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Course Code: GE433

Course of Study: Germany & the Holocaust: Interpretations & Debates

Name of Designated Person authorising scanning: Christine Shipman

Title: Inside Nazi Germany : conformity, opposition and racism in everyday life

Name of Author: Peukert, D.

Name of Publisher: Penguin

Name of Visual Creator (as appropriate):

INSIDE NAZI GERMANY

*Conformity, Opposition, and
Racism in Everyday Life*

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translated by Richard Deveson

Yale University Press
New Haven and London

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Original German edition:

Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde:

Anpassung, Ausmerze und Aufbegehren unter dem

Nationalsozialismus

© 1982 by Bund-Verlag GmbH, Cologne

Translated from the German by Richard Deveson © 1987

First published in Great Britain 1987 by B. T. Batsford Ltd

First published in the United States 1987 by Yale University Press

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Typeset by Tameside Filmsetting Ltd

and printed in Great Britain by Anchor Brendon Ltd

Library of Congress catalog card number: 86-51431

International standard book number: 0-300-03863-1 (cloth)

0-300-04480-1 (pbk.)

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- 3 Staatsarchiv München, Bestand Oberkohle. I am grateful to Klaus Tenfelde for kindly making this picture available. Stadtbildstelle Essen.
- 4 *Berliner Illustrierte*, no. 15, 13th April 1939, p. 583. Sammlung Alte Synagoge, Essen. Stadtbildstelle Essen.
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- 6 Stadtbildstelle Essen. Sammlung Alte Synagoge, Essen.
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- 8 Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf, RW 58, Bd. 12111.
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- 16 *Krupp-Zeitschrift*, vol. 29, no. 18, 15th June 1938.
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- 17 Sammlung Schmidt, Essen.
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- 18 From Otto Helmut, *Volk in Gefahr. Der Geburtenschwund und seine Folgen für Deutschlands Zukunft*, 1934, p. 29. I am grateful to Gisela Bock for this reference: cf. Bock, 'Frauen und ihre Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus', in *Frauen in der Geschichte*, ed. Annette Kuhn and Gerhard Schneider, Düsseldorf, 1979, pp. 113-49.
- 19 From Dr. Jakob Graf, *Biologie für höhere Schulen*, vol. III for Class 5, 1943. Photo: Sammlung Schmidt, Essen.
Hif mit!, no. 5, February 1935. Bestand Würdehoff, Sammlung Schmidt, Essen.
- 20 From *Ewiges Deutschland. Monatschrift für den deutschen Volksgenossen*, March 1937, p. 31. Bestand Würdehoff, Sammlung Schmidt, Essen.
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Contradictions in the mood of the 'little man'

Joachim Fest's recent film *Hitler – A Career*, like so many films before it, shows never-ending columns of enthusiastic Germans, boys and girls, men and women. The film critic or historian quickly notes that many of these shots are posed or owe their effect to sophisticated editing, censorship or, not least, the pressure of the system of terror which made it dangerous for people not to look fired with enthusiasm. None the less, National Socialism's highly stylised portrait of itself as a society borne forward by enthusiastic mass consent has persisted in many publications until the present day, including writings by serious domestic and foreign authors. This intellectual construct, however, of a German 'national community', or *Volksgemeinschaft*, totally mobilised save for a few fragments at the margin, is contradicted by the memories of many members of the older generation. There were numerous expressions of dissatisfaction and instances of nonconformist behaviour, ranging from the deliberate refusal to cook an officially prescribed Sunday stew (*Eintopf*)* to the giving of shelter and support to victims of persecution. The intelligence networks of the German workers' parties that had been driven underground and abroad also furnished considerable contemporary evidence of dissent from the regime. Probably the most careful documentation of this mood in the other Germany – or of this other mood in Germany – was in the so-called 'green' reports: the 'Reports on Germany', reproduced on green paper, that were compiled by the exiled Social Democratic Party leadership.¹

*'National comrades' were urged, through propaganda, to eat a cheap 'one-pot' Sunday meal once a month and to donate the money thereby saved to social-welfare purposes. Collectors for the Winter Relief Fund went from door to door putting pressure on people to make their 'donations'.

Outwardly, to be sure, National Socialist society preferred to portray itself as a closed, harmonious national community. In fact, however, the internal situation reports and reports on morale drawn up by Nazi Party and police departments, which remained secret and were used only to brief selected groups in the leadership, documented very deep dissatisfaction among the population. People chafed particularly at failings in the economy and at the manifold intrusions by the Nazis into private life and long-standing customs.² This can be illustrated by some examples from the monthly situation reports compiled by the Gestapo's Düsseldorf headquarters, which controlled the western Ruhr and the northern Lower Rhine.³ In contrast to later analyses which have viewed Hitler's successes in work-creation, particularly, as responsible for winning broader popular support, the Gestapo was still being forced to record in September 1934 that 'the belief [among the jobless] that unemployment can be completely conquered is fading'. In places where the onset of rearmament had created new jobs, the fear of war became more widespread:

Nearly everywhere there is secret talk about the possibility of a war. Reliable reports therefore almost make it possible to speak of the first stages of a war psychosis,

the Düsseldorf Gestapo noted in October of the same year. Food shortages (meagre supplies of fats, for example) and price rises in basic foodstuffs such as meat, fats and potatoes led during 1934-35 to a growing wave of irritation that took the shape not only of overt expressions of discontent but also of a greater willingness on the part of the 'grumblers' to take risks: semi-public 'grumbling' (*Meckerei*) became widespread.

Clumps of people at street corners on the lookout for trouble are becoming increasingly common,

the Gestapo reported in July 1935. And in November 1935 they were driven to add:

[The general situation] is discussed daily in critical, disparaging or malicious terms - in places of work, in the shops, in public houses and on the trains and trams.

There are similar secret reports on popular morale, free of all propagandist gloss, covering the whole period of the Third Reich.

Two examples, from the early and final phases of the National Socialist regime respectively, can serve by way of illustration.

