when the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats and the Socialists in the Reichstag had broken up. He only had two other Nazis in the cabinet then, Goebbels as minister of propaganda, a newly-created post, and Goering, who doubled this with the position of President of the State of Prussia and who as a result got all the Prussian police under his control. The steps towards the dictatorship follow thereafter chronologically. The first of these was the use of the fire in the Reichstag, lit by a somewhat deranged leftist called Van der Lubbe. Hitler used this to bully the Reichstag into passing an enabling act which conferred the powers of state upon him as Chancellor. As a result of this he was able to declare the Socialist and Communist Parties illegal, to break up the trade unions and to pressure the other political parties, until by the summer of 1933 they had all been 'mashed together' underneath the Nazi Party and ceased their separate existence. In the summer of 1933 he also negotiated a concordat with the Catholic Church, part of the price of which was the disappearance of Catholicism as an organised political movement, and the retirement of the Catholic political leaders who took refuge in Italy in the Vatican. On 30 July 1934 he purged the Nazi Stormtroops, the SA. Shortly after that Hindenburg died and instead of there being a new presidential election, the presidency was abolished and all civil servants and all

soldiers swore their oath of loyalty to Germany in the person of Hitler himself.

In 1935 the Nuremberg laws were passed which enabled him to purge the civil service of those who were regarded as politically or racially unsuitable. 1936, the year of the re-occupation of the Rhineland, was also the year in which Hitler decided that he had to take the German economy to a further stage of preparation for war, and he organised the Four-Year Plan and put it under the control of Goering. There ensued a battle for the control of the German economy between Schacht, an economic expert who had restored German internal economic activity in 1933 by virtually cutting Germany off from the outside world of finance and loans, and Goering, which Schacht was to lose. He was forced out of the position of minister of economics in the autumn of 1937 and sacked from the Reichsbank in February 1939. Shortly afterwards his deputy had a nervous breakdown because of the way in which the German economy was being handled.

In February 1938 Hitler succeeded both in bringing the Foreign Ministry under his control and in breaking the power of the German military machine, by abolishing the Ministry of Defence, getting rid of Blomberg and Fritsch, setting up the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, the High Command of the armed forces under his own control and forcing Beck, his principal opponent, into resignation. The crushing of the army was to continue between then and December 1941.

CRUSHING POLITICAL OPPONENTS

By then it had become clear that organised opposition to Hitler on a large scale was impossible. The socialists, whose leadership took refuge in exile, firstly in Prague, then in Paris and then in London, found that you could bring together members of the old parties, but there was a critical mass beyond which something would be betrayed, somebody would be indiscreet in public, somebody would be denounced, and the Gestapo was set upon them. There are four separate move-

The Reichstag Fire, 1933.

ments between 1933 and 1939 on which one can see this process taking place. Similarly with the trade unions. It is after all, if you have a police that has turned to political matters in a society that had hitherto been open, not a matter of great difficulty to identify the people with whom you are going to have trouble if you want to set up a single party state. First of all you can identify them by their positions. Then you have them on record because they make speeches and get reported in the newspapers. If you have a good press-cutting service and a good system of enquiry as to who occupies positions of authority and places where people will listen to them, drawing up an automatic arrest list, putting them all behind bars and beating up the recalcitrant ones regularly, killing the odd one as an example to anybody else, this is a perfectly simple thing to do. One of the reasons why it is clear that the Reichstag fire was not fired by the Nazis as a perfect excuse is that the German police were not ready. The list on which they acted against the socialist and communist leadership was a year out-of-date. Some of the people had died, some of them had moved, and quite a good number got away because they were not where they were supposed to be anyway. If it had been properly planned they should have taken a much larger proportion of those available. As it was, of course, they made a clean sweep of anybody who fell into their hands and those who went into concentration camps and died resisting arrest, who were shot while trying to escape and all the rest of this well-known set of excuses was very large.

The press was broken and the control of radio and film passed under the control of Goebbels. To pass leaflets, to listen to foreign broadcasts and anything like that was made illegal and special radio sets were manufactured, the so-called people's receivers, which could not pick up anything but weak signals so that they could not listen to anything from abroad. One of the sneakiest things British Intelligence did was to buy into Radio Luxembourg's news service in 1937. Radio Luxembourg was the most powerful commercial station in all of Europe. It enabled them to broadcast Chamberlain's speeches during 1938 to give the lie to any attempt to make him out as a warmonger, to the fury of Goebbels and his ilk who managed by protesting eventually to get the Luxembourg government to shut down any political or news broadcasts from Luxembourg radio sometime in 1939.

