

INSIDE NAZI GERMANY

*Conformity, Opposition, and
Racism in Everyday Life*

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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.

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The Führer myth and consent in everyday life

After the Second World War was over, and Germany underwent Allied occupation, it was regularly asked why there had been no repetition of the revolutionary events of November 1918. The uniform readiness of the Germans – apart from some numerically small resistance groups – to keep doing their 'duty' to the end, as soldiers or as workers on the 'home front', was generally explained by historians in one of two ways: in terms of a seduction theory, or of a supervision theory.

The seduction theory emphasised the active, or at best passive, assent accorded by the overwhelming majority of the population to the National Socialist regime, this assent being generated by the sophisticated techniques of fascist mass organisation and the supposed irresistibility of Goebbels's propaganda. The supervision theory, on the other hand, asserted that the systems of control, internal espionage and policing in the Third Reich were so efficient that even the faintest attempt at opposition was sure to lead to the concentration camp.

Both theories highlight phenomena which were indubitably present in the Third Reich and which hampered the formation of an effective resistance movement. But, as all-or-nothing accounts, they are distortions of the historical reality. There were in fact many kinds of criticism of the regime's social and political measures, as we have seen in the previous chapter. These criticisms of shortcomings in everyday life were voiced despite the stage-managed public appearances of the 'Leader' and the mass rituals at Party congresses which undoubtedly impressed many people, and despite widespread enthusiasm, or at least satisfaction, over Hitler's foreign-policy successes. The fear of war which Germans clearly felt in 1938–39 also shows that even Goebbels's sophisticated propaganda met with disbelief when it flew in the face of the basic everyday needs and experiences of the population, such as the longing for peace and the memory of the horrors of the First World War.

Similarly with the supervision theory. Although the apparatus of

control and terror was more elaborate than in any previous political system, there were pockets within which nonconformist behaviour could and did develop, albeit under conditions of constant danger.

A deeper historical analysis of the Third Reich must therefore go beyond emphasising its supposedly unchallengeable techniques of manipulation and surveillance – techniques which in any case always provided an easy excuse for those who persistently shrank from any form of resistance. Rather, we must explain what were the fundamental needs and activities in which the population's active consent, or passive participation, took root, enabling the trains to Auschwitz to continue, metaphorically as well as literally, to leave on time till the bitter end.

The selfsame morale reports by the Nazi agencies and the exiled Social Democrats which recorded a wide variety of critical opinions also noted – simultaneously and, of course, with reference to the same groups of people – a wide range of favourable responses to the actions and characteristics of the Nazi regime.¹

First and foremost were the regime's successes in foreign policy, which won considerable approval even among members of the erstwhile labour movement, as the SOPADE reports repeatedly and despondently noted. Approval was centred, in the first place, on the fact that Hitler had succeeded in short order in undoing discriminatory provisions of the Versailles treaty ('bringing home' the Saar, remilitarising the Rhineland, reintroducing general conscription) and in achieving long-standing national goals, such as uniting all Germans within one 'Greater Germany'. But the tangible gains in foreign policy were not the only thing that counted with public opinion: the methods did too. The population responded positively to the fact that after a decade of timorous, compromise-minded and inconsistent foreign policy, Hitler seemed to have pulled off his successes despite – or perhaps precisely by – his risk-taking, his radicalism, his refusal to compromise and his unswerving purposefulness. (In reality, Hitler's successes were due more to the incomprehension and disunity of his opponents.) As important as the successes themselves, then, was the posture of the 'Leader', conjuring up, after a decade of uncertainty, a strength of leadership and a desire for success in which it seemed possible to have faith. Popular approval clustered round motifs such as success, strength, recovery and security; national advance was the collective transfiguration of individual yearnings. Daydreams of glory and grandeur seemed to be being fulfilled.

The SOPADE reports on the German entries into the Rhineland in 1936 and Austria in 1938 similarly noted three aspects of popular approval of the new direction in foreign policy: satisfaction that Germany was playing a world role again; acceptance of the principle

that violent methods were justified by 'tremendous' successes; and personalisation of the successes through the Führer cult:

The Führer's foreign-policy statements strike a chord with many workers too; especially with young people. The firm stand the Führer has taken over the occupation of the Rhineland has been universally impressive. Many people are convinced that Germany's foreign-policy demands are justified and cannot be passed over. The last few days have been marked by big fresh advances in the Führer's personal reputation, including among workers.²

There is no mistaking the enormous personal gains in credibility and prestige that Hitler has made, mainly perhaps among workers. The fact that Austria was subjugated by force has had little or no effect so far on the way the event is being judged here. The crucial point is that Austria has been annexed; not how. On the contrary, it is being taken for granted that the annexation was carried out with violence, since almost all the major successes of the system have been achieved with the use of violent methods.³