A plebiscite was held on 19th August 1934 on the question of the merging of the office of Chancellor of the Reich with that of President

(Hindenburg, the previous President, had just died) – to secure, in other words, the acclamation of the 'Führer'. In September 1934 Gestapo stations in the Prussian *Regierungsbezirke* (regional administrative districts) were forced to admit, in their reports on the month of August, that one-quarter or more of the voters, especially in Catholic areas and in working-class districts, had not voted 'Yes' but had either returned 'No' votes, spoiled their ballot papers or abstained. (In later 'elections' the regime's control mechanisms were much better-oiled; correspondingly, there was more widespread recognition that nothing could be achieved by casting a 'No' vote which would in any case not be recorded in the final results.)

On 6th May 1943 the Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*, SD) of the SS noted, in its secret 'Reports from the Reich', which were intended only for the eyes of the top state and Party leaders:⁴

[. . .] the mood of the national comrades (*Volksgenossen*) is at present calm. There is not, however, the necessary conviction and belief in final victory
[. . .]

This lack of faith is captured in a rhyme that was circulating in the Ruhr. It referred to the rally held in the Berlin Sports Palace on 18th February 1943 (and broadcast on the radio), where a specially selected audience, in response to Goebbels's repeated question, 'Do you want total war?', had fanatically roared back 'Yes'. The rhyme was addressed to the English bomber pilots (the so-called "Tommies"):

*Lieber Tommy, fliege weiter,
wir sind alle Bergarbeiter,
fliege weiter nach Berlin,
die haben alle 'Ja' geschrien.*

Tommy, please don't drop that bomb:
All we are is miners, Tom.
Berlin's where you want to drop it,
They said 'Yes', so let them cop it.

These examples shed a lot of light on the problem of dissident opinion within the Third Reich. In the first place, they show what the secret reporting on popular morale in Germany was like. Many Nazi and state agencies reported regularly to their superiors on events and views in their regions. Even though a great number of these documents have not survived, extensive supplies of source material remain which have only recently begun to be properly exploited by researchers. For the 1930s the monthly reports of the Gestapo and, in parts, those of the Presidents of *Regierungsbezirke* are particularly important. The late 1930s and the early 1940s are well documented in various areas: for example, by reports by the Trustees of Labour (*Treuhänder der Arbeit* – see p. 107 below) on the economic situation, working conditions and workers' behaviour, and reports of the Prosecutors-General (*Generalstaatsanwälte*) of the Higher Regional Courts (*Oberlandesgerichte*). The period

from the start of the war until 1944 is dealt with exhaustively by the SD reports of the type quoted above.

Secondly, our two examples reveal an important characteristic of the majority of these secret reports: namely, that they avoided the usual cosmetics of public propaganda and reported in detail on criticism and discontent. Sometimes one even has the impression that the popular mood is being painted too sombrely, either in order to give body to the demands of the authors (e.g. the Gestapo) or because the agents and informers at the grass roots were particularly prone to peddle rumours about spectacular instances of criticism. The material in the reports, however, is so varied and so consistent as between different regions and different periods (especially in Bavaria, where the sources are exceptionally rich) that it is possible, using the customary procedures for assessing sources, to form a very precise picture of everyday popular feeling and opinion. This picture can be filled out by using judicial and Gestapo documents on legal cases involving so-called 'popular opposition' (*Volksopposition*) and 'malicious offences' (*Heimtückedelikte*): the latter a type of charge which could be brought even for making a joke at the regime's expense.

Thirdly, we have the 'Reports on Germany' produced by the SOPADE (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands im Exil*), the German Social Democratic Party in exile. These documents, compiled by the Party executive committee on the basis of reports by Party representatives within the Reich, constitute a source of material for the years 1934-40 that is quite independent of the National Socialist sources and thus provides the researcher with a control. They contain an almost inexhaustible wealth of information about everyday life and the behaviour and views of ordinary people, and critical analyses that are to a large extent free of any anti-fascist wishful thinking.

Fourthly, our two examples mark off, as it were, the two ends of the spectrum of possible expressions of opposition, leaving aside outright resistance of the sort represented by, say, the underground activity of Communist and Social Democratic groups. In the 1934 plebiscite a not inconsiderable portion of the population declared its opposition quite openly at the ballot box. These voters rejected the conferment of the office of Führer on Hitler and in this sense came out against the political system as a whole. This inference cannot be drawn equally unequivocally from the many expressions of criticism and discontent in daily life recorded in later years, as is borne out by the earlier-quoted SD report from 1943, with its stress on the 'calm' mood of the people despite their lack of conviction. In other words, these later manifestations of criticism apply first and foremost only to specific cases: to the partial aspect of social reality to which they directly refer.

Fifthly, however, the satirical rhyme from the Ruhr reveals some recurring basic features of everyday criticism, or 'grumbling', as Goebbels tried to denigrate it in a campaign as early as 1934. We shall try to describe and classify these features now. The expressions of popular criticism and discontent recorded in the reports on morale show similarities and differences as regards causes, subject-matter and forms of behaviour.

Frequently, satirical verses, rumours and catchphrases gave voice to what people felt to be a genuine split between themselves 'down below' (in our example, the miners) and the bigwigs 'on top' (the yea-sayers in the capital); or, to put it another way, between those who had to endure total war and those who had brought it about.

In the joke or the rumour a complicated political process, or the analysis of an entire social structure, could be reduced to a significant concrete detail that stood symbolically for the whole. This symbolic function of the anecdote was the basis of the 'truth value' even of many fairly far-fetched rumours, which circulated more widely as people became less able to believe in Goebbels's propaganda. The ironic tension between explicitly stating the detail and symbolically implying the whole likewise applied to a joke that was going the rounds in 1943: that there would soon be more butter again, because the pictures of Hitler were going to be 'creamed off'.^{*5} This was a pointed symbolic linking of the problem of food shortages with the decline of the Führer myth.