Resistance is a difficult word too, because in the rest of Europe it means military or quasi-military or para-military organisation of sabotage. We think of the resistance in Yugoslavia, think of Tito or Mihailovich, the Cetniks or the Partisans. If we think of it in France we think of the Maquisards. In Germany, even in Austria, there was no resistance of that sort until the last days. You do not after all take up arms against your own people. That is not resistance, that is civil war. One has to remind oneself that between 1918 and 1924 the Germans had had a great deal of civil war and between 1931 and 1933 they had a lot more with continuous fighting, including

shooting, in the streets between communists and Nazis.

OPPOSITION IN THE CHURCHES

Resistance in Germany had better be described as opposition and it takes two parts. The only organisations which had any access to publicity were the churches, the Catholic Church and parts of the Protestant Churches. The Catholic Church, by the concordat, accepted the destruction of political Catholicism in order to preserve those parts of the aims of political Catholicism which were important to them, that is non-interference by the state in Catholic education and in the Catholic financial agencies.

On 30 July 1934 a lot of scores were settled other than those which involved the SA. For example, Von Schleicher, the last Weimar Chancellor, was shot, and the leader of Catholic Action, Dr Clausener, also fell victim to SS murderers. On that occasion the Catholic Church decided not to go public. And it was to emerge that the Catholic leadership was very divided on what you did about Nazism. On the one hand there was the man who was to be the next Pope, Pacelli, his replacement as the papal nuncio in Berlin, Orsegaigo, and Cardinal Bertram, the leading German cardinal, and several bishops, who took the view that to go public was to go far too far and that you should protest in private. They were to have a problem with the then Pope, Pius XI, who was as virulently anti-Nazi as he was anti-Communist. In 1937 he issued an encyclical *With burning anxiety*, (*Mit brennender Sorge* are the opening German words) commenting on the attacks on the Catholic Church, condemning the racial doctrines of Nazism. There was for a

brief period a head-on collision between the Catholic Church and the Nazis. It ended in what one may loosely describe as a Mexican stand-off. The Nazis stopped attacking monasteries and nunneries and arresting priests, and the moderate non-oppositional section of the Catholic Church withdrew its public opposition to Nazism.

But there was to come a new crisis in 1941. This arose over the implementation of Nazi mass murder of the mentally ill in German asylums. Once again there was a division between Cardinal Bertram and a smaller group of the most prominent bishops. Bishop Gehlen of Munster, Bishop Preising of Berlin and two others being the most notorious, the method that they chose for making their opposition public was the reading from the pulpits of Bishop's Letters. A Bishop's Letter had to be read from every Catholic pulpit in the diocese. It was the one access to public opinion that the Gestapo and Goebbels could not control. Once again, the final outcome of it was that the Nazis abandoned, at any rate overtly, the policy of eliminating the mentally ill.

Where the Protestant Churches were concerned, they were more open to Nazi attack and were divided. There were Nazi churchmen in the Protestant Church and there were German state-appointed Lutheran bishops. The result was that the German Lutheran Churches, where the heads were elected by electoral colleges within each presbytery, organisations which were much more vulnerable than the hierarchy to pressure from the police, divided. Only three of the bishops retained their resistance to Hitler and broke away, setting up the so-called Confessional Church. The Confessional Church itself was to break between the so-called moderates and the radicals. The independent Confessional Church

way of life. You liked folk singing, you were a member of a socialist folk singing group. You liked collecting stamps, you were a member of the Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands Briefmarks Sammlung or whatever it was called. And the personal relationships that those created could continue, even though the party itself was dissolved.

The communists were more open to penetration by the Gestapo. Indeed the Communist Party was very largely destroyed in Germany, partly by the action on the part of the German police after the Reichstag fire in 1933, partly because it was another year or so before they abandoned the doctrine that the socialists were worse enemies of Communism and the working class than the Nazis were, and partly because they were on the whole an organisation which was very well known to their neighbours. And there were not wanting plenty of people to denounce them — there was a neighbour who wanted part of a person's house, so if you knew he was a communist you denounced him to the Gestapo because that would get rid of him, and his wife would be thrown out on the street and then you could take it over. All the nastier side of ordinary public life.

The only protection against this was that within the individual areas into which Germany was divided, the *Gaue* as they were called, some of the Gauleiters would not have the Gestapo operating in the area for love nor money because it would have challenged their own authority. My favourite is Hans Frank, who quite rightly was hung by the Poles after the war, but who would not have Himmler classifying the Poles in the part of Poland and Germany that was his Gau as non-Germans and therefore subject to rules. As he said publicly 'If I looked like Himmler I would not talk about Aryanism'. I mention this to show that one of the great oddities about Germany which one has to understand is that in a nation of 80 million and in a country the size it was, there were all kinds of exceptions. There was a very brave woman who has just retired as political editor of the liberal weekly *Die Zeit* in Hamburg. She and her friend belonged to the Prussian nobility and never sent their children to a German school under the Nazis. They kept ahead of the school inspectors by moving from one part of their massive estate to another. One of the areas which was totally unpenetrated by the Gestapo until very close to the end was the German aristocracy. One of them, Goerdeler, the former *Bürgermeister* of Leipzig, was in touch with the British from 1937 onwards. The Gestapo never got at him because nobody who he knew would have dreamed of talking to the Gestapo about this. This was one of the areas where social solidarity was a countervailing force against the penetration of the political police and the informant system.

INTERNAL EMIGRATION

On the other hand of course in the big cities, particularly in the big blocks of flats in which so many Germans lived, all the Gestapo needed was to enlist the caretaker in the block. So the system of social control worked both

ways. There were parts of Germany that it did not touch, and there was a whole internal migration of people who simply kept their heads down, who were to emerge in 1945–46. One of my favourite characters was the minister of education from Bavaria, a formidable woman who had been a Social Democrat and had been beaten up by the Nazis in 1933 and had simply, as they said, behaved like a submarine, gone into internal emigration, and emerged after the war. And she particularly made herself felt because she resisted the educational philosophy of the American occupying authorities, which was heavily influenced by the philosophy of peer guidance, peer relationships, that did not believe in pushing children, that did not believe in teaching them ancient languages and so on, whereas the average Bavarian parent wanted to return to the system of education that they had known before the Nazis. She, with the solid support of the Bavarian electorate, told the American education authority where to get off. And the American education authority were in the appalling position that they could only defend their version of democracy by behaving in a totally undemocratic manner and the man concerned, who was a minor school inspector from Iowa, had a very severe nervous breakdown and had to be taken off home. His successors decided that they better leave well alone because it would not look good if it got into the press.

These are the phenomena which one can use to explain the survival of political institutions in Germany. The other thing, which of course is less a part of the British tradition of law and very much a part of the German and for that matter European ones, is the limitation of executive power by law. The slogan of the German opposition of all sorts was a return to a state based on law, *Recht*, rather than on power, *Macht*. Out of this you can see the development of the very open, and in some ways remarkably democratic system in Germany that has existed since the mid-1950s. It is a logical development, but to appreciate it you have to look at German history in this century as something through which a lot of people lived. But their lives were not broken into little chunks simply because it happens to be convenient for historical periodisation to talk about Germany as Weimar Germany, Nazi Germany, post-Nazi Germany, and think of them as three periods that were totally separate from one another. It is through that period that institutions and feelings and organisations and most of all the personal relationships and alliances that were based on them survived. They survived in the Catholic parties, they survived in part of the Lutheran parties, and they survived between the socialists. And these were to be the two strongest parties which emerged in 1946: the alliance between the Evangelical Lutheran and political religious organisations and the Catholics, which was to produce the present German Christian Democrat Party, and the emergence, eventually abandoning its Marxism, of the German Social Democrat Party under Willy Brandt which was to hold power for so long in the 1970s.

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included some of the best-known members of the resistance, including the theologian Dohnanyi and others. There were Catholic members of the resistance, particularly the group at Kreisau around the family home of Helmut von Moltke, who played a part in trying to elaborate the ideas as to what a post-Hitler government should do. But the churches as a whole took as their motto the rule 'render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, unto God the things that are God's', something that allows for a division, and only attacked when they felt that their sphere was being particularly invaded. To their eternal shame of course it must be said, as it was said of the Pope during the Second World War, they never protested publicly against the measures of the Final Solution. Individuals did, the Vatican passed on to Western governments all the information that came its way, which was considerable, about the Final Solution, but paralysed by the fear of another deportation to Avignon, the Vatican remained officially silent. Not that its senior members had anything to say for Nazism at all, but Pius XII felt that to take overt political opposition to Hitler would expose Catholics throughout Europe to persecution, would not produce a positive gain and might lead to the imposition upon the Catholic Church of a Nazi Pope, or even of a position where there were two Popes at the same time, as there had been during the worst periods of the Middle Ages.

TO DENOUNCE OR PROTEST?

For the Socialist Party, what one has to remember about the German socialists is that being a socialist in Germany was not a matter of voting for a political party, it was more a