It is a similar story with the economic and social policies of the regime. Here above all there were enough everyday problems and inconveniences to provoke repeated criticism. Yet the overall balance of achievement was positive: in contrast with the depression of 1932, there was a brilliant 'economic miracle' which at the minimum guaranteed the basic needs of 'work and bread' for everyone from 1936–37 onwards and was also beginning to meet the demand for higher-quality goods. Germany's gross national product rose from 58 thousand million Reichsmarks in 1932 to 93 thousand million RM in 1937, overtaking the record level of the 'golden twenties', 89 thousand million RM in 1929.⁴

Admittedly, the share taken by armament production rose enormously (from 1 per cent in 1932 to 13 per cent in 1937). But even though there was a fall in the share taken by consumer-goods production relative to the rapidly growing GNP (81 per cent in 1932 to 64 per cent in 1937), this in no way meant that consumers were deprived, since there was a considerable increase in the disposable volume of consumer goods: whereas the 1932 figures came to only two-thirds of the 1928 volume, by the end of 1936 they had already surpassed this record level of the twenties. Since the number of those in work rose correspondingly (from 12.9 million in 1932 to 18.9 million in 1937, a slightly higher level than in the pre-crisis year 1929) and the length of the average working week settled again at its pre-crisis level (from 41.47 hours in 1932 to 46.07 hours in 1937), total wages and salaries also increased (from 27.4 thousand million RM in 1932 to 41.5 thousand million RM in 1937, just below the 1929 level of 44.9 thousand million). Although the price of the upturn had been the inflationary financing of rearmament, which gave an ominous

undertone to Germans' hopes for the future, people had work again, they were earning money and they could avail themselves of the growing number of consumer goods on the market. In order to sustain the feeling of success and the hopes of recovery the National Socialists were even prepared, despite shortages of foreign exchange and strict trade controls, to import materials for consumer-goods production as well as products and raw materials needed for rearmament. Despite their candid plea for 'guns, not butter', the Nazis knew, so to speak, which side their bread was really buttered.

The contradiction between the need to rearm for war and the need to satisfy the consumer demands of the population could certainly not have been kept concealed for long. In fact, the economic situation in Germany became considerably more acute in 1939. It was only Hitler's unleashing of world war that enabled the contradiction to be displaced externally. Half of Europe was plundered so that the Germans could be kept supplied to a relatively high standard. Germany lived on credit: first its own, and then that of other countries.

None of this was apparent to the man in the street in the 1930s. He regarded the 'economic miracle' as a positive achievement of Hitler's, although there was, admittedly, a wide discrepancy between the propaganda images and the Third Reich's actual achievements in social policy. For example, *Kraft durch Freude* ('Strength through Joy', an arm of the official pseudo-trade-union organisation, the German Labour Front)⁵ organised holiday trips ranging from weekend excursions to health-cure visits to the Harz and the Black Forest, and Norwegian cruises. In reality, however, long-distance travel was restricted to a hand-picked minority, and most Germans spent their vacations at home or in the immediate vicinity. Similarly, a couple getting married – provided that they were 'genetically healthy', in the sense laid down by the 'racial biologists', and that the wife surrendered her office or factory job – could receive a marriage loan which could be partly 'repaid' by the production of children. (In sarcastic parlance, the loan was 'abgekündert', i.e., literally, 'childed off'.) The long-term effect, however, was neither to raise the birth-rate nor to reduce women's work. Again, although the construction of the *Autobahnen* and the establishment of a large car factory to build the so-called 'KdF car' (the later 'Volkswagen' or 'People's Car') led to an eventual modernisation of private transport, the immediate result was that these facilities, and the money which many Germans had saved towards the 'KdF car', were diverted to the rearmament programme. The same was true of the DAF's campaigns that were designed to give a 'social welfare' tinge to industrial relations: annual national job competitions; competitions for the 'model National Socialist firm'; *Schönheit der Arbeit* ('Beauty of

Work') etc.⁶ Nevertheless, what was achieved was enough to give the population a foretaste of the better future of their dreams. Since the upward *trend* was maintained, the regime's promises were taken as guarantees that the economic miracle would continue, and the manifest signs that the boom was inflation-based and dependent on the build-up of military weaponry were suppressed from consciousness. Even in 1943, when a majority of Germans, according to the SD reports, had stopped expecting a German victory, the Wüstenrot building society announced new business worth 201 million RM; and as late as February 1945 the Ludwigsburg building society was advertising in the magazine *Das Reich* under the slogan, 'Save in Wartime – Build Later'.⁷

National Socialist domestic policy also met with approval for its promise to create 'order'. Even acts of terror, detentions in concentration camps, the banning of Communists and Jews from public employment, bannings of political parties and the firing-squad executions following the Röhm putsch of 30th June 1934 were awarded positive verdicts, on the grounds that they showed that order would be enforced with a 'firm hand', that there would be a 'clean sweep', and so forth. Attitudes of servility that had been robbed of an outlet ever since the end of the Wilhelminian empire now had something to fasten on again, thanks to the Nazi state and its 'Leader'. But non-monarchist and non-militaristic Germans were won over too: people who had seen the Weimar period primarily as one of political confusion and personal insecurity. The call for order did not balk at terror when it was initiated from above.

The widespread approval of Hitler on the 'law and order' issue, and the wholesale acceptance of the 'Leader's acts of illegality and murder, is documented unambiguously in the SOPADE 'reports on Germany' following the 30 June 1934.⁸

The immediate result of the murders was great confusion, both as regards the way they were viewed and as regards their future political consequences. On the whole, Hitler's courage in taking decisive action was stressed the most. He was regarded practically as a hero. Hitler's slandering of the victims, their homosexuality and their 30,000 Mark meals, was at first also adjudged heroic. As to what the repercussions of the events of 30th June and their aftermath will be, an agreed and definitive answer cannot yet be given. Our comrades report that Hitler has won strong approval and sympathy from that part of the population which still places its hopes in him. To these people his action is proof that he wants order and decency. Other sections of the population have been given cause for thought.

East Saxony: A small businessman told me that he and his colleagues had known for a long time that Hitler was going to strike at Röhm and his associates. He still sees Hitler, even now, as an utterly honourable man who

wants the best for the German people. It is only Hitler's hangers-on who have been preventing him from working for the people, and now he has got rid of them. When I tried to explain to him that Hitler alone bore the responsibility for all the murders, these and earlier ones, he said: 'Still, the main thing is, he's got rid of the Marxists.' He also said that Hitler undoubtedly still had as much support among the majority of the people as he did before, especially as he was now cleaning out the dreadful SA, who had done Germany great damage. Wages would definitely be cut now, and industry would be able to get back to work and start earning money. He still swears by Hitler as a superhuman being, even if he is a murderer many times over.

Bavaria: 1st report. By slaughtering his 'best friends', Hitler has forfeited none of his mass support as yet; rather, he has gained. Reports from different parts of Bavaria are unanimous that people are expressing satisfaction that Hitler has acted so decisively. He has produced fresh proof that he will not settle for second-best and that he wants decency in public life.

Not the least of the achievements of the National Socialist mass organisations was that despite objections on the scores of bossism, bureaucracy and empty rituals, they provided a considerable number of people with tasks and jobs which boosted their sense of self-esteem and even offered real if limited opportunities for promotion. Even during the earlier so-called period of 'struggle' before 1933 the NSDAP and the SA had held on to their members primarily by promoting an empty but permanent activism which seemed, to people with shattered social or working lives, to offer a way of escape from resignation and despair. National Socialist ritual and staged mass events, particularly the appearances of the Führer, enabled the followers to feel reassured of their own significance. This mechanism explains the effectiveness – though also the limitations – of Nazi propaganda. It fastened on everyday needs for security, sensual satisfaction and social aspiration which the crisis-torn Weimar republic had been unable to meet. But it was also required, after the National Socialist seizure of power, to regenerate the charismatic excitement that otherwise threatened to drain away in the face of an everyday routine of economic difficulties and political disappointments.

This was the very role that the Führer myth performed: it bridged the gap between, on the one hand, the need for uplift, security and a positive outlook on the future and, on the other, the disillusionments of everyday Third Reich life.⁹ All the morale reports are agreed that the 'Leader', Adolf Hitler, was popular among all social classes, including sections of the working class. He was expressly and personally exempted from the numerous criticisms of the regime's actions that were voiced. The standard phrase, 'If the Führer knew about it ...', was

used to imply that he would be as 'tough' with the shortcomings and improbities of the lower-level leaders as he was with the political opposition. In this sense Adolf Hitler's popularity articulated a certain basic consent to the system on the part of the majority of the population, a consent that remained unaffected by outspoken expressions of criticism on points of detail.

It emerges, accordingly, that the targets of criticism were generally lower- and middle-rank Party functionaries, officials and subordinate representatives of authority; support was centred round the figure of Adolf Hitler. Plainly, the Führer myth was not merely a product of extravagant National Socialist propaganda but was the focal point of popular consent vis-à-vis the regime. We can help to explain this 'schizoid' attitude by applying to fascism Max Weber's explanatory model of 'charismatic authority'. It was only to be expected that the enthusiasm of the pre-1933 'movement' phase would wear off in the course of everyday life; in order that the swell of approval should not run completely dry as daily concerns reasserted themselves, a highly visible identification-figure was needed who could represent the system as a whole. This was the 'Leader'. The Führer myth made it possible for people to give voice to everyday 'grumbles' and yet consent to the overall dispensation. This basic consent, articulated primarily in the Führer myth, comprised approval of personal, authoritarian control, enthusiastic support for the posture of 'decisive action' and the imposition of order through terror, and uncritical applause for both the real and the specious propaganda achievements of the system.

These elements of basic consent to the regime were also necessary to ensure that the system itself functioned on a day-to-day basis. A system that was unconditionally rejected by most of the people would hardly have been able to call on them to carry out the daily tasks necessary to sustain routine work and public discipline, or to accept National Socialist propaganda and the decrees and regulations issued by the authorities. But there was not only the experience of unavoidable participation in the system on a daily basis, as a small cog in the large machine: there was also, specifically, the mobilisation of a fair-sized section of the population through the National Socialist mass organisations. The mass organisations themselves were a combination of enforced participation, motivated support and purely nominal membership. The virtually inexhaustible supply of insignia, functions and sub-functions, ranging from the *Blockwartssystem* of neighbourhood spying to the *Luftschutzbund* (the air-raid protection association), again made no genuine alteration to the often depressed social position of the office-holders, but they had a symbolic effect. Life was a state of subservience sweetened by privileges.

The evidence of Hitler's popularity to be found in both the SOPADE and the police and governmental morale reports is too plentiful and convincing to be overlooked. Approval of, not to say enthusiasm for, Hitler as an individual was indeed a feature of everyday life in the Third Reich. Two extracts from a great range of sources can serve to illustrate this.

A SOPADE report compiled as early as April/May 1934 noted:¹⁰

A general phenomenon that has been noticeable for some time is still evident: Hitler is generally exempted from criticism.

A report from Bavaria says, 'One cannot ignore the fact that many of those who grumble and complain still have faith in Adolf Hitler's strength and his honourable intentions, but believe that even he cannot prevail single-handed.'

A correspondent from Berlin puts the point in more detail: 'In general we can say that Adolf Hitler is exempted from criticism, his aims are conceded as honourable and people think that he cannot be blamed for the mismanagement of his subordinates. This is partly the result of the systematic Führer propaganda, but it is also undoubtedly the effect of his personality. His personality impresses simple people, and Hitler still has a lot of personal support among the workers.'

It was particularly the Führer's public appearances, covered nationwide on the radio, that won approval. The approval began to crumble only when Hitler's optimistic forecasts were all too clearly given the lie by wartime realities. This oscillation between belief and scepticism emerges forcibly from an SD report on popular reaction to Hitler's speech on Heroes' Memorial Day (*Heldengedenktage*) in 1942, following the winter of 1941-42 when German troops outside Moscow had suffered their first defeat:¹¹

On the basis of reports now available from all parts of the Reich on the Führer's speech on Heroes' Memorial Day, it can be said that the Führer's words have found a powerful echo among the population.

The sentence in the Führer's speech which left the strongest and assuredly most lasting impression was: 'But we can already be certain of one thing today: the Bolshevist hordes which failed to conquer the German soldiers and their allies this winter will be beaten by us next summer and will be destroyed!' The Führer's words have enormously strengthened the hopes entertained by the greater part of the people that Bolshevism will be destroyed this year. In this connection, numerous national comrades expressed views to the effect that the Führer would never have spoken in these terms if he himself had not had the utmost conviction and certainty that his forecast would be borne out. Only a few individual comrades voiced doubts - in view of the imponderable size of potential Soviet strength and in view of similar forecasts made by the German military command last year -

whether it would in fact be possible to bring the eastern campaign to a victorious and definitive conclusion during the coming year.

The Führer's statement that 'the eventual frontiers of the Bolshevist colossus will prove to be far removed from the sacred fields of Europe' also attracted considerable notice. Many detected a certain contradiction between these words and the Führer's statement closely preceding it, that the 'Bolshevist hordes will be beaten by us next summer and will be destroyed'; and a few even felt that they implied the view that it would never be possible to smash Bolshevism entirely.

The intensity and the wide currency of the Führer myth can scarcely be explained, however, if it is seen simply as the result of National Socialist propaganda or as the product of mass yearnings and wishful thinking. So artificial a construct would inevitably have shattered on making impact with real experiences and real disappointments. For the Führer myth to be effective, two conditions were indispensable.

First, the 'Leader' had to remain well distanced from sources of criticism and discontent in everyday life. Hitler's reluctance to get mixed up in disputes involving rival state and Party authorities contributed to the image of the 'Leader' as the disinterested final source of authority and court of appeal. So did the role he was supposed - quite wrongly - to have played in the so-called Röhm putsch of 30 June 1934. Hitler's intervention was perceived as securing 'order' in response to the threat of SA terror; in the process, the population accepted the unlawful killings of SA leaders as well as the accompanying murders of several other politicians (for example, the former Reich Chancellor Schleicher).

Secondly, the personal charisma of the 'leader' had to be held up as responsible for all the domestic and foreign-policy achievements which promised to fulfil people's yearnings for security, progress and national greatness. This mechanism is much in evidence in the morale reports. Goebbels's propaganda fell on fertile ground here; this indeed was the basis of its effectiveness. The propaganda was believed as long as Hitler could point to a string of successes and soothe any discontent by prophesying new ones. Correspondingly, the ending of military success caused the Führer myth to fade. It is true that the SD reports indicated that even after the turning-point of the war there was still a widespread desire for a while to hear the Führer speak over the radio again. But the enthusiasm became progressively more short-lived after each radio address, and Hitler held back more and more from making personal public appearances, correctly gauging the decline in his powers of persuasion. For most Germans, the Führer myth was dead before Hitler physically took his own life.

Active consent - popular approval of Nazi policies - was conditional

upon the regime's ability, by invoking a constant fresh supply of genuine or ostensible achievements, to meet people's basic everyday needs for security, progress and a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Its initial asset was the fact that the Weimar Republic, by virtue of defeat in world war, inflation and world economic crisis, had created a deep-seated feeling of insecurity and made many Germans grasp thankfully even at pseudo-solutions. It was only through the ever more hectic pursuit of real or spurious successes that the charismatic Führer myth was able to withstand the disillusioning impact of ordinary everyday actuality.

The mechanism whereby contrary but genuine experiences were repeatedly repressed called for the construction of adversarial images and scapegoats. The 'forging' (a popular fascist term) of the 'national community' or *Volksgemeinschaft* required, as a complement, the strict marginalising of 'community aliens' or *Gemeinschaftsfremde* – not only Jews, but gypsies and the so-called 'asocial'. The beliefs that Hitler's draconian measures really put a firm curb on crime, that he educated the 'work-shy' into doing productive work in camps (in the Reich Labour Service, in the police Work Education camps and in the concentration camps) and that he saw to it that women could walk unmolested through the streets at night, are among the hardest popular myths about Hitler. The approval of the manifest use of force against outsiders also revealed a readiness to countenance latent force within the ostensible 'national community' itself, if this was in the interests of 'order'. Putting it perhaps over-forcefully, we can say that an aspect of consent to the Nazi regime was not so much the often-cited fear of terror as the emotional approval of terror when it was directed against 'community aliens' and hence served the supposed restoration of 'order'.

Here we plumb the most deep-lying reason for the consent given by the majority of the population to the Nazi regime. The real appeal of the Führer myth was to the longing for normality felt by a population which had been shaken by crisis and whose social reference-points had been thrown into disarray.¹² The recognition that National Socialism was constitutionally quite incapable of restoring normality could be kept repressed as long as new campaigns and partial successes preserved expectations and a sense of promise; and as long as the regime's 'restoration of order' conveyed an impression, however spurious, of efficiency and strength of will. Within the 'national community', 'order' was upheld by appeals for discipline, by ranking the people into hierarchies and by obtaining self-imposed participation; at the margins, 'community aliens' faced outright violence. The 'normality' that people craved thus embraced both regimentation and subservience, and was underpinned by the overt use of force.

Active consent and sympathy with the goals and actions of the regime, however, are not sufficient on their own to explain why National Socialism remained politically unchallenged within Germany, even after the turning-point of the war. Here we must ask why it was that those who had not subscribed to the promise of National Socialism were not roused into positive acts of opposition. This widespread *passive* consent – accepting the regime as a given, and being prepared to do one's day-to-day 'duty' – rested on a process which the Nazi regime simultaneously combated and fostered: a retreat from the public sphere into the private.¹³

As National Socialism penetrated traditional social milieux and institutional structures, partly breaking them up, partly taking them over, so it drove their former members into the private domain. Views that had become politically taboo or criminal could be maintained only within the family circle or among close friends, if at all. Even politically-minded people withdrew into privacy in face of the constant pressure to conform, the perpetual need to demonstrate loyalty, the thought control and the bureaucratic routine that marked public life under National Socialism. But the withdrawal into the private sphere was not only a mass retreat from the Nazi pressure to conform: it was also the product of long-term socio-cultural trends. The development of German industrial society into a modern mass consumer society on the American model, which had first come to expression in the 'golden twenties', was reactivated by the economic recovery of the 1930s, after the hiatus caused by the world recession. Although the manifestations of modernity had provoked the censure of the fascist 'blood and soil' Romantics, the Nazi regime was only selectively hostile to these developments. 'Degenerate art' disappeared from the galleries; but the modern designs of countless consumer goods remained. 'Judaised' and 'nigger-ised' jazz was officially combated; but up to the outbreak of war jazz records not only remained on sale in Germany but were actually produced in large quantities. Even during the war, watered-down versions of modern dance, spectacular revues and lavish film musicals were among the forms of entertainment expressly promoted by Goebbels. The Third Reich was actually the great age of the 'unpolitical' films of the UFA (the biggest German film production company).

Even Coca-Cola consumption rose significantly in Germany in the thirties. Agrarian romanticism notwithstanding, the Nazi regime fostered enthusiasm for modern technology, not only because it needed it as part of its armoury for conquering *Lebensraum*, but also because the toughness, frictionless functionality and efficiency of the machine matched the ideal of the fighter and the soldier, the man 'hard as Krupp

steel'. The mass adulation and star treatment accorded to German racing drivers in the thirties is a case in point.

Especially important was the growth of broadcasting, which achieved a breakthrough with the cheap mass production of the 'People's Wireless Set' (*Volksempfänger*). Leaving aside the question of political propaganda, the result was a pronounced shift whereby people found their daily (or rather, evening) leisure entertainment within the family. Radio, and particularly television – the development of which was accelerated during the Third Reich, both technically and as regards programme-making, though the decision to go ahead with mass production of sets was blocked by the outbreak of war – were media which in fact positively emphasised the individualised private sphere.

In addition, until the outbreak of war it was not illegal to listen to foreign broadcasts, apart from Radio Moscow. German radio magazines published the details of programmes from neighbouring countries. Even during the war, when listening to so-called enemy stations carried the risk of severe penalties (including death), radio remained a much-used medium, and people could check improbable German military reports against, say, the BBC within their own homes.

These examples also show, not just that there was an increased desire during the Third Reich to withdraw into the private sphere, but that the demand for non-political entertainment was met by plentiful offerings from the repertoire of modern leisure culture and mass consumption. The Reich Propaganda Minister Goebbels, in particular, made it quite clear that he assumed that a broadcasting policy based on 'non-political' relaxation would have a more positive effect on the population, given the likely demoralising realities of the war, than programmes filled with dogmatic Nazi ideology and diehard slogans. In his inaugural speech at the 16th Broadcasting Exhibition in Berlin – held from 28th July to 6th August 1939, when preparations for the invasion of Poland were in full swing – he declared:¹⁴

Broadcasting has certain quite definite tasks to perform, particularly in view of the times in which we are living at this moment. What is needed is not heavy, serious programmes which, after all, only a fraction of the people can grasp; we must provide the broad masses and millions of our people, engaged as they are in a struggle for existence, with as much relaxation and entertainment, edification and improvement, as possible.

By contrast, National Socialist dogmatists were certainly zealous in recommending a return to old 'German values'. But their practical efforts to stem the flow of 'Americanised' modernity had patchy results. Even the massive wartime police operations directed against jazz and swing, which culminated in young swing fans from Hamburg being sent

to the youth concentration camp at Moringen, were not strikingly successful.

The 'double life' that was led by a large section of the population – in the public domain, delivering the required pledges of loyalty and quotas of economic output; in private, pursuing non-political spare-time pleasures with minimal possible interference – certainly ran contrary to National Socialist mass mobilisation, but it can in no sense generally be reckoned as opposition or resistance (although the dividing lines between these notions were fluid, as the case of the young swing fans shows. See Chapters 8, 10 and 11.) The very retreat into privacy crippled possible resistance and weakened people's sense of concern at the excesses of the regime. It led to self-absorption and self-sufficiency, to the mixture of 'apathy and pleasure-seeking'¹⁵ described by one wartime diarist:¹⁶

And the world? The best thing is to shut your eyes to it and to stop hearing and seeing all the dreadful fuss and bother that is getting more and more confusing and difficult to sort out. No one has any idea where it is all going. Most people have completely stopped even asking, and are just sticking to the tiring daily business of shopping and thinking about food. The emptiness inside one is getting more and more noticeable . . .

Paradoxically, then, even the population's counter-reaction to the National Socialist pressure of mobilisation served to stabilise the system.

It is clear, if we follow the everyday-life approach, that the experiences of separate individuals cannot be neatly and mechanically categorised under labels of 'dissent', 'passive consent' and 'active participation'. This very fact, however, seems to me to be a vitally important result of the everyday-life approach, since it shows that the Third Reich cannot have failed to leave its mark on all members of society: on the common people, who some would allege to have been basically in opposition; on the middle class, alleged to have been basically non-political. It serves as a warning against a facile recourse to percentages: what proportion of Nazis in the population was opposed by what proportion of nonconformists and what proportion of people prepared to resist? It is heartening in a socio-political sense because it demonstrates that even fascist fellow-travellers or active participants could undergo liberating experiences from which a democratic outlook was capable of emerging. It is dispiriting, on the other hand, to those who would like to think that 'another Germany' remained intact through twelve years of fascism: a Germany not integrated into the system, not caught up in the system's functioning – maybe only a minority of the regime's political opponents, but in its essence

undamaged. Even the resistance fighters who did not conform were weighed down by the experience of persecution, by the sense of their own impotence and of the petty compromises that were imperative for survival. The system did its work on the anti-fascists too; and often enough it worked despite the shortcomings of the fascists themselves.

FIVE

Areas of conflict in the Third Reich

Unlike the simple version of totalitarianism that is nowadays mainly confined to German school history textbooks, where it is graphically represented by pyramid-shaped diagrams with Hitler at the top, the Third Reich was very far from being a monolith. To say that it was riven by internal conflicts, however, does not mean that it was a chaotic phenomenon without a specific mode of development, a fascist logic of progressive radicalisation;¹ nor does it mean that all, or even a majority, of the conflicts that occurred should be set down as resistance. In schematic terms, we can sketch three differing types of conflict within the Third Reich.²

1 *External conflicts* between the National Socialist system and its opponents, and/or between the system and the groups which it combated in the course of its history. Opponents of both foreign and domestic policy are included here, especially the labour movement and, to some degree, the Christian churches.³ The characteristic feature of this type of conflict was that the opponent groups all possessed their own distinctive identities and traditions which enabled them to offer differing patterns of behaviour in response to National Socialism and its demands. They might yield to the pressure to conform, or form temporary coalitions, or persist in outright rejection. In all cases they opted for those forms of behaviour which most allowed them to maintain their identities and traditions.

2 *Internal conflicts* occurring horizontally, so to speak, among different factions within the ruling National Socialist system. Researchers into fascism are nowadays agreed that National Socialism was not a monolithic system free of contradictions, but that it broke down into a 'polycracy' of competing power blocs. These blocs (additional personal fiefdoms, satellites and offshoots can also be identified) were in a state of permanent and raging conflict with one another that was very costly in material resources and, in the long run, was damaging to the system's ability to function. This type of conflict is

fundamentally different from the first type, since the parties involved were concerned to improve their standing within the system and to mobilise the resources of the Nazi regime to their own advantage. Nevertheless, under certain conditions such conflicts could also lead to a rejection of the Nazi system as a whole, as was shown by the path taken by the military, which proceeded from internal opposition within the system to the conspiracy of 20th July 1944.⁴

3 Another type of conflict, again involving fissures within the National Socialist system but this time ones running *vertically*: conflicts between the Nazi elites and the masses, or between the elites and individual groups within the population under Nazi rule.⁵ This may seem to be the same as the first type, but the parallel is misleading. In the first place, these groups by no means necessarily possessed the firm, traditionally-rooted identities characteristic of the clearly-defined opponent groups; secondly, these conflicts did not arise out of a confrontation between the Nazi regime and the world outside it, but sprang from the inner dynamics of the Nazi regime itself – for example, from the contradictions created by rearmament. Rearmament generated a demand for labour which in practice led automatically to wage increases in armaments firms; these increases in turn caused financial and material resources to be diverted from rearmament. A similar conflict arose from the mobilisation of young people into the Hitler Youth: successful mobilisation inevitably permitted the youth organisation areas of autonomy, that led to clashes with the original goal of training young people for membership in a dictatorial and authoritarian society and establishing the discipline necessary for war.

Conflicts between elites and ruled need not destroy the very framework of the system. They can also merge with the other forms of conflict: for example, rival leadership groups can play off the demands of different sections of the population against one another; or bodies expressly devoted to resistance can fasten on the day-to-day conflicts between the population and the elites.

The Nazi regime did not resolve the social contradictions that were inherent in a modern industrial society; it disguised them, and offered no distinctive functional model of conflict resolution. The much-heralded unifying 'new order' had little real substance. Agrarian romanticism and racialist ideological indoctrination were at odds with the demands posed by modern technological armaments and warfare. Policing and surveillance systems became so ramified that they got in one another's way; in many areas of society, improvisation replaced plans for reorganisation which in any case had been badly thought out. The unresolved contradictions piled up, driving the National Socialist leadership into trying increasingly reckless and under-funded

solutions, until the regime perished amidst the chaos of war and mass destruction.

These internal contradictions created a wide variety of situations in which people were faced with the choice either of complying with National Socialist orders or of resisting them.⁶ Decisions of this kind often faced people who were not even conscious and persistent opponents of the regime. Ought you to contribute to the Sunday *Eintopf* collection? Ought you to send your son to join the Hitler Youth, even though you were afraid of the 'bad influence' it might have on him? Ought you to ignore the possible penalties and listen to foreign radio broadcasts, even if you only wanted to find out how the war was really going? In all cases the specific nature of the situation determined whether the individual was aware of the import of the decision or whether he simply acted spontaneously and unreflectingly in the way his social background and everyday experience indicated.

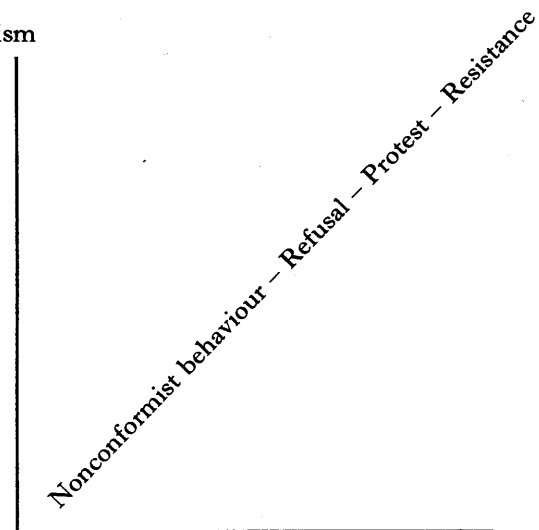
No system is capable of punishing all infringements of its norms; any attempts to do so would make the system itself seize up. Accordingly, within each system, including National Socialism, there are whole areas of behaviour that normally lie below the threshold of police intervention. It was in these areas – usually private ones – that most acts of *nonconformist behaviour* vis-à-vis the Nazi regime were clustered (see diagram). As a rule these were separate individual acts of infringement of the norms and did not call into question the system as a whole.

Forms of dissident behaviour in the Third Reich

Scope of criticism
of the system

general

partial



private ----- public/ political Sphere within which dissident behaviour takes place

Acts of nonconformist behaviour became one degree more general, and hence directed politically against the regime, if they were more than just breaches of particular norms of the system but were undertaken in opposition, say, to orders issued by the authorities. *Refusals* of this sort could, for example, include not sending one's son or daughter to the Hitler Youth or the League of German Girls (BDM, *Bund Deutscher Mädel*) in contravention of repeated official injunctions, or failing to increase one's personal work output despite recurrent calls by management.

More far-reaching again, because one stage further in the direction of wholesale rejection of the regime, was *protest*, though this might still be a matter of single-issue action, such as the churches' campaign against euthanasia (that is, the murder of disabled people).

On the gamut of dissident behaviour, *resistance* can be taken to denote those forms of behaviour which were rejections of the Nazi regime as a whole and were attempts, varying with the opportunities available to the individuals concerned, to help bring about the regime's overthrow.

Of course, many of these forms of everyday behaviour are, in the customary sense of the term, non-political. In most other societies they are permissible, or are at least put up with as long as they take place in the private sphere. The all-pervasive interventionism of the Nazi regime brought about an objective change in their significance. Whereas it is a fundamental assumption of a liberal social order that the domains of the private (and/or social) and the political coexist side by side, National Socialism politicised society by importing political claims into domains that had previously been private. At the same time it broke up the separate sphere of politics, characterised in liberal society by the rule of law and the rational organisation of administration, and gave the vacuum over to the competing claims of different bureaucratic groups. One possible reaction to this enforced politicisation – and one that was, in actual practice, widespread – was to retreat into what was held to be non-political privacy: to keep an uneasy distance from all semblance of public and politically accountable behaviour. Yet even if people subjectively viewed their behaviour as non-political, and sought to justify it in these terms when faced by National Socialist sanctions, their behaviour nevertheless often fell, as a matter of objective fact, within the area of jurisdiction claimed by the regime. Deciding precisely where a particular act or form of activity should be located on the scale of dissident behaviour must depend on the individual case, but in practice National Socialism commonly gave people no choice, if they did not succumb, other than to progress from nonconformity to refusal to resistance. It was, indeed, their experience of the regime's encroachments on their lives that often drove people

who had merely given cautious voice to dissident attitudes into espousing more decisive opposition.

As we try to understand the motives and preconditions underlying the various forms of nonconformity and resistance, the question arises: where were oppositionally-minded people able to take refuge? Were there areas from which they were able to draw strength and encouragement for oppositional activity? It is not for nothing that reference has been made to the fact that the National Socialists were at pains to smash traditional socio-cultural structures of solidarity. These indeed proved to be particularly stubborn sanctuaries of opposition and became bases for unexpected counter-attacks into the National Socialists' own territory. Particularly significant here were sub-cultural structures of solidarity within Catholicism, solidarity among friends, neighbours and colleagues in workers' housing estates, and comradeship in the workplace itself.

Yet even though these traditional social environments became sanctuaries of dissident behaviour, they were by no means left untouched by the social and political changes that took place during the Third Reich. The dynamic effects of economic boom based on rearmament not only altered the social position of the working class but affected the middle classes too. Life in the provinces was changed both by the process of migration from the countryside to the cities with their better-paying industrial jobs and by the National Socialists' attempts to penetrate all the traditional structures of political life. Changes in the position and conduct of young people were particularly noticeable; young people, after all, had not undergone the sorts of experience which adults had under the Weimar republic.

Some of these changes in social status and social environment worked in the Nazis' favour; in other cases, different tendencies cut across one another; in yet other cases, changes went contrary to the Nazi social design, vague though this was. In the following chapters we shall try to weigh up these different processes, from the point of view of their effect on the National Socialist system of authority.