Criticism of police-state controls was expressed predominantly in small-scale ways (through rumours, jokes, unofficial whispering campaigns, news from abroad passed on in confidence), and it made use of the manifold informal channels of everyday communication: chats during working breaks, when shopping or in the pub; conversations with neighbours, friends and relatives. As early as October 1934 the Cologne Gestapo had ascertained that popular discontent was

in no sense an assumption, but an indubitable and established fact. The latter point must be emphasised, because this mood of depression about the economy cannot readily be detected in a public, outward sense. The relevant elements of the population lack the courage to mount public demonstrations or other such forms of action; they dare not engage in public criticism for fear of denunciation and the informer system. In view of its breadth and depth, we must not be indifferent as regards this discontent. The danger that the dissatisfaction may ultimately develop into opposition to the state

*[A pun on *entrahmt*, which means 'taken from their frames' as well as 'creamed off' or 'skimmed'. (Transl.)]

and the movement is a real one. Propaganda deployed by Communist elements at this juncture will increase the danger.⁶

An important contributory factor in fostering this 'second public opinion', as a Gestapo official termed it in 1934,⁷ was the opportunity of picking up foreign news broadcasts, thanks to improvements in radio sets. Here the principal tool of Goebbels's propaganda, which had actually been systematically promoted, produced highly unwelcome side-effects. Despite harsh penalties (during the war a so-called 'broadcasting crime' could be a capital offence), this consequence could not really be prevented. Although we should not overestimate the immediate political and ideological influence of Radio Moscow, the BBC and other stations, their news broadcasts (and deliberately disseminated rumours) at least undermined confidence in the German news media, especially as military reports in the second half of the war became increasingly misleading.

The Security Service (SD) of the SS reported on 22nd January 1943, for example:⁸

It is clear from a wealth of general and detailed reports that the effectiveness of the public media of guidance and control is at present very seriously impaired. Among many reasons, the principal one that may be suggested is as follows:

The national comrades have the feeling that when events take a negative course the public media of guidance and control always put an 'official face' on them. A condition has thus developed whereby, under such circumstances, considerable sections of the nation no longer regard the press as the best source of instruction, but assemble 'their own picture' from rumours, stories told by soldiers and people with 'political connections', letters from the front and the like. Hence often the most nonsensical rumours are accepted with an astonishing lack of criticism.

Compared with the dissemination of news from foreign radio broadcasts and the spread of indigenous rumours and jokes, the influence of information documents produced by the political resistance was depressingly small.⁹ In any case, such documents circulated in larger numbers only in the years 1933-35 (though then often in tens of thousands). Distributing them was a much riskier business than listening to the radio within the secrecy of one's own four walls. Production, which meant getting hold of paper, stencils, typewriters and duplicating machines, became more and more difficult; and the disparity between the risks to life and liberty involved in distributing the documents and the tiny effect they were likely to have on their diminishing numbers of readers became steadily more demoralising with the years. To this extent the decline in the number of resistance documents should not be seen as implying a general forswearing of

opposition and resistance, although there certainly were such causal links in specific cases. Opposition within the totalitarian state, in fact, found its best expression in informal activities which were hard for the Gestapo and the law to get to grips with.

Even though we may be convinced, in the light of the documents mentioned, that there was far more criticism and disaffection during the Third Reich than the unitary façade of propaganda might lead one to expect, there are still plenty of questions concerning the historical significance of this body of data:

– Which social groups did the critical voices actually come from? Were critical attitudes concentrated in certain groups, while other groups remained predominantly loyal?

– Was the criticism that found expression directed against the regime as such, or against particular measures? How can we establish a correct weighting of the occurrence of criticism, on the one hand, and approval of the regime, on the other?

– Is it possible to trace definite shifts in public opinion over the twelve years of Nazi rule?

– What exactly is the relationship between the relatively frequent occurrence of critical, oppositional *opinions* and the manifestly less frequent occurrence of oppositional *activity*?

To answer these questions, let us first see what are the main themes that keep cropping up in the reports on public opinion.

First and foremost are constant variations on the theme of dissatisfaction with oppressive living conditions and poor material provision. Children in Schwelm in Westphalia sang in public a dialect rhyme that their parents had composed in secret:

<i>Wir hant jetzt einen Führer.</i>	We've got a Leader now, they say,
<i>Et wird ok alles düerer.</i>	Bread's gone up, but not your pay.
<i>Bald gift et groten Krach.</i>	Soon the lot'll blow sky-high,
<i>Dann sagt wi widder goden Tag.</i>	Then once more we'll say 'Good- bye'*. ¹⁰

This was a commentary on the catastrophic price rises in basic foodstuffs during 1934–35. Even the Dortmund Gestapo, which was responsible for southern Westphalia, was driven to comment in August 1934:

The broad masses in the industrial district live for the most part on bread and potatoes. Such price rises must therefore be simply catastrophic for morale.¹¹

*Instead of 'Heil Hitler!'

In fact, prices of meat, butter, fats and oils in this region had risen between 50 and 100 per cent, locally, above 1933 levels by December 1935; potatoes cost between 50 and 70 per cent more in 1935 than they had the year before. On top of this there were considerable fluctuations in supply and periodic shortages of essential goods.

Although shortages eased somewhat in the following years, bottlenecks were a constant source of criticism. It is evident, indeed, that the Nazi leadership had learned from the hunger unrest of the First World War and accordingly tried deliberately to keep supplies at acceptable levels. To this end it even used up foreign exchange during the pre-war period that had really been earmarked for rearmament, and from 1939-40 onwards it attempted to keep German rations as high as possible by plundering the occupied territories. Nevertheless, daily provisions for the mass of the population were tight in the Third Reich, were repeatedly disrupted and were therefore a frequent cause for the voicing of discontent. This fact must be borne particularly in mind, since in the memories of many contemporaries the pre-war National Socialist years have been retouched to seem an epoch of recovery and prosperity. This perception owes most to a retrospective comparison with the lean years of the Depression and the war (and immediate post-war period). At the time, the thirties were viewed in a far less optimistic light. The fact that there was a *tendency* in the direction of economic improvement was welcomed, and hopes of recovery were pinned on it, but criticism of crucial and persisting shortages was sustained.

The second recurrent legend, that Hitler rapidly succeeded in generating employment, is a reflection more of Nazi propaganda than of the reality of the Third Reich. Many people were impressed for a time in 1933 by the barrage of propaganda to the effect that the nation was now engaged in the decisive 'battle for work', but the elimination of unemployment in fact proceeded at a sluggish pace. The publicly celebrated fall in the number of unemployed for 1933-34 was caused by a mild upturn in economic activity that had already become apparent in 1932, as well as by the 'voluntary' detailing of unemployed workers into Labour Service (*Arbeitsdienst*) camps and so-called emergency labour camps, where they were drafted to work mainly on public prestige projects for minimal wages. In any case, the statistics were extensively manipulated. The sobering reality was becoming increasingly recognised by 1934, and matters remained thus until the inauguration of the big rearmament projects of 1936-37, which did indeed generate full employment: a critical juncture, noted in many morale reports.

In addition, even enthusiastic supporters of National Socialism realised in the course of the year 1934 that many of the promises made in the NSDAP programme and repeated by Party speakers were not being

honoured. Certainly, many National Socialists had been able to exploit the upheavals caused by the seizure of power and wangle jobs for themselves, thereby satisfying their own personal ambitions or at any rate securing steady employment and providing for their material needs. But many NSDAP members, and especially members of the SA, were disappointed too: either because the intertwined apparatuses of Party and state still preserved jobs for enough representatives of the bureaucracy and the old elites to provoke the hatred and envy of the lower-level Nazis who were done out of them; or because everyday routine even under totalitarian rule gave the Brownshirt rebels of the street battles of 1932 relatively little scope for action;¹² or even because not a few of the Nazi leaders who had attained the dignity of office now turned their powers and privileges as fully to account as the 'bigwigs' had standardly been accused of doing under the Weimar Republic. Rumours about careerism, special privileges, extravagance and corruption among the 'Brownshirt bigwigs' became regular topics of popular grievance.

On the other hand, records of public opinion concerning the Nazis' use of terror against political dissidents were astonishingly infrequent, even though in 1933, at least, the press carried very detailed reports of persecutory measures taken against Communists, Social Democrats and trade unionists.¹³ There are two possible explanations of this silence in face of the terror against the left. First, many supporters of former centre and right-wing parties welcomed the fact that the National Socialists were cleaning out the 'Reds', and they were prepared to put up with or sanction terrorist 'excesses' in the process. Secondly, however, open discussion of anti-left terror measures was far riskier, in view of its clear political subject-matter, than talking about, say, scarcities of food. Many people who did not condone the terror against the left kept silent for fear of being persecuted themselves.

Public opinion as regards the campaign against the churches was another matter. Critical comments about restrictions on church institutions and activities, about the persecution of priests and active parishioners and about the anti-church stand taken by Nazi leaders make up a large part of the morale reports, especially in regions where Catholicism was still deeply rooted in people's daily lives or in the strongholds of the Protestant 'Bekennende Kirche' (Confessional Church), which was opposed to the regime on religious issues.¹⁴ That the anti-church campaign caused so much stronger a reaction within public opinion than the incomparably more brutal attacks on the left is mainly due to the fact that there was less of a taboo against talking about the former area of conflict: church activities that were still permitted overlapped in various ways with activities that were forbidden or

persecuted. In addition, impeding a Corpus Christi procession, say, was a real incursion into the lives of practically all the inhabitants of a strongly Catholic area, whatever the inhabitants' individual political beliefs. Dismay was correspondingly more general, and people made no bones about their criticism.

Popular attitudes towards the persecution of the Jews were inconsistent.¹⁵ In places where National Socialism was able to attach itself to deeply rooted anti-Semitic traditions (often with a religious foundation), the racially-based anti-Semitism of the Nazis also found receptive audiences, though on a much lesser scale than might have been expected in view of the central role played by hatred of the Jews in Nazi ideology. The mass of the population, however, was not induced into actively supporting the persecution of the Jews; nor, on the other hand, was it moved to criticise it on grounds of principle or indeed to show solidarity with those who were being persecuted and defamed. Hence anti-Semitism was in no sense, as some historians and journalists have supposed, an essential instrument in integrating and mobilising the population in a National Socialist direction. Yet the persecution of the Jews provoked wide-scale popular criticism (i.e. something more than the few acts of solidarity performed by individuals) only when the material interests of the majority group within the population seemed to be adversely affected. The Nazis' exclusion of Jewish cattle dealers from doing business, for example, was effected only with difficulty, since many farmers clung obstinately to their traditional and financially rewarding business contacts.

Only one event really exposed the anti-Semitism of the National Socialists to almost unanimous public obloquy and indignation: the *Reichskristallnacht* pogrom of 10th November 1938.¹⁶ This is shown, at any rate, both by secret opinion reports compiled by police and government agencies and by information smuggled abroad by socialist informants for the 'Reports on Germany' of the Social Democrats in exile (SOPADE).

*From the Reports on Germany, SOPADE, November 1938*¹⁷

The brutal measures against the Jews have caused great indignation among the population. People spoke their minds quite openly, and many Aryans were arrested as a result. When it became known that a Jewish woman had been taken from childbed, even a police official said that this was too much: 'Where is Germany heading, if these methods are being used?' As a result, he was arrested too. [. . .] After the Jews, who are going to be the next victims? That is what people are asking. Will it be the Catholics? Or will an emergency general capital levy be imposed? [. . .] In the whole [. . .] region there is great anger at this vandalism. One clear example of this was when the SA smashed up a shop after dark and were pelted with stones from an

orchard opposite, under cover of the darkness [...] Many people are looking after the Jewish women and children and have put them up in their homes. Housewives are shopping for the Jewish women, because it is now forbidden to sell food to them. It has also been established that the violence of the measures taken varied considerably from place to place. [...] But among the people the action was certainly a cause of great intimidation. [...] People no longer dared to speak so openly. Everyone realised that the Nazis have got the power to do whatever they want. [...] The protests by the people of Berlin against the robberies and arson and the evil deeds done to Jewish men, women and children of all ages were plain. They ranged from looks of contempt and gestures of disgust to overt words of revulsion and harsh abuse.

From the Reports on Germany, SOPADE, December 1938¹⁸

The broad mass of the people has not condoned the destruction, but we should nevertheless not overlook the fact that there are people among the working class who do not defend the Jews. There are certain circles where you are not very popular if you speak disparagingly about the recent incidents. The anger was not, therefore, as unanimous as all that. Berlin: the population's attitude was not fully unanimous. When the Jewish synagogue was burning [...] a large number of women could be heard saying, 'That's the right way to do it – it's a pity there aren't any more Jews inside, that would be the best way to smoke out the whole lousy lot of them.' – No one dared to take a stand against these sentiments. [...] If there has been any speaking out in the Reich against the Jewish pogroms, the excesses of arson and looting, it has been in Hamburg and the neighbouring Elbe district. People from Hamburg are not generally anti-Semitic, and the Hamburg Jews have been assimilated far more than the Jews in other parts of the Reich. They have intermarried with Christians up to the highest levels of officialdom and the wholesale and shipping trades.

From a report by the Heilbrunn Gendarmerie station, 26th November 1938¹⁹

Some have welcomed the actions taken against the Jews; others watched them calmly; others again are sorry for the Jews, though they do not necessarily express this openly.

From the monthly report of the Regierungspräsident of Lower Bavaria and the Upper Palatinate, 8th December 1938²⁰

The Jewish assassination of the German Embassy counsellor in Paris gave rise to sheer anger in all sections of the population. There was a general expectation that the national government would intervene. The legal measures directed against the Jews were therefore fully understood. What was correspondingly much less well understood, by the bulk of the population, was the reason for the manner in which the spontaneous actions against the Jews were carried out; indeed, these were condemned, including widely within the Party. The damage to shop-windows, merchandise and furniture was seen as an unnecessary destruction of valuable items which in

the last analysis were part of the national wealth of Germany, and it was viewed as a flagrant contradiction of the goals of the Four-Year Plan, especially the salvage campaigns that are being conducted at this very time. Fears were also voiced that the destructive urges of the masses might be reawakened by these means. In addition, the incidents enabled unnecessary sympathy for the Jews to come to the surface, in both town and countryside.

*From the monthly report of the Regierungspräsident of Lower Franconia, 9th December 1938*²¹

[. . .] The punitive measures, particularly the imposition of a financial penalty, have been generally approved. A majority, especially among the rural population, regrets that the actions have caused valuable items to be destroyed which, in view of our raw-material position, could more appropriately have benefited the community as a whole. A further complaint was that the action was continued even after the decree by the Reich Propaganda Minister ordering its immediate cessation and, in particular, that foodstuffs were deliberately destroyed. In Oberelsbach, *Bezirksamt* Bad Neustadt an der Saale, 3½ cwt. of flour were thrown on to a manure heap and a crate of eggs from storage was thrown on to the road. According to one *Bezirksamt* report, during the subsequent *Eintopf* collection many national comrades declared that since so much property had been destroyed, they felt unable to contribute to the collection.

By contrast, the public labelling of the Jews with the yellow star, the deportations to the east and the exterminations in the gas chambers left no great mark in the public-opinion reports. Part of the explanation for this is the fact that information about the mass exterminations in the east was made available only very circumspectly (and hence was not easily understood, even by the SD's and Gestapo's informants). Nevertheless, it was possible – except for those who preferred to keep their ears and eyes shut – to learn at least the fact of mass murder, even if not all the details, from foreign radio broadcasts and from rumours that percolated through.²² There seem to be several reasons why public concern and dismay had significantly diminished, in comparison with reaction to the *Kristallnacht* pogroms. The atrocities of the concentration camps did not take place in Germans' immediate sphere of experience; people preferred not to believe such grim reports until their truth had been clearly confirmed; and, not least, the growing everyday distress caused by bombing and by fears for relatives at the front had anaesthetised people to the sufferings of the Jews, who as a population group had long since been displaced from the immediate field of vision of the Germans in any case.

Foreign policy was for a long time one of the regime's particular assets in the balance-sheet of public opinion. The step-by-step dismantling of the provisions of the Versailles Treaty was felt by a wide

majority to be a reparation for the injustice that the victorious First World War powers had inflicted on the Germans. Even the SOPADE reports, whose contributors came from within anti-fascist (and mainly working-class) circles, repeatedly confirmed the widespread prevalence of nationalistic thinking. The SOPADE report for January 1935 concerned the plebiscite in the Saar. Since Versailles, the Saar had been administered by the League of Nations. In 1935 the population was able to vote, in a free election, for retention of the *status quo* or for union with either Germany or France. The SPD and KPD jointly urged the former. Over 90 per cent, however, freely voted for '*Heim ins Reich*' ('Back to the Reich').²³

In western Germany the National Socialists have played the plebiscite result up into a big national celebration. The great mass of industrial workers let themselves be swept along on the tide of national triumph.

Reaction to the German march into Austria in March 1938 was described by a Breslau Social Democrat:

On Friday, as I followed the decisive blow-by-blow story on the radio, I thought: 'This means war. In a few hours enemy planes will probably be flying over Breslau.' I couldn't bear to stay in my flat any more. The scene on the streets had completely changed. SA, SS, HJ, BdM were on the streets in large numbers. Although people didn't yet know how it had all happened, they were shouting in a sort of frenzy, 'Heil Hitler! Austria is ours! Sieg Heil to our brave soldiers,' and so on. The atmosphere was similar to that on 30th January 1933, when Hitler became Reich Chancellor. Everyone was carried away by this atmosphere. Only gradually did groups form here and there, and people began to discuss what had happened. You could hear people saying that war was now on the way and that they were going to go home and pack and move out to the villages. But these were isolated voices. The general opinion in the groups was: 'Let's face it, Hitler is a great man, he knows what he wants and the world is scared of him.'

Conversations the next day followed the same trains of thought. Hitler's prestige has risen enormously again and he is now practically idolised. The objection that the western powers might still intervene and issue Germany with an ultimatum was laughed out of court. The western powers simply daren't do anything against Germany, and even if they do, Germany is strong enough to get its own way.

I have discovered one thing about the attitude of the population: if Germany were to become embroiled in a war today, the whole nation would march. And it would probably be a long time before the country began to have second thoughts about the war.

The general approval accorded to the reintroduction of conscription, the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, the Austrian *Anschluss* and the later annexation of the Sudetenland marked the closest convergence

between the hopes and expectations of the population and the self-portrayal of the regime and of its 'Leader', Adolf Hitler. The summing-up of the popular mood made by the Dortmund Gestapo in July 1935 is quite fair:

Thus recognition of the great achievements of the Führer in the sphere of foreign policy [. . .] is coupled with a widespread and unmistakable lack of enthusiasm as regards economic matters.²⁴

But a closer analysis of public opinion also shows that the population followed Hitler's revisionist foreign-policy line less unhesitatingly and unreservedly than the enthusiastic acclamation of National Socialist successes may perhaps imply. On the people's part there was always the unvoiced doubt whether it was possible to fulfil these various demands without provoking the danger of world war. During the crisis over the proposed annexation of the Sudetenland in September 1938, misgivings and deep-seated fears of war were even articulated relatively openly in the street, on public transport and in pubs and factories. The National Socialists' reaction to these amazingly plain manifestations of disfavour was to swivel their propaganda round through 180 degrees. Whereas Hitler had hitherto been acclaimed as the statesman of peace who sought only to restore Germany to equality of status, there was now a switch to accustoming the population to the idea that war was an acceptable ('ultimate') means of attaining a position of Pan-German dominance. None the less, popular response to the outbreak of war on 1st September 1939 was muted. In particular, there was none of the uncontrolled enthusiasm that had marked August 1914.

This unenthusiastic mood picked up from time to time as German troops made successful advances in the so-called 'Blitzkrieg' campaigns. The high point of morale was reached after the occupation of Paris and the news of the conclusion of an armistice. Longings for peace were combined with feelings of triumph over the 'ancestral enemy' who had remained undefeated through the four years of the First World War.

*From a report on morale, Security Service (SD) of the SS, 24th June 1940*²⁵
Reports from all areas of the Reich concur in yielding the following picture on this matter at the present time. Under the impact of the great political events, and enthralled by the military successes, the entire German people now has an inner unanimity as never before, and there is a deep sense of unity between the military and home fronts. Opposition groups have had the ground knocked completely from under their feet. Everyone is looking with gratitude and confidence to the Führer and to his armed forces as they speed from victory to victory. Opposition activity is met by fierce condemnation on all hands. The population's healthy will to resist is in the ascendancy and

is effective proof against inflammatory and defeatist influences. These are either completely ignored or are angrily condemned.

From a report on morale, SD, 27th June 1940

The tumultuous excitement of previous weeks has changed, following the armistice negotiations and the subsequent cessation of hostilities, into a mood of celebration marked by quiet, joyful pride and gratitude to the Führer and the armed forces.

This deep joy found particular expression with the announcement of the news of the implementation of the armistice agreement. Flags were hoisted everywhere, even during the night, and many national comrades hurried out on to the streets and squares to take part in various demonstrations of thanksgiving. Some had to return home disappointed, since no appropriate arrangements had been made, although they had in fact been expected. Only a few failed to seize the opportunity of the night-time celebration. The broadcast was even heard in air-raid shelters, since, much to the people's annoyance, there were attacks by English aircraft at the very time of the announcement.

The secret reports by the SD continued to record upswings of morale following the various German victories, but they also regularly noted unease, as hopes for peace were shattered, and a basic sense of uncertainty as to the ultimate outcome of the war.²⁶ The invasion of the Soviet Union on 22nd June 1941 and, especially, the defeats at Moscow and Stalingrad in the two following winters increased the numbers of those who felt that the war was lost and wanted it to end. Disapproval remained primarily passive, however; little trace of determined resistance, not to mention revolt, could be detected. Three reasons for this can be cited. First, the Nazi apparatus of terror remained intact until the final days of the war and stifled at birth all forms of individual, let alone collective, rebellion. Secondly, the strains and burdens of the war – the fatigue of industrial workers, in particular, employed on 10- or 12-hour shifts, and of the population in general, subjected to night-time bombing – created a climate of resignation that led people, not to rebel, as British strategy had calculated, but merely to wait passively for the war to be over. Thirdly, long years of experience of living under the Third Reich had given rise in any case to a drastic atomisation of social relations and this now impeded the communal effort that would have been needed for resistance.

The passivity of the German people in the latter stages of the war thus points up again the basically limited character of the so-called 'popular opposition'. Most of the 'grumbling' remained fruitless and failed to lead to active opposition. Taken together, the targets of all the adverse expressions of opinion did indeed cover virtually all aspects of life, but as a rule each criticism related only to a clearly defined

individual case and did not vitiate a person's assent to other policies of the regime. Likewise, the critics themselves came from virtually all groups within the population, but they did not manage to achieve a true collective identity as an opposition; they remained isolated from one another, held back by passivity or preoccupied by special interests.

The SOPADE reports on Germany had tried several times to assess the extent of the 'grumbling', the degree of serious opposition and the level of support for the regime. The report for November 1935 noted:²⁷

Discontent has increased again and is more extensive than last year's grumbling [*'Meckerei'*], but it is no stronger than before. It is expressed more openly, but it has just as little political content. People say, 'Things can't go on like this' and they also say, 'Things can't be worse after Hitler', but behind these phrases there is neither the will to overturn the system nor any conception of what should take its place.

This being so, and given past experience, when waves of grumbling have always been followed by periods of general disappointment and disillusionment, we must again face the possibility that the present very widespread grumbling may switch round into very general indifference and resignation. After 'Things really can't go on like this' there is: 'What's the point, the Nazis are dug in much too tightly'. These extraordinary swings of mood, which are typical of Hitler's Germany, place great strain on the mental strength and resilience of everyone involved in illegal opposition.

*From SOPADE report for February 1938*²⁸

To the extent that the attitude of a whole nation can ever be reduced to a formula, we can assert roughly the following three points:

1 Hitler has got the approval of a majority of the nation on two vital questions: he has created work and he has made Germany strong.

2 There is widespread dissatisfaction with prevailing conditions, but it affects only the worries of daily life and has not so far led to fundamental hostility to the regime as far as most people are concerned.

3 Doubts about the continued survival of the regime are widespread, but so is the sense of helplessness as to what might replace it.

The third point seems to us to be the most significant, as far as the present situation in Germany is concerned. Despite the regime's enlargement of its political and economic power, and despite the far-reaching approval this has gained for it among wide sections of the nation, there is a feeling of uncertainty about the future. Whether this feeling springs from worries about a war, or is a result of shortages, the regime has not so far succeeded in eradicating the idea that its rule may only mark a period of transition. This point is more important, as far as the regime's inner strength is concerned, than the recording of temporary oscillations between satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Nor does it contradict our observations that the political indifference of the masses is on the increase.

If we complement our use of these morale reports by examining the

vast number of documents covering police and judicial proceedings relating to anti-state offences, then it becomes clear that the picture of a harmonious 'national community cannot be sustained.'²⁹

This wealth of evidence of the negative underlying attitude of a large section of the population – indeed, a majority of the population, if all separate aspects are added together – must not be built up to look like a secret national resistance. Diverse forms of criticism and 'grumbling' were quite capable of existing side by side with partial recognition of the regime or at least with passive acceptance of authority. What the secret public-opinion reports document is not that there was a broad and pervasive 'popular opposition' but, above all, that the propaganda image of widespread radiant enthusiasm was mere window-dressing. In actuality, after the seizure of power the dynamism of the National Socialist movement petered out in rows about jobs and influence and ritualistic parades and rallies devoid of real emotional participation. The mass of non-Nazis fell back into passive discontent, querulous resignation and privacy-seeking accommodation with the regime.

'Grumbling' and the rumour system were thus indicators, not of an extensive 'popular opposition', but of the deep fragmentation of public opinion into distinct spheres: the controlled (and increasingly discredited) sphere of the Reich Ministry of Public Information and Propaganda; citizens' outward attestations of loyalty within the public domain; the internal opinion-gathering processes of the authorities and Nazi organisations; and uncensored private conversations. Since these different spheres of communication had little to do with one another, and indeed were often in direct conflict, the competition between them reduced the likelihood that realistic views of the situation would be formed or that any rational opinions might emerge at all. Criteria for the truth of statements and for the veracity and credibility of opinions became unclear. It was hence inevitable that the ability of the population to assess the true position – and, ultimately, to act – should suffer. As in other social spheres, the effect of National Socialism on public and private communication was ultimately destructive.

When analysing the reports on public opinion and morale during the Third Reich, we should pay serious attention not only to indicators of discontent but also to instances of clear-cut approval of particular actions of the regime.³⁰ So far we have dealt especially with public and semi-private expressions of popular opinion, as documented by a vast range of morale reports. We have seen that the political effectiveness of the relatively large potential for discontent and criticism was restricted in double fashion: on the one hand, because people expressing critical views were isolated from one another and were preoccupied with separate individual interests, and on the other because partial criticisms

arising on an everyday basis were often tempered by varieties of approval of what the regime was doing. In order, then, to assess the relative significance of criticism and consent, we must examine the life-situations and everyday experience of 'ordinary people' more closely. In doing so, however, we immediately confront a major problem. As mentioned, we possess essentially two large bodies of source material on public opinion: the secret morale reports, and the documents of court cases and police investigations involving oppositional activities and opinions (the so-called 'malicious offences').³¹ The former kinds of source are concerned with more generalised analyses of the public mood, but in the process tend to leave obscure the specific, tangible individuals involved and the critics' social backgrounds. The documents of the cases of 'malicious offences', on the other hand, while yielding personal information about the accused, their origins and the social situations within which their acts of criticism arose, relate only to isolated cases coming to the attention of the courts and leave open the question how far they truly reflect overall opinion and mood: in the village concerned, on the worker's housing estate, among the small artisans, and so on. We can attempt to escape this difficulty by suggesting comparative analyses of the two categories of source – that is, making a closer approximation to the complex historical reality by viewing it from both directions at once.

Nevertheless, it must still be stressed that reconstructions of forms of social perception and behaviour can only ever be approximations: they are no substitute for the direct encounter with the individual case, with the unique experiences of flesh-and-blood individuals living their daily lives during the Third Reich. Such individual experiences have to some degree been documented in autobiographical interviews; some people have come forward with their own written sketches and accounts. Police and court documents can help to fill out these kinds of case history.

Both types of access to historical data, the generalising approach centred on social and political structures and the individualised approach tracing people's everyday experiences in all their complexity and inconsistency, are indispensable in the formation of a full and impartial judgement.

Geschichte des preußisch-deutschen Nationalstaates', *Historische Zeitschrift*, no. 217 (1973), pp. 584-632.

46 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York, 1965.

3 Contradictions in the mood of the 'little man', pages 49-66

1 *Deutschland-Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands (SOPADE) 1934-1940*, ed. Klaus Behnken (7 vols.), Frankfurt, 1980. See also: Michael Voges, 'Klassenkampf in der "Betriebsgemeinschaft". Die "Deutschland-Berichte" der Sopade (1934-1940) als Quelle zum Widerstand der Industriearbeiter im Dritten Reich', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, no. XXI (1981), pp. 329-84. A concise analysis of popular mood based on regional sources is given by Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich*, Oxford, 1983.

2 Martin Broszat, Elke Fröhlich and Falk Wiesemann (eds.), *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, vol. 1, *Soziale Lage und politisches Verhalten der Bevölkerung im Spiegel vertraulicher Berichte*, Munich and Vienna, 1977; Martin Broszat and Elke Fröhlich (eds.), *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, vols. 2-4, *Herrschaft und Gesellschaft im Konflikt*, Munich and Vienna, 1979-81; Robert Thevoz, Heinz Brannig and Cecilia Lowenthal-Hansel (eds.), *Pommern 1934/35 im Spiegel von Gestapo-Lageberichten und Sachakten* (2 vols.), Cologne and Berlin, 1974; Franz Josef Heyen (ed.), *Nationalsozialismus im Alltag. Quellen zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus vornehmlich im Raum Mainz-Koblenz-Trier*, Boppard, 1967; Bernd Vollmer (ed.), *Volksopposition im Polizeistaat*, Stuttgart, 1957; Jörg Schadt (ed.), *Verfolgung und Widerstand unter dem Nationalsozialismus in Baden*, Stuttgart, 1976.

3 The following extracts from secret monthly situation reports by Gestapo stations in Rhine-Westphalia during 1934-35 are taken from: Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin-Dahlem, Rep. 90P; quoted also in Detlev Peukert, *Die KPD im Widerstand. Verfolgung und Untergrundarbeit an Rhein und Ruhr 1933-1945*, Wuppertal, 1980, pp. 204-18.

4 Heinz Boberach (ed.), *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, Neuwied, 1965, pp. 387-90.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 418.

6 Peukert, *Die KPD im Widerstand*, op. cit., p. 208.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 214.

8 Boberach, op. cit., p. 211.

9 An impressive literary account of this situation is: Hans Fallada, *Jeder stirbt für sich allein*, Reinbek, 1964.

10 Peukert, *Die KPD im Widerstand*, op. cit., p. 215.

11 Ibid., pp. 209f.

12 Fischer, op. cit.; Jamin, op. cit.; Christoph Schmidt, op. cit., pp. 37-43; Ulrich Klein, 'SA-Terror und Bevölkerung in Wuppertal 1933-34', in Peukert and Reulecke, op. cit., pp. 45-61.

13 Ian Kershaw, 'Alltägliches und Außeralltägliches: Ihre Bedeutung für die Volksmeinung', in *ibid.*, pp. 273-92.

14 Heinz Boberach (ed.), *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo über Kirche und Kirchengemeinde in Deutschland 1934-1944*, Mainz, 1971; Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, op. cit., pp. 156-223; Jeremy Noakes, 'The Oldenburg Crucifix Struggle of November 1936: A Case Study of Opposition in the Third Reich', in Peter D. Stachura (ed.), *The Shaping of the Nazi State*, London, 1978, pp. 210-33.

15 Ian Kershaw, 'The Persecution of the Jews and German Popular Opinion in the Third Reich', in *Leo Baeck Year Book*, vol. xxvi, 1981; Falk Wiesemann, 'Juden auf dem Lande: die wirtschaftliche Ausgrenzung des jüdischen Viehhändlers in Bayern', in Peukert and Reulecke, op. cit., pp. 381-96. Cf., however, the account of the village of Rhina in Hesse: Peter O. Chotjewitz and Renate Chotjewitz-Häfner, *Die mit Tränen säen*, Munich, 1980. For the more traditional interpretation see Lucy Davidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians*, Cambridge, Mass./London, 1981.

16 William S. Allen, 'Die deutsche Öffentlichkeit und die "Reichskristallnacht" - Konflikte zwischen Werthierarchie und Propaganda im Dritten Reich', in Peukert and Reulecke, op. cit., pp. 397-412.

17 *Deutschland-Berichte der SOPADE*, op. cit., vol. 5, pp. 1205ff.

18 Ibid., pp. 1352ff.

19 Quoted in Kershaw, 'The Persecution of the Jews', op. cit., p. 328.

20 *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 473.

21 Ibid., p. 475.

22 Herbert Obenaus, 'Haben sie wirklich nichts gewußt? Ein Tagebuch zum Alltag von 1933-1945 gibt eine deutliche Antwort', *Journal für Geschichte*, vol. 2 (1980), no. 1, pp. 26-31.

23 *Deutschland-Berichte der SOPADE*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 10; subsequent quotation from *ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 267.

24 Peukert, *Die KPD im Widerstand*, op. cit., p. 210. On public opinion and Nazi propaganda, see especially: Jutta Sywottek, *Mobilmachung für den totalen Krieg. Die propagandistische Vorbereitung der deutschen Bevölkerung auf den Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Opladen, 1976.

25 Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, op. cit., pp. 77f., subsequent quotation from *ibid.*, p. 79.

26 Cf. also Marlis Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans*, Athens, Ohio, 1977; Franz Dröge, *Der zerredete Widerstand*, Düsseldorf, 1970; Hans-Jochen Gamm, *Der Flüsterwitz im Dritten Reich*, Munich, 1978.

27 *Deutschland-Berichte der SOPADE*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 1363f.

28 *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 138f.

29 National Socialist propaganda also acknowledged this; cf.: Jutta Sywottek, op. cit.; W. S. Allen, 'Die deutsche Öffentlichkeit und die "Reichskristallnacht"', op. cit.

30 Ian Kershaw, *Der Hitler-Mythos. Volksmeinung und Propaganda im Dritten Reich*, Stuttgart, 1980.

31 Peter Hüttenberger, 'Heimtückefälle vor dem Sondergericht München 1933-1939', in *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, op. cit., vol. 4, pp. 435-526.

4 The Führer myth and consent in everyday life, pages 67-80

1 Kershaw, 'Alltägliches', op. cit.

2 *Deutschland-Berichte der SOPADE*, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 310.

3 *Ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 28of.

4 Based on calculations by Tim W. Mason, *Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft*, op. cit., p. 61. For the subsequent statistics, see also the contributions by Ludwig, Petzina, Volkmann, Fischer, Milward and Mason in: Friedrich Forstmeier and Hans-Erich Volkmann (eds.), *Wirtschaft und Rüstung am Vorabend des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, Düsseldorf, 1975.

5 Hasso Spode, "'Der deutsche Arbeiter reist". Massentourismus im Dritten Reich', in Gerhard Huck (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte der Freizeit*, Wuppertal, 1980, pp. 281-306.

6 Jürgen Reulecke, 'Die Fahne mit dem goldenen Zahnrad: der "Leistungskampf der deutschen Betriebe" 1937-1939', in Peukert and Reulecke, op. cit., pp. 245-70; Chup Friemert, *Produktionästhetik im Faschismus. Das Amt 'Schönheit der Arbeit' von 1933-1939*, Munich, 1980.

7 Hans Dieter Schäfer, *Das gespaltene Bewußtsein*, Munich, 1981, p. 151.

8 *Deutschland-Berichte der SOPADE*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 198ff.

9 Kershaw, *Hitler-Mythos*, op. cit.

10 *Deutschland-Berichte*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 10.

11 Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, op. cit., p. 239.

12 The role of the concept of 'normal times' in everyday consciousness and in autobiographical memoirs has been examined by Uli Herbert in the Essen project, 'Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet 1930-1960'.