

Anti-Nazi Germans

**Enemies of the Nazi State from within the Working
Class Movement**

by *Merilyn Moos*

German Volunteers in the French Resistance

by *Steve Cushion*

Community Languages

in association with the *Socialist History Society*

Published by
Community Languages, 2020

ISBN 978-1-9163423-0-9



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Front and rear cover illustrations: *Details from "Allies inside Germany" by H A Rothholz*

Born in Dresden, Germany, Rothholz emigrated to London with his family in 1933, to escape the Nazi regime. He retained a connection with his country of birth through his involvement with émigré organisations such as the Free German League of Culture (FGLC) in London, for whom he designed a series of fundraising stamps for their exhibition "Allies Inside Germany" in 1942.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Andrea Siemsen, Ian Birchall, Charmian Brinson, Irena Fick, Leonie Jordan, Matthias Schirmer, Mike Jones, University of Brighton Design Archives and the Committee of the Socialist History Society.

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Preface

Ian Birchall

The Second World War is still very much with us. No self-respecting public figure dare be seen in autumn without a bright red poppy (the days when Jeremy Corbyn wore a white poppy are long forgotten). Enthusiasts for British departure from the European Union like to recall the days in the 1940s when Britain "went it alone" (forgetting that the German defeat was largely attributable to the Russian army).¹

So the history of the Second World War is not a matter of academic debate but a live political issue. As Orwell showed in *1984*, control of the present and future depends on control of the past, with constant rewriting of history. There have recently been a number of studies which have challenged the conventional narrative and the widely accepted myths about the war.²

So we should be very grateful to Marilyn Moos and Steve Cushion for their contribution to a better understanding of what really happened in the Second World War. They provide a mass of detailed information, much of which will be unfamiliar even to those who consider themselves reasonably knowledgeable about the subject.

In the first place they challenge the view that the war was essentially a struggle between nations, that the enemy was "Germany". Thus Britain's greatest war crime, the bombing of Dresden, in which some 25,000 died, is often justified or minimised by the implication that it was deserved, since all Germans were responsible for Hitler. (German population bombing was not dealt with at Nuremberg, since Allied atrocities were at least as bad.³)

In fact Germany was in no way a united entity. In the five years after the end of World War I, Germany seemed to be on the brink of revolution, with repeated waves of class struggle and near insurrection. For the Russian Bolsheviks and for the Communist movement worldwide, hopes that a version of the Russian Revolution could be re-enacted in Germany were central to their political strategy. Later historians may be sceptical about the possibilities of a German revolution, but to eyewitnesses at the time⁴ there seemed no doubt that Germany was heading for a

¹ See J Burke, "History Proves Britain Can Go It Alone", <https://getbritainout.org/history-proves-britain-can-go-it-alone/>

² Donny Gluckstein, *A People's History of the Second World War*, Pluto, London, 2012; Chris Bambery, *The Second World War: A Marxist History*, Pluto, London, 2014; James Heartfield, *An Unpatriotic History of the Second World War*, Zero Books, Winchester, 2012. (The last of these contains a mass of useful information, despite its author's current alignment with the Brexit Party.)

³ Nicole Dombrowski Risser, *France under Fire: German Invasion, Civilian Flight, and Family Survival during World War II*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 2012, pp. 269-70.

⁴ See for example Victor Serge, *Witness to the German Revolution*, Haymarket, Chicago, 2011.

revolutionary situation. Millions of German workers and others shared the aspiration for a juster and more equal society.

Just ten years later Hitler came to power. Those millions had not evaporated. It is true that popular moods change and that the experience of defeat produces political realignments. But Hitler was scarcely brought to power by near unanimous support. Indeed, but for the stupid and irresponsible role of the German Communist Party in refusing a united front with the Social Democrats (on the absurd grounds that they were "social fascists"), it is highly unlikely that Hitler would have taken power at all.

But, as Marilyn Moos shows, the opposition had not gone away. The balance of forces had shifted dramatically, and all opposition was thrust into illegality. But throughout the Third Reich a resistance persisted and made its presence felt. And that opposition was not simply directed against the Nazi regime's obscene racial policies, or its belligerent foreign policy, but was a response to its offensive against the working class.

The Nazis were always viciously anti-Semitic, and this should never be underestimated, but in the first years of Nazi rule the working class were the main target. As Marilyn notes, Zionist youth organisations were allowed to operate legally till 1939, and "systematised State annihilation" was pursued only from 1942, after the decimation of the left (an earlier proposal to deport Jews to Madagascar was blocked by Britain, concerned that the Jews might make their way to Britain).⁵

In the immediate aftermath of the First World War the German working class had made some significant gains - notably the legally protected eight-hour day (established in 1918 and abolished in 1923). So Hitler had the enthusiastic support of all those who wanted to see the working class put back in its place, with the destruction of its political organisations and its trade unions. This included not just the German employers, but those around the world who wanted to see the working class pushed down. It should never be forgotten that one of the earliest supporters of Hitler, who gave him substantial financial support, was Henry Ford.⁶

Marilyn has accumulated from a variety of sources, including remarkable interviews with some of the rare survivors, an impressive collection of accounts of activity by the German opposition to Hitler. She effectively demolishes any claim that Nazism can be explained in terms of a German "character" or "national identity". The key to an understanding of Hitler's rule has to be sought in the balance of class forces.

The sheer savagery of Nazi rule is well-known, but the extent of resistance is often

⁵ Heartfield, *An Unpatriotic History*, p 301.

⁶ AC Sutton, *Wall Street and the Rise of the Nazis*, Clairview, Sudbury, 1976, pp 91-93.

ignored or forgotten. The distribution of oppositional publications, especially in the early years of Nazi rule, was remarkable. As Marilyn notes, resistance – with the consequent risk of being accused of treason – could range from jokes to sabotage. Resisters displayed courage, imagination and resourcefulness – for example the Dresden Trotskyists, who used the cover of a mountaineering group to smuggle in literature from across the frontier in Czechoslovakia.

Many resisters paid with their lives for having stood up to the Nazi regime. But resistance was not futile. As one survivor pointed out, it saved others from persecution, distinguished Germany from Nazism, shortened the war and saved lives. Only half the planned number of V2 "flying bombs", used against Britain in 1944-45, were actually produced, partly as a result of sabotage by workers. As Marilyn points out, we should not forget that "some Londoners will have owed their lives to these acts of bravery".

Another prevalent myth is that there was such a thing as the French Resistance. For a generation and more after 1945 the memory of the Resistance was invoked to support the political reputations of both Charles de Gaulle and the French Communist Party. But the actual history is a bit more complex. France's rapid collapse in 1940 is to be explained, not by the fact that the French were "cheese-eating surrender monkeys",⁷ but because a substantial section of France's upper classes felt more comfortable with an unequivocal anti-Communist like Hitler than with the threat of working class power as manifested in the factory occupations of 1936. Hence Hitler had substantial support among the privileged and powerful in French society. Steve Cushion quotes a factory owner saying: "I would rather see my country occupied by the Germans than my factory occupied by the workers."⁸

There was, moreover, a deep well of antisemitism in French society. It was France, at the time of the Dreyfus Affair in the 1890s, that showed itself to be the most overtly anti-Semitic nation in Europe. Though truth and justice ultimately triumphed in the Dreyfus Affair, the anti-Semites did not go away, but bided their time, awaiting revenge. The anti-Semitic *Action Française* produced a daily newspaper throughout the 1920s and 1930s. So when the German Occupation began, it was often the French anti-Semites who were ahead of their German allies in demanding repressive policies against Jews in France.

The Resistance did not reflect the national feeling of the vast majority of the French population, as is often claimed. David Drake, in his study of occupied Paris, is

⁷ The phrase was first used, ironically, on *The Simpsons*, but has frequently been quoted by people who did not seem to understand the irony.

⁸ See also Annie Lacroix-Riz, *Le Choix de la défaite: les élites françaises dans les années 1930*, Paris, Armand Colin, Paris, 2006.

nearer the truth when he argues that there were small minorities of resisters and collaborators, with the majority in between just trying to survive.⁹ The situation was more a civil war than a national liberation struggle against foreign oppression. Yet it is only very recently that French President Macron has acknowledged France's complicity in the Holocaust.¹⁰

As a result it is no surprise to learn from Steve's researches that the Resistance was far from being a wholly French affair, but that it involved people of many nationalities who opposed Hitler's racist and anti-working-class policies.

The *Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée* was a survival from an earlier period when the Communist Party had devoted considerable attention to organising immigrant workers. The group led by Armenian Missak Manouchian, including Jews, Italians and Hungarians, carried out a number of bold actions against the occupying forces before they were finally captured, tortured and executed. The Communist Party then tried to claim that they had been active in the cause of fighting for French national independence. The Communist poet Louis Aragon wrote that they died "shouting France as they fell".¹¹ But the final letters written by these resisters have survived, and scarcely one of them mentions France.¹² They were internationalist revolutionaries fighting against the Nazis.

Martin Monath was another "foreigner", a German Jew, fighting against the Nazis. As a Trotskyist he rejected the Communist Party slogan "*à chacun son boche*" (let everyone kill a Hun). Instead he argued for fraternisation with German soldiers, believing that at the end of the war French and German workers could unite in making an anti-capitalist revolution. He played a central role in producing the newspaper *Arbeiter und Soldat*, circulated among German soldiers. Among those working with him were the Belgian Ernest Mandel, and the Pole Abraham Leon. That they were a serious threat to the Nazis is shown by the ruthlessness with which the occupying forces smashed the organisation and murdered Monath. For many years Monath has been a somewhat shadowy figure, but now a remarkable biography has appeared.¹³

While recognising the internationalism of the Trotskyists, Steve also sees as positive the Communist Party strategy of individual attacks on German conscripts. Arguing that "mutinous situations and collaboration with erstwhile enemies rarely arise when their army is victorious", he concludes that "the two tactics, the carrot and

⁹ D Drake, *Paris at War, 1939-1944*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2015.

¹⁰ "France organised this", *Guardian*, 17 July 2017.

¹¹ L Aragon, *L'Affiche rouge*, <http://pcf.evry.pagesperso-orange.fr/aragon.htm>

¹² See <https://www.marxists.org/history/france/resistance/manouchian/index.htm>

¹³ Nathaniel Flakin, *Martin Monath: A Jewish Fighter Among Nazi Soldiers*, Pluto Press, 2019.

the stick, were complementary". Personally I am more sympathetic to the Trotskyist argument that "the terrorist act creates a barrier between French workers and German soldiers, but no victory is possible without unity between them".¹⁴ However it is a serious argument and deserves further discussion.

Both sections contain a large number of brief biographies of individuals, people ignored and forgotten by history, but who played a heroic role and often suffered the consequences. There are some ironic reminders of the fact that the history of the fight against fascism was soon swallowed up by the new polarisation of the Cold War. Robert Havemann, one of the founders of a group to support forced labourers in the Nazi period, was sacked from his academic post in West Berlin in 1948 because of American pressure. He moved to East Berlin, but ended up under house arrest in East Germany. Clearly such an internationalist was acceptable to neither Washington nor Moscow. The Yugoslav Ljubomir Ilic played a leading role in the French Resistance. After the Stalin-Tito split in 1948, outraged that Yugoslav volunteers in Spain were being slandered as Gestapo agents, he tried to contact his old comrade, Charles Tillon, a top leader of the French Communist Party – but Tillon refused to see him. (Ironically, a couple of years later Tillon himself was purged by his own party.)

The book is thoroughly documented and based on extensive research. But the authors are not simply academics; they are both long-standing socialist activists and remain deeply involved in the trade union movement. They see their book as a contribution to the political struggle which has animated their lives.

In their conclusion Marilyn and Steve point to some "frightening similarities" between Brexit Britain and the late Weimar Republic. They are right to feel gloom and to sound a warning. But there are also hopeful features in the present situation – notably Extinction Rebellion with its recognition that global problems require global solutions. In this book Marilyn and Steve have struck a blow against national myths and in favour of an authentically internationalist tradition, which can inspire activists of a new generation. It deserves a wide readership.

Ian Birchall

¹⁴ La Vérité, 15 March 1942.

Hidden resistance

by *Merilyn Moos and Steve Cushion*

"History should emphasize new possibilities by disclosing those hidden episodes of the past when people showed their ability to resist, to join together, and occasionally win."

- Howard Zinn

Regularly ignored or forgotten in most of the many histories on the rise of the Nazis is the level of resistance from German citizens and in particular from members of the German working class. Here are forgotten stories of brave men and women who organised in German towns and villages against the Nazis, most often leading to their deaths. The second part of the book chronicles, in a way that has not been done before, the contribution made by German refugees to fighting the Nazis in France. And though this is not a book that only looks at Jewish resistance, we also aim to challenge the notion that the Jews were led as sheep to their deaths.

We were fortunate in this age of the internet to find some of the voices of a few who survived, which are included here. This was facilitated by the availability of records previously held in East German archives.

We want to reclaim a different history for Germany: not that of how its people allowed the Nazis to take power, a myth which still prevails in varying forms today, but of how many Germans in one form or another resisted the Nazis.

This book starts with the first wave of popular resistance against the Nazis in 1933 and continues through the Second World War, which needs to be understood as two parallel wars, one between rival imperialisms and the other a war of popular resistance.¹ The authors seek to add to that analytical approach by considering the particular case of the German anti-Nazi resistance. We are unequivocally on the side of that resistance. Perhaps this should not even need to be said, but such is the power of nationalism, that many people feel uncomfortable with those who are prepared to undermine their own country's war effort or take up arms against the nation of their birth, even if that nation were Nazi Germany. We have no such qualms and take an internationalist stand that places class before nation.

It is impossible to calculate how far the resistance contributed to the defeat of Nazi Germany. The overwhelming official narrative of the Second World War is that it was a "Good War" in which the people of the Allied nations pulled together and fought, with great sacrifice, for freedom, democracy and the defeat of fascism; the

¹ Gluckstein, Donny, 2012, *A People's History of the Second World War: Resistance Versus Empire*, London: Pluto.

expression "People's War" has been frequently used.² But there is a great difference between wanting to see the Axis defeated and unconditional support for the Allies. The conventional historiography ignores or downplays the failure of the Allies to bomb the rail links to the death camps, the mass rape of German civilian women by the Red Army, the firebombing of Dresden, Cologne and Hamburg by the RAF and the US Air Force, to name but some of the Allied atrocities.³

This is history from below that will primarily look at active resistance originating within the workers' movement. Thus we do not go into detail about the attempted coups such as the Generals' plot to bomb Hitler in July 1944 or the more parliamentary focused opposition, both of which have been dealt with extensively elsewhere.⁴ Further, we are only concerned with the official policies and actions of the leadership of the workers' parties and unions in so far as these affected the actions of the militants themselves. Too often, history books quote the official policy of an organisation or the pronouncement of one of the leaders of a party or union and assume that this will be implemented by the organisation's members. We distinguish between the bureaucratic positions of the main parties, in particular the Communist and Social Democratic Parties, and the very different activist positions taken by many of their members and sympathisers. We shall be looking at the actual activities of the rank and file anti-Nazi militants and in the process we shall be rescuing the memory of some heroic fighters who otherwise risk being lost from history. Any attempt to write a people's history of the German anti-Nazi resistance must focus on the actions of real people.

² e.g. Calder, Angus, 1992, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945*, London: Pimlico

³ Heartfield, James, 2012, *Unpatriotic History of the Second World War*, Alresford: Zero Books.

⁴ Gill, Anton, 1994, *An Honourable Defeat: A History of German Resistance to Hitler, 1933-1945*, London: Heinemann

Part 1 - Enemies of the Nazi State from within the Working Class Movement

by *Merilyn Moos*

Chapter 1 - Introduction

It is a commonly held myth, fuelled by some academics, that there was little resistance in Germany to the Nazis. In fact, there was a wide diversity of opposition to the Nazi state: initially from within the working class movement and, later, from different sections of the State, judiciary and, famously, also the army, better known because those involved were more prestigious. This section of the book will focus on the organised resistance by the less celebrated members of the workers' movement, which was far more extensive than is usually thought.

It is regularly forgotten or overlooked that the first enemies of the Nazis were communists and socialists, both of whom the Nazis saw as standing for the working-class and internationalism and not for race, nation and the "German Volk".¹ The Nazis' hatred and terror of the organised working class from 1919 onwards informed their decisions right up till 1945. Three million Germans became political prisoners between 1933 and 1945.

The *Reichstag* fire, a month after Hitler became Chancellor, provided a wonderful excuse, though quite possibly planned, for the Nazis, in particular the SA (*Sturmabteilung* or Stormtroopers), to settle scores. That night in February 1933, the SA killed about five hundred anti-Nazis, 1,500 communists were arrested in Berlin alone and about 10,000 in Germany as a whole. In March and April, 40-50,000 political opponents were taken into protective custody, a form of indefinite detention, made possible by the suspension of all civil liberties in a decree passed on the night of the *Reichstag* fire. As many as 200,000 political prisoners were detained in 1933. For the SA, membership of the KPD was sufficient grounds to be taken into protective custody.² Sixty thousand communists were imprisoned in 1933-34 and 2,000 murdered; in 1935, the Nazi authorities arrested 15,000 communist resistance fighters. From the beginning of 1933 until the end of 1935, almost 3,000 trials were conducted against at least 18,243 communists.³

The wave of arrests that followed the *Reichstag* fire decimated the hierarchy of the Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, KPD) in a

¹ Wachsmann, Nicholas, 2015, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, London: Little, Brown.

² *Kommunistischer Widerstand 1933-1945* (Communist Resistance), a publication from the DDR, available on-line <http://www.ddr-biografien.de/00000095890f9bc01/0000009589137ed36.html>

³ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, pp.20-32

single night. By June 1933, more than half of the KPD district leaders were in detention. The SA trashed town halls, publishing houses and Party offices as well as hunting down not just members of the KPD but members of organisations associated with the party.⁴

Both the KPD and the Social Democratic Party (SPD, *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) were entrenched in German civil society and the Nazis aimed to destroy the organisations associated with them. The leading members of the KPD's "sister" organisations were arrested and then killed by the Gestapo: the Freethinkers groups (essentially humanist groups campaigning on issues such as the separation of State and Church and divorce rights but which also seem to have done some paramilitary training on the side), the Committee of the Red Front (RFB, *Rotfrontkämpferbund*), the left walking groups, the Red Sports unit, Red Athletes, Free Swimmers, the banned Proletarian Freethinkers and cultural groups such as the popular agit-prop movement. There were other small left groups, such as the Trotskyists or the SAP (*Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*, Socialist Workers Party of Germany) who were also arrested in these first months of Nazi rule. The Nazis declared the organisations of the working class to be the principal enemy of the new Germany and that its leaders had to be eliminated.

After the March election in 1933, the Nazis first banned the KPD and then came for some of the SPD and trade union leaders, who were seen as less dangerous than the communists. On 2 May 1933, the Nazis banned the German free trade unions, occupied their premises and interned countless trade unionists in the concentration camps. In June, the Nazis banned the SPD, the biggest opposition party.

In 1933, around 53,000 people fled Germany, almost all some sort of anti-Nazi. Roughly four thousand German communists left for the USSR, though 70% of these were subsequently arrested during the ever-widening purges of the 1930s, most of whom were killed.⁵

A number of KPD comrades and fellow travellers fled to the UK in 1933 or soon after: Guenther Reimann, Rosa Leviné-Meyer, her son Genja Leviné, her stepson Rudi Meyer, Ernst Hermann Meyer, a musician/music critic and his wife Ilse Meyer, Lucia Moholy, a well-known Bauhaus photographer and partner of Theodore Neubauer, who was to become a major communist resistance hero, Edith Bone, Lisa Cocker, Egon Schulenburg, Max Berger, Heinero Cassirer, Paul Berliner, Hans Eisler and his wife, Lou Jolesch, the unnamed daughter of the CP academic Professor Kuczynski, Gerhard Friedlander, son of Ruth Fischer and Paul Friedlander, and my

⁴ *Ibid*, p.30

⁵ Cox, John, 2009, *Circle of Resistance: Jewish, Leftist and Youth Dissidence in Nazi Germany*, New York: Peter Lang, p.60

father Siegfried Moos, who became the secretary of the KPD exile group in London from 1934 to 1936.

By the end of the war, about 150,000 members of the KPD had been detained in concentration camps, about half of the KPD membership, and at least 30,000 executed.⁶ It is generally estimated and "confirmed" by Gestapo records that close on one million leftists were imprisoned or placed in camps between 1933 and 1945, of whom about 200,000 were killed.⁷

Within weeks of coming to power, the Nazis had closed down around 200 social democratic newspapers (national and local), occupied more than 50 KPD newspaper offices and arrested and imprisoned thousands of journalists, printers and editors.

The first camps, such as Dachau, were constructed in March 1933 for KPD prisoners, hundreds of whom lost their lives in 1933 alone. Though many of the early political prisoners were eventually released, communists, many of whom were already the leaders of the early underground resistance, accounted for about 80% of camp inmates in 1934 and were still the main focus for the Nazi sweeps of 1935.⁸ About one hundred communist activists, who were also Jewish, were interned in the Dachau concentration camp alone in 1935.⁹ In 1936, about 3,700 of the 4,700 concentration camp inmates were political prisoners. In 1938, there was another sweep of the communists still in Germany: at this point, political prisoners, most of whom had been in the anti-Nazi underground, still formed the majority of camp inmates.

For Hitler, there were two intertwined causes for the long-term degeneration of the German people, on the one hand, the "cowards", the "treasonous party rabble", criminals and the "Jewish - Marxist wire pullers" who laid the groundwork for the socialist revolution and for class division and, on the other hand, the unwillingness of the Weimar Government to crush them effectively and offer an ideological alternative.¹⁰ A visceral hatred of the left, with whom both Himmler and Hitler were obsessed, was present from the beginning of the Nazi Party.

The destruction of the left rid the Nazis of the main institutions which would have

⁶ Bayerlein, Bernhard, 2017, "The Entangled Catastrophe: Hitler's 1933 Seizure of Power and The Power Triangle" in *Weimar Communism as Mass Movement*, in (eds.) Hoffrogge, Ralf and Laporte, Norman, London: Laurence and Wishart, p.272

⁷ *Kommunistischer Widerstand 1933-1945*.

Note: The Gestapo were the German secret police, created by Göring in 1933. In 1934; it came under the aegis of Himmler, the leader of the SS. Responsible for state security, it used extreme violence and had the power to send people to concentration camps (KZs). It was especially concerned with any form of ideological dissidence.

⁸ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, pp.28-32

⁹ Paucker, Arnold, 2003, *German Jews in the Resistance 1933 – 1945 The Facts and the Problems*, Berlin: Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand. This information is based on an interview by Paucker of Dr. Alfred Laurence, a previous prisoner in Dachau.

¹⁰ Mason, Tim, 1993, *Social Policy in the Third Reich*, Berg, Oxford. pp.21-25

challenged their eugenicist, socio-racist perspective of the outsider: Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, the "workshy", the mentally ill, amongst others, constructed as separate from and inferior to the Aryan German.¹¹ While the Nazis' rabid antisemitism may have provided the glue for the party, this was not what attracted the German people, as sometimes portrayed. It was a prerequisite for the step-by-step implementation of Nazi policies based on the racialised "other": from expropriation to exclusion before systematised State extermination began. Genocide was not an initial part of the Nazi plan.

How do we find out about the resistance? What do we mean by resistance ?

There are two main primary sources for information about the anti-Nazi resistance: the first is the inevitably rare direct testimony of the leaders and members of the resistance who survived; the second are official German intelligence and legal reports and Gestapo or SS (*Schutzstaffel*) records (though many Gestapo files have been lost).¹² Both have their strengths and drawbacks.

There are few personal mementos, and fewer minutes of meetings. In the early years, the KPD's bureaucratic commitment to keeping careful records was continued, although the papers were regularly seized by the police and provided evidence for many prosecutions, a sign of the party's inability to recognise the political reality.

Surviving members of the resistance might be tempted to overstate the resistance's effectiveness (if for no other reason than why else did their comrades die) but according to the work by the US Bombing Survey Field Teams who interviewed members of the German resistance in that brief political window between 1945 and 1947, if anything, members of the communist resistance underestimated their significance. There is good reason for this. The underground operated on the basis of secrecy and would usually not have known anything beyond their local small cell, so the knowledge of the survivors was usually fragmentary. As is the case for interviews given long after the event, interviews with survivors or survivors' families may include unpredictable distortions, be over-subjective and though informative, may often be more descriptive than analytical. Fortunately, a few quasi-autobiographies do exist, such as by Len Crome, previously Jonny Huttner, Oskar Hippe, and Wolfgang Abendroth.¹³

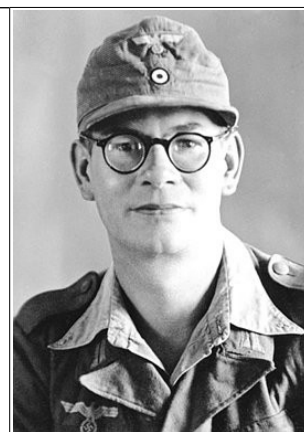
¹¹ *Ibid*, p.281

¹² Almond, Gabriel and Krauss, Wolfgang, 1999, "The Size and Composition of the Anti-Nazi Opposition in Germany" in *Political Science and Politics*, Volume 32, Issue 3, pp.564.

¹³ Crome, Len, 1988, *Unbroken. Resistance and Survival in the Concentration Camps*, London: Lawrence & Wishart; Abendroth, Wolfgang, 1981, *Ein Leben in der Arbeiterbewegung*, Berlin: Suhrkamp ; kindly translated by Sybil Cock. Hippe, Oskar, 1991, *And Red is the Colour of our Flag*, London: Index books.

Len Crome is the pseudonym of Jonny Huttner, a young Jewish Communist and former member of the famous agit-prop group: *Das Rote Sprachrohr*, who spent from 1936 till 1945 in a various prisons and camps, including Sachsenhausen, Auschwitz and Buchenwald. *Unbroken* is the story of those terrible times. Crome describes life in Sachsenhausen, where the resistance were usually members of the KPD.

Wolfgang Abendroth (1906-1985) is an extraordinary figure who deserves to be better known. He joined the Communist Youth at the age of 14 and agitated for a united front of social democrats and communists. He was expelled from the KPD in 1928 and became one of the leading figures in the SAP. In 1933, he lost his job as a junior lawyer for political reasons, and went on to provide legal advice for many opponents of the regime. Following his first arrest, Abendroth emigrated to Switzerland. After acting as a courier, he decided to return to Berlin in 1935. There, he was an active member of the resistance until he was imprisoned for several years in 1937. Forcibly drafted into the *Strafdivision 999* (Criminal Division 999), known as the death battalion, in February 1943, he deserted to the Greek partisan organisation: ELAS. He was taken prisoner by the British, and carried out political education for opponents of the regime in POW camps in Egypt. He was to become Professor of Politics at Marburg University, West Germany.¹⁴



Wolfgang Abendroth

However, my impression is that many of these resistance fighters did not have children, or thus grandchildren, who subsequently wanted to record their lives. A few documents of the political parties in exile survived but were written from afar and therefore not necessarily accurate. In the last forty odd years, there has been new research into and celebration of the local resistance by the local state, although I suspect some over-egging of no doubt heroic acts of resistance.

Nazi sources are also not as reliable as one might first assume, apart from their significant differences in systems of recording. The pre-Nazi courts continued to exist in parallel with the Nazi Peoples Courts and reliably enforced Nazi law, especially against political resisters. The records of the Courts and of treason trials do not provide detailed data and are notoriously unreliable.¹⁵ The Gestapo or SS intelligence reports are limited for two major reasons. Firstly, the Nazis set about destroying every document they could as the war came towards its end, which suggests they understood the implications of what they had done. Secondly, the records of the

¹⁴ www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/wolfgang-abendroth/
For more about him as a figure in the resistance, see the chapter 13

¹⁵ Wachsmann, *Hitler's Terror in Nazi Germany*, p.69

Gestapo that still exist, list crimes but are imprecise such as "Enemy of the State" or "Treason", catch-alls that are not a reliable guide to active resistance.¹⁶ The detailed actions or extent of the anti-Nazi underground and their differences in political emphasis are thus difficult to document.

Two final methodological points: women did not customarily organise separately formally or informally in the resistance. I have therefore decided that it is better to highlight the role of women within the resistance groups and activities rather than to present a separate section on "women in the resistance".

The centrality of antisemitism to the Nazi project is without question but what one means by "Jew" is not. This is complicated for at least two reasons. Firstly, the Nazis themselves kept changing who was included in this category. But more fundamentally, many people of Jewish heritage within Germany did not define themselves as Jews or, if they did, saw it as a form of identity which did not differentiate them from also being German. Although there evidently remained traces of antisemitism within sections of German society, most Jews saw themselves as integrated, even assimilated. More significantly, many Jews in the resistance to the Nazis, saw themselves first and foremost through their politics. Thus at times, I make use of the term "Historic Jews", referring to a large though not always clearly defined group of people whose roots were religiously or culturally Jewish but who did not necessarily define themselves in most important matters as being Jewish. Unfortunately, phrases such as "Germans and Jews" can still be heard as if Jews had not been Germans.

This is a study which does not consider how representative acts of resistance were. Readers wanting a quantitative approach should look elsewhere. It also does not examine how the Nazis successfully took power in 1933, the subsequent schisms and conflicts within the Nazi state, how far the resistance did or did not have subterranean support beyond its own organisation, or why the Nazi regime managed to cling on for as long as it did and whether this indicates a level of "collusion", including by the German working class. I also do not focus on the bigger picture of the role of the Allies (including the Soviet Union) except insofar as it had a direct impact on the resistance.

This book does not aim for objectivity. It is unashamedly written to honour the resistance which had its roots within the working class movement. We are celebrating that resistance, not attempting to balance it against those who supported or were the bystanders of Nazism.

Unlike the antifascist struggle in France or Spain, resistance to the Nazis was not

¹⁶ Almond, *The Size and Composition of the Anti-Nazi Opposition in Germany*, p.564

armed and with a few extraordinary exceptions, did not make use of force. The reasons are obvious. Any approach to active or organised resistance was complicated by the Nazi state's use of systematic terror from the very beginning making organised resistance close to impossible. Thus it can be tempting to understand almost any sign of non-acceptance or opposition, including, for example, refusal to give the Nazi salute, as resistance and therefore to define resistance so broadly that it no longer has much meaning.¹⁷ Resistance to the Nazis regularly has been applied to a wide variety of acts which in one form or another indicate a non-acceptance of the Nazi dictatorship but not an active resistance to it. The influential Bavarian State Archive defines resistance as every form of active or passive behaviour which is based on the rejection of the Nazi regime or any part of their ideology, bound up with risk. Its director, Martin Brosnat, then developed on this and stated resistance was any form of rebellion against asymmetrical rule.¹⁸ John Cox for example defines resistance as any action motivated by the intention to thwart, limit or end the exercise of the power of the oppressor.¹⁹ Though resistance is here correctly associated with motivation rather than success and is not limited to armed action, it still opens the door to a wide spectrum of survival mechanisms and cultural and social activities.

Another approach to resistance is presented by Mason. He distinguishes between the political resistance of the German working class to Nazi rule in the form of an organised underground, and what he refers to as "workers' opposition". Though not generally organised, political or conscious, economic class conflict re-emerged at different points between 1936 and 1939. Working class demands succeeded in gaining better wages and conditions, given the labour shortages, through spontaneous strikes, collective pressure on employers, slow-downs and sick-leave and thereby weakened the regime. The Nazis' aim was to break this historical class consciousness. The Gestapo saw a KPD wire-puller behind every conflict in the workplace. Mason argues for the distinction between opposition and resistance as what this distinction reveals is the Nazis' success in separating the political resistance groups from the economic class conflicts and demands.²⁰

Peukert's work emphasises the questions over the organisation of the anti-Nazi resistance. His schema usefully suggests a sliding scale from active resistance aimed ultimately at overthrowing Nazism on the one hand, through to passive resistance or what he also calls everyday resistance, including small, illegal and usually individual acts of public protest, such as refusing to give the Heil Hitler salute or hang out a

¹⁷ Kershaw, Ian, 1983, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich 1933-45*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, pp.162-3

¹⁸ Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, p. 223.

¹⁹ Cox, John, speaking in a Holocaust resistance workshop, sponsored by the North Carolina Council on the Holocaust, <https://vimeo.com/44069342>

²⁰ Mason, Tim, 1981, "The workers opposition in Nazi Germany", *History Workshop Journal* 11, p.120-7

Nazi flag or, instead of giving to the Winter Relief Fund, giving food to POWs, to occasional non-conformist behaviour in private, such as for example, listening to a foreign radio at home or private grumbling.²¹ But Peukert's sliding scale also suggests that those who partake in limited dissident behaviour, whilst opposing one Nazi policy, may sometimes also collude with Nazism. One example of this, not given by Peukert, was some families' objections to their relatives being treated under the eugenic cleansing programme.

But these acts of defiance or even opposition are not collective acts with the clear political purpose of overthrowing the Nazi regime.²² While those who were involved in passive resistance may have been acting against the interests of the Nazi state or may even have diminished its ability to carry out its decisions, this still does not constitute active resistance.

Our concern is with active political resistance, where the resister's aim, though often not effective, is to challenge the Nazi system. Active resistance can also apply to acts which in themselves do not challenge the existence of the Nazi state but which are broadly a prerequisite for doing so, such as the attempt to maintain a reasonably functioning underground network or propaganda work.²³

My argument is that it was only from within the working class, that there was sustained organised resistance aimed at overthrowing the regime.

Why has the resistance from within the working class movement been ignored?

History has a political function. Any understanding of why resistance from within the working class movement to the Nazis has been under-researched needs to understand the centrality and complexity of the political paradigms in West Germany in the first decades after 1945 and during the Cold War. To many Germans, recollections of resistance were an awkward reminder that choices were possible, even under the Nazis. Let us also not underestimate the role of Konrad Adenauer, first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, who presided over a political dialogue which presented communists as essentially outside civil society. In West Germany, much of the resistance continued to be understood as high treason against the fatherland for many years during Adenauer's rule. The communists, the leadership of the resistance, were equated with the Nazis as twin evils, a habit which has not entirely died out.

But there was a quandary here. It was important to recognise some forms of

²¹ Peukert, Detlev, 1989, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, London: Yale University press, pp.31-33

²² Kershaw, Ian, 2015, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, London: Bloomsbury, p.223-227

²³ Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, pp.31-33

resistance. The July 1944 plotters were raised to near mythological status in post-war Germany in an attempt to refute the idea that all Germans were Nazis, and also to present the case that resistance from above as opposed to from below was politically legitimate and, at the same time, to delegitimise the communists as an anti-Nazi political force.

Insofar as resistance was recognised, it was from a right-wing, bourgeois, military and occasionally religious background, but not from the social democrats and certainly not from the KPD. As late as 1956, the Bonn Parliament voted to compensate the widows of SS officers, but the Communist Party was declared illegal in the same year and communists were excluded from compensation.

It took some decades after the war for the resistance to be recast as patriots, as people of conscience rather than as traitors. According to Peter Steinbach, the reasons why the German communist resistance became marginalised was its futility, the association between the resistance and USSR style repression and communism's ultimate failure, especially after the collapse of East Germany.²⁴

The East German state presented itself as inheriting the mantle of the anti-Nazi resistance, especially of the many brave KPD martyrs, counter-posed to the Nazis in West Germany. Why then did the East German Government (the communists theoretically in a coalition with the social democrats from 1948), who had a culture of celebrating their heroes and who should have inherited the mantle and memory of the German working-class resistance, not celebrate more fully those who had stood up and too often died opposing Nazism? But who was to be seen as a hero? There had been profound changes of line between 1933 and 1945, an inability to control from afar what could well have been seen as the more "adventurist" members of the resistance as well as the inconvenient truth that some of the early resistance was led by those who had left or never belonged to the KPD. In addition, the research taking place in West Germany would generally not have reached them. Although the dissolution of the East German state removed its heavy hand from the direction of research, the academic community in the ex-GDR was hit by a wave of purges and sackings, largely unsupported by their fellows in West Germany, which acted to further inhibit research on the resistance.

During the Cold War, a belief in "our side" held an ideological influence over academia as well as politics in Britain and America as well as German historiography, which started to significantly reduce only in the mid-1960s, though there were some brave early swallows. The Allies did not honour revolutionaries or often even the resistance. Amongst the leaders in the Second World War, Churchill

²⁴ Case, David, 1998, "The Politics of Memorial Representation. The Controversy Over the German Resistance Museum in 1994", *German Politics and Society*, Vol 16, no. 1, p.63

was an exception in holding to the tactic of building up the Special Operations Executive (SOE) who worked with resistance fighters across Europe. Roosevelt and many of the High Command of the Allied military preferred a more conventional war. Add to that, we are here discussing the enemy, the Germans, even if these were the "good" Germans. Moreover, communists, during the academic freeze which so often went along with the Cold War, were on the other side.²⁵ It is not till the late 1960s that a few historians start to focus on German history from below, which before then had not been documented, for example Peukert's 1976 study of Ruhr workers in which he considered why coal miners, especially in the Ruhr, opposed the Nazi regime when others did not. He focused on the role of the underground KPD in the miners' struggle where officials of the Labour Front (the Nazi trade union) had, despite themselves, to make wage demands on behalf of the militant miners.²⁶ In the late 1970s/early 1980s, there emerged a greater emphasis on a "History Workshop" approach which encouraged local communities, civic authorities and academics to focus on, interview if possible and publicise the people in the local resistance. It is only relatively recently that there has been considered analysis and debate about the broader trends, including the different meanings and forms of resistance.

The lack of attention to the resistance from within the working class is also in part a product of how the victims of Nazism have been seen in much of Western Europe, at least since the late 1960s, primarily in terms of the Holocaust. There is a misleading equation between Nazism and the Holocaust, which both suggests the Holocaust's inevitability and minimises, if not ignores, Nazism's other targets. To take one example, the language of "Holocaust survivor" came to replace that of the post-war "Displaced Person", of whom Jews were in a minority, only after the Eichmann trial of 1961/62 and the increasing legitimation of Israel as the plucky victim of, and defender against, the Arab "antisemitic barbarians". From then, Nazism increasingly was seen as primarily targeting Jews. The mass extermination of Jews has diverted much of our attention from the Nazis' earlier priorities.

A final note about the heated debates as late as the second half of the 1980s in Germany, before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The German Resistance Museum in Berlin, which opened in 1989, presents a particular set of memories of the resistance. In 1994, a group of irate left-wing students briefly occupied the Museum after the commemoration of the attempted military coup of 1944 was marked by a speech by

²⁵ Two of the few British authors who look at the grass-roots politics in the German working class during this period are: Rosenhaft, Eve, 1983, *Beating the Fascists? The German Communists and Political Violence 1929–1933*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;

LaPorte, Norman, 2002, *The German Communist Party in Saxony, 1924–1933: Factionalism, Fratricide, and Political Failure*, Oxford: Peter Lang.

²⁶ Peukert, Detlev, 1976, *Ruhrarbeiter gegen den Faschismus. Dokumentation über den Widerstand im Ruhrgebiet 1933–1945*, Röderberg-Verlag

Chancellor Kohl and did not include the son of a social democratic resister. The contours of the main debate are represented by Franz von Stauffenberg, a son of Claus von Stauffenberg who attempted to assassinate Adolf Hitler on 20 July 1944 and who was himself a conservative politician, on the one hand, and Peter Steinbach, the director of the Museum on the other. Stauffenberg and others complained to the Berlin government about two exhibits: the inclusion of exiled communists who had been a part of the USSR-based anti-Nazi National Committee for a Free Germany, in particular of Walter Ulbricht and Wilhelm Pieck, two early leaders of the East German regime, and the POWs in the Soviet Union who had called on their fellow soldiers to overthrow the Nazi regime and who could therefore be seen as "Red fascists". He also accused Peter Steinbach of pushing his own agenda of resistance and threatened to boycott the traditional 20 July ceremony.²⁷

Steinbach responded by arguing that the resistance was more than the 20 July plotters, that the exiled communists should not be seen as traitors and that remembrance was not the same as nationalism, but he also criticised resisters' relatives, arguing for the need to accept a pluralist perspective. There followed a heated debate in the media, amongst historians and resisters' relatives. Although many did not support Steinbach, the fact that the July plotters had attempted to build a political alliance, including with the communists, was seen as a justification for including the communists in the Museum. There was an in-between position: the Mayor of Berlin argued that the communist resistance should be recognised but not in a museum which was built on the ground where von Stauffenberg and others were executed. A number of historians of different political hues have addressed the issue of the role of the conservative opposition. Mommsen for example argued that they generally had a mistrust of "mass democracy" and held essentially authoritarian and Christian family values, with a sympathy for the Nazis' expansionist goals, though not their means.²⁸

In a period where academic and popular controversy still rages about the causes and effects of Nazism, this work aims to remind us of a different brave tradition of resistance against barbarism.

²⁷ Case, *The Politics of Memorial Representation*, pp.58-81

²⁸ Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, pp.217-219.

Chapter 2 - The Nazis Hated the Organised Working Class from the Beginning

From the start, the Nazis were committed to breaking working class organisation and rooting out Marxism. The Nazi hierarchy's fear of the working class had its origins in their experiences, especially in Bavaria, of an insurgent popular workers' movement. This chapter emphasises the importance of the social movements on the ground as an explanation for Nazism's victory in 1933.

The ideology of the NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, National Socialist German Workers' Party, commonly referred to as the Nazi Party) was formed largely in response to the revolutionary upheavals in Bavaria and in the rest of Germany in 1918/19. The mutiny by sailors and soldiers in Bavaria against the war in 1918 precipitated solidarity action and within a few months, the working class was in revolt, finally led by a recently formed KPD. Although the revolutionary upheavals only lasted for just over a week, it was the last straw for the Social Democratic Weimar government. An armed militia, led by Ernst Toller, a member of the Independent Socialists, had defeated the regular army organised by Hoffman, the SPD mayor of Munich. This would not do. The German bourgeoisie were upset. In 1919, the German Social Democratic government under Ebert sent in 30,000 *Freikorps*, an organisation of right-wing mercenary soldiers, to put down the workers' revolution, not trusting their own regular troops. In early May 1919, after murdering the revolution's leaders, the *Freikorps* took over the running of Munich.¹

The repression was brutal. Resistance was quickly and ruthlessly broken. Munich became "the headquarters of a massive counter-revolutionary conglomerate".² The *Freikorps* turned Munich into the headquarters of the counter-revolution and provided the Nazis with their first storm-troopers who brought with them into the Nazi Party a profound hatred for, in particular, communists but also Jews.

The *Freikorps* provides a crucial link between the crushing of the Bavarian uprisings, the Nazi Party and events in 1933. Numerous future leaders, for example Ernst Röhm, the future head of the SA (*Sturmabteilung*), Himmler, future head of the SS, Heydrich, second to Himmler in the SS, Rudolph Hoess, the future commandant of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Hans Frank, the Governor-General of Poland, all belonged first to the *Freikorps* in Munich and then to the early Bavarian Nazi group.

¹ Waldemar Pabst, transformed the army unit he had been leading in 1918 into a heavily-armed division of the *Freikorps*, with about 40,000 men. He was the key figure guiding the murders of Luxemburg and Liebknecht in Berlin, which he later referred to as "executions". He worked closely with Noske, a leading social democratic politician who Pabst always claimed gave his assent to the killings. Later, Pabst described himself as a supporter of the Nazi state. Gietinger, Klaus, 2019, *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*, Verso, pp157-160

² Siemens, Daniel, 2017, *A New History of Hitler's Brownshirts*, Boston: Yale University Press, p.5

It is regularly overlooked how far the SA held a different political ideology to the future mainstream Nazi ideology. It represented the highly distorted "Socialist" part of "National Socialism", deploring capitalist excess, in favour of the redistribution of wealth and for a more radical, mass-action and worker-based form of Nazism.

The *Freikorps*' profoundly nationalistic and anticommunist beliefs directly influenced the SA. The years 1918/19 were, as they saw it, when the German working class both threatened and deserted Germany. It was a pivotal moment when they appreciated the need to crush the organisations of the German working class and root out Bolshevism. The *Freikorps* believed in defending Germany against the Soviet menace and that Communists and Jews were traitors to the Fatherland, policies the SA also adopted. As with the *Freikorps*, it was the SA who were the political soldiers, believing in the use of violence and intimidation, anti-Communism and Aryanism. Already in 1919, they were proclaiming that Bolsheviks, usually associated with Jews, were national traitors.

The SA saw themselves as a revolutionary group and believed in the violent overthrow of the Weimar Republic, as opposed to Hitler's belief in parliamentarianism. There was even the so-called Stennes Revolt when Stennes, the Berlin commandant of the SA, refused to provide protection for Goebbels on 30 August 1930, his men instead demonstrating against Goebbels and then getting into a serious fight with the SS.³

The SA, the largest Nazi mass organisation with 60,000 supporters by 1930, has escaped much attention in part because the Night of the Long Knives in early July, 1934, brought the SA's socialist crusade and independent, extra-legal activity largely to an end and, in part, because the Nuremberg trials only looked at crimes committed after the outbreak of war, not from 1933.⁴ But the SA, with their calls for a second revolution against finance capital, for an SA state, their challenge to the regular army and their open acts of disorder and brutality could not be allowed to continue. The SS, unleashed by Hitler, led the purge of the SA leaders in July 1934, proving the SS's loyalty, marking their political ascendancy and leading to their future control of most of the concentration camps.⁵

The street fighting days of the Weimar Republic

The years leading up to 1933 were a period of creeping civil war. As early as 1926, Joseph Goebbels, already an officer in the Nazi Party, was assigned the task of breaking the hold of the left in Berlin, the "Reddest city outside the USSR". From

³ Kershaw, Ian, 1999. *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, p217

⁴ Siemens, *New History of Hitler's Brownshirts*, pp.37, 309

⁵ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, pp.80-1

1927, there were daily street and community confrontations, even battles, between the militants of the left and the SA, other irregular military forces and on occasions the police. The Nazis were out to destroy the organised working class, especially in Berlin.

In a sign of the KPD's awareness of the growth of the far-right in the years soon after the defeats of 1919 and 1924, it had set up a number of defensive organisations, in particular the Red Front (RFB, *Rotfrontkämpferbund*), which trained its reliable members in the use of guns. Although there were other defensive anti-Nazi organisations associated with, for example, the SPD, up till late 1932, the prime danger, as perceived by the SPD's leadership, was Bolshevism, not Nazism, although it did establish a nominal anti-Nazi organisation.

The Red Front were by far the most militant and organised anti-Nazi organisation and were especially targeted by the SA and the police.⁶ It drew its members mainly from the young unemployed, usually led by local, youngish KPD militants. Their goal was often to defend their own community. By 1928, it had about 100,000 members, by 1933 about 130,000, many more if sympathisers are included.⁷

While the Red Front had originally been set up to be at the physical forefront of a revolutionary movement, the turning point can be seen as 1929 when, at the illegal Berlin Mayday demonstration, the "gutters ran with blood". The police, under social democratic control, fired on the demonstrators, in particular the Red Front. The police chief called a state of emergency as the police and in some areas the SA battled the demonstrators over three days, especially in "Red" Wedding, a working class district of Berlin. Over 30 died and over 200 were injured. The RFB was banned.

From then on, the Red Front became a defensive, not offensive, organisation. It had to develop a structure to protect its members and set up a five person cell structure, the leader often a KPD member. The cell structure made it more difficult to infiltrate and limited how much each member knew of each other. However, that was also a disadvantage. Cells acted fairly autonomously, both from each other but also from the KPD leadership. But its members did learn in the years between 1929 and 1933 how to operate underground, crucial for the resistance work in which many of their members were to be involved from 1933, an awareness lacking in much of the KPD leadership.

Yet the KPD's view of the Red Front remained at best equivocal. After the bloodbath on the Mayday 1929 demonstration, it was the Red Front who defended Berlin's working class communities against the Nazi attempts at incursion, while the

⁶ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.83.

⁷ Grant, Thomas, 2004, *Stormtroopers and the Crisis in the Nazi Movement: Activism, Ideology and Dissolution*, London: Routledge, p.43

KPD leadership initially held back. From then, the KPD leadership tended to see the Red Front as a home for adventurists and people keener on defending their communities than being a disciplined part of the class struggle. Soon after 1929, the KPD leadership set up their own elite and secret paramilitary unit, something which has only recently emerged, made up of groups of ten, some of them with *handfeuerwaffen* (handguns), who underwent training.⁸

In addition, the KPD leadership also set up the alternative, and largely ineffective, *Kampfbund gegen den Faschismus*, in 1930, whose members were not allowed to carry guns and whose aim was to confront the Nazis on legal grounds. Then they also established *Antifaschistische Aktion* in 1932, to draw in any working class militant who wished to engage in self-defence; primarily this involved defending individuals and communities targeted by the Nazis, for example tenant protection against evictions, but the nearer it got to 1933, the more the individuals involved seem to have ignored their supposed political goals and taken to the streets.

What further complicated the relationship between the Red Front and the KPD was that the KPD wanted to draw young unemployed youth away from the clutches of the SA and so developed strategies to facilitate this, such as inviting Nazis onto their platforms. The leadership's attitude to confronting the NSDAP was erratic and led them at times to criticise the Red Front's emphasis on confronting the Nazis. The infamous joint KPD/SA picket line during the brief transport strike in 1932 was not a one-off, but a feature of KPD policy, as well as a part of the KPD's doomed attempt to influence and draw to them Nazi sympathisers. The KPD leadership in the years leading up to 1933 were regularly criticised for their failure to take the growing Nazi threat seriously enough by both the Red Front and their youth wing, which increasingly saw the KPD leadership's condemnation of individual terror as a license for fascist violence.

Though vastly outnumbered by the left, the threat from the Nazis, at least in Berlin, grew little by little from 1924 until 1929. In 1927, the SA had the confidence to confront a carload of the Red Front, following a Nazi meeting at Trebbin, close to Berlin. By early 1929, the SA in Berlin had a membership of about 800, while the KPD had 15,000 in 1927.⁹

From 1929, units of the Red Front, frequently embedded in the local working class community, fought the Nazis street by street, and tavern by tavern. Taverns were focal clash points. The pub owners did not make much of a profit from their left-wing unemployed and impoverished clientele who frequently used the taverns as meeting points and there were regular instances of taverns being taken over by the Nazis.

⁸ My thanks to Harald Marpe, from private correspondence.

⁹ Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists?* pp.11, 18

Based in Berlin, Oskar Hippe described various instances of the street fighting between the Red Front and the SA that he witnessed in the years before 1933 and the increasing strength and violence of the SA against the organised working class.¹⁰ In 1929, the SA shot at people leaving a KPD meeting in the Ahlert rooms, leaving two dead and several injured. The authorities did nothing. At about the same time, the Charlottenburg Workers League organised a social which was shot at by the SA, again leaving dead and injured. Another attack in Charlottenburg, Berlin was on a group of Red Front musicians. In the subsequent large demonstration called by the KPD, the police attacked the demonstrators. The SA attacked the building where the Red Front was holding a meeting; a battle ensued, where the working class locals piled in on the side of the left, causing the Nazis to retreat but there were many injured.

One infamous battle which centred on the SA take-over of a previously KPD tavern took place at Neukölln in 1931, where the tavern owner had joined the Nazi party. The Nazis had 1,300 members and nine tavern-headquarters in the district, the first SA group there already claimed seventy members. The SA moreover were being shielded by the police and armed by the military. But Neukölln was also a stronghold of the left, where the Red Front was strong, with about 2000 members. Demonstrations of all kinds had been banned. Despite the KPD's then line being for mass action, things took an unexpected turn when a group, singing the International, returning fire for fire, fired on the Nazis, who were defending Bowes tavern and killing the tavern owner.¹¹

Again in 1931, the Kreuzberg battle was precipitated by another Nazi take-over of a formerly KPD tavern, when, unusually, members of both the SPD and the KPD attacked the SA. In Dortmund, a traditionally left-wing area, there were repeated violent clashes between members of the KPD, with a membership of about 1200, and the Nazis, but such offensive action was exceptional. Hippe concludes from his many examples that there was a significant resistance to the Nazis up to 1933 and so its subsequent failure needs to be explained.

The *Guardian* correspondent gives us a prescient warning about how powerful the SA had become as early as 1932:

"Their [Klagges, Minister of the Interior and an unnamed nationalist] spell of power in Brunswick is a kind of rehearsal. The... SA men... have lorries on

¹⁰ Hippe, Oskar, 1991, *And Red is the Colour of my Flag*, London: Index books, p.117. Hippe was active from the German revolution of 1919 on through the Nazi years. He was to join the Left Opposition, disillusioned with both the Stalinisation of the KPD and the treachery of the SPD. Written many decades after the events themselves, the book can at times be vague on detail, even occasionally inaccurate, but is, for all that, one of the very few personal accounts of these years from the revolutionary left and somebody active in the working class resistance and is valuable as such.

¹¹ *Ibid*, pp.117-119

which they race along at great speed, the swastika (their antisemitic symbol) fluttering over the bonnet. ...The stormtroops leap down; blows from cudgels, knives, preservers, knuckle dusters are dealt out, heads are cut open, arms raised in self-defence are broken or bruised and crouching backs or shoulders are beaten black and blue. Sometimes shots are fired and knives are drawn. Never is there any cause for such an assault, only a pretence of 'comrades in danger' that will serve as an excuse for the assault. The lorry with its load of hooligans can be seen racing along almost any day. Nothing is done to stop the abominations".¹²

The members of the Red Front often faced tough, civil war-like conflicts with the SA from 1933 onwards as the SA continued pursuing their pre-1933 enemies. Although this was a civil war in which one side was, generally, not armed, the Red Front cadre, some of whom had been armed, had generally hidden their guns in the woods or other safe places once the arrests had started in 1933.¹³

Sandvoß, in a passing reference unfortunately without any detail, talks about an initiative by the M division (military political division) of the KPD to procure weapons. In 1934, this led to Max Jessel being arrested and imprisoned for 10 years after SA-Sturmbannführer Kubick excavated a weapons depot at the end of November 1933 at Kastanienallee 86.¹⁴

The Berlin Three

I was exceedingly fortunate in being given the opportunity to interview, in autumn 2011, Rudi Schiffmann and two of his comrades, who were KPD activists in the early 1930s, one of them in the Red Front. I refer to them as the Berlin Three. The interviews reveal how far there was an organised resistance up till 1933, driven as much by their daily experiences as by the KPD party line, a resistance which the SA did their very best to crush. What emerged from these interviews was how they experienced something akin to civil war on the streets of much of Berlin in the early 1930s, with daily battles between the SA and organisations such as the Red Front, as well as heroic attempts at sustaining antifascist activity after 1933. The other two were Hans Hohoutek (1911-2013) and Elfriede Brüning (1910-2014). Hans became a member of the KPD in 1932 and was involved in the Proletarian Freethinkers (a sort of KPD humanist group) and in KPD sporting groups, joined the resistance, and was arrested and released repeatedly, He was drafted into military service in 1940 and came across the Red Army in February 1944. He became a member of the National

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/news/1932/mar/30/mainsection.fromthearchive>

¹³ Sandvoß,, H.R., *Neukölln*, in: German Resistance Memorial Centre, 1990, *Resistance in Berlin, 1933-1945*, p.175
I wish to thank Matthias Schirmer for drawing this study to my attention.

¹⁴ Sandvoß, *Widerstand* in Prenzlauer Berg und Weißensee, p.121

Committee for a Free Germany¹⁵, and on its behalf, took part in the fight against the German armed forces from April 1944. He became a leading police person in East Germany.¹⁶ They gave me some sense of how active the SA were on the ground, especially against socialists and how essential some sort of community defence was in militant working class areas up to 1933.¹⁷

Aged 16, Rudi joined the Youth Red Front in Wedding where he lived. He quickly became the leader of his locally based small group, which was made up of 8 to 10 people. From 1929 or even earlier, the SA were trying to take over control of the streets and taverns which were left-wing strongholds and to patrol or break up left meetings. There were, he said, thousands of Red Front groups across Germany. Unemployed, he had a secret printing press in his hut on his allotment, where he lived with his family, putting himself and his family in a permanent state of danger. He said: "At the time that I worked illegally, we produced and distributed papers on some material. I lived in a hut on the allotment, 3000 huts ...There were a lot of communists, before 1933".

Leaflets then had to be distributed by just one person because of the fear of arrest. He described how his wife would push their baby out in the pram, with antifascist leaflets under the mattress in order to get past the police. It was vital to always know how to get out of a tight spot.

Rudi described how the SA would attempt to attack them or others in the community daily whenever they had the opportunity. "They attacked us and then blood was flowing. They looked for us. They found out where we were and then they attacked us". He and other members of the Red Front had scouts on bikes and courting couples who alerted the neighbourhoods when the SA were coming, to give them time to summons and organise support. Rudi said: "It was always the SA attacking us. We had hot heads as well on our side. There were boiling points. I always said: Stay calm, stay calm, but if we were attacked, we fought back. But that happened quite a lot".

Elfriede, one of the three people I interviewed, also talked of the nightly battles between the SA and the Red Front in Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin. She said that "The Red Front fighters were involved from 1929/30 onwards in protecting the locality

¹⁵ see the section in Chapter 10 on "The role of the National Committee for a Free Germany (NKFD).

¹⁶ see the section in Chapter 13 on "Strafdivision 999".

¹⁷ My thanks to VVN-BbA, in particular Hans Coppi, who kindly put me in touch with the Berlin Three and to Irene Fick who acted as the translator. The VVN-BdA or *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes – Bund der Antifaschistinnen und Antifaschisten* (*The Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters*) was founded in 1947 in what was to become East Germany. It emerged from victims associations in Germany who were political opponents to Nazism. Since 2002, the association extended to all of Germany, and now includes camp survivors. The VVN-BdA is presently one of the most active antifascist organisations in Germany and has not always been viewed favourably by different German governments.

against the SA and it was them who were on a daily offensive".

With good reason, Rudi emphasised not only the fear of the SA and the police but also the fear of betrayal by each other: "We had friends and they had friends but we had to be very careful whom we talked to because we had to trust them and it was very difficult sometimes". The SA and the Red Front were drawn from the same communities, went to the same schools, lived in the same streets; indeed, occasionally were brothers. "The SA were also workers. They weren't arrogant or anything, they didn't have work and they sold themselves for a few marks...You know these people. We went to the same schools. Sometimes, they were good friends of mine. It was very difficult. To find out who still had a character or who was a bandit".

What also emerged from the interview, as well as from other material in this study, is that people left the KPD for the SA. Rudi explained that once the Nazis were in power, comrades, "even [some from] the Red Front", were so frightened that they joined the SA. There was also overlapping membership, on occasion a result of attempts at recruiting SA members into the KPD; Elfriede was betrayed when one of the members of their left writers group who also belonged to the SA turned over their names to the SS in 1934. Hippe corroborates this. He wrote that such was the level of disillusionment, that many people joined the SA without cancelling their membership of left groups and then would pull out whichever membership card was appropriate, usually that of the SA.¹⁸

From 30 January 1933, Rudi stated, the direct terror began. There were raids everywhere and many comrades were picked up, tortured and murdered. Known for his political activities and under surveillance by the SA, Rudi went into hiding. But the work of the party had to be continued. Rudi became a part of the party's local underground leadership. He saw what happened after the *Reichstag* fire at the end of February 1933 as a continuation of earlier State/social democratic repression and SA intimidation.

Rudi's first task was to reconnect with the Berlin leadership. There was an intermediary, Gustav, who recommended that the priority should be antifascist activity. Rudi's work included graffiti: slogans against fascism on houses and in streets. They also printed and distributed illegal leaflets, especially at job centres.

In March 1933, another comrade, Willi, asked for Rudi's support in illegally building Red Aid in Wedding and in Gesundbrunnen. The purpose was to win people away from Hitler and to support the victims of fascism. Rudi contacted his comrades as well as non-Party friends and succeeded in resurrecting a Red Aid cell. They got

¹⁸ Hippe, *And Red is the Colour of my Flag*, p.140

hold of a duplicating machine, typewriter, stencils and paper. Everything had to be hidden and Rudi found that the homes of his mother and his parents in law were ideal hiding places.

From October 1934, there was a wave of arrests of members and antifascists whom Rudi knew; this was followed by a raid on his hut, but nothing was found. The Gestapo tried, and by suggestion had succeeded, in getting their agents into their network. "In the meantime, we had also learnt to work *Konspirativ*". In summer 1936, there was a further set-back which undermined their work. Many more comrades whom he knew and had worked with closely were arrested, kept in protective custody, then given a farcical trial and sent to camps, but nobody betrayed him. Hans in his interview stated that after about 1935, the resistance was smashed. Rudi had adopted a pseudonym of "Ruhmann" which protected him as newer members did not know his real name. By then, there were very few comrades left and the connection to the Berlin leadership was no longer possible. Moreover, the Gestapo had been lost. As he said repeatedly: "A lot of those who produced it [the leaflets] got arrested... Some were executed. One had to be very careful".

In April 1937, one comrade was released and he and Rudi attempted to resurrect their activity, by scattering leaflets, which they had made with hand carved rubber stamps. He also resumed collecting donations in solidarity with incarcerated antifascists. He occasionally ran leaflets across the border from Czechoslovakia for the underground. He was just lucky not to be caught. When I asked about whether he had ever considered going into exile, he replied quite angrily: "Where else could I go?"

During the war, Rudi was conscripted, became a POW but was released, found his way back to Germany and then, after the war, moved to East Berlin, as did Elfriede and Hans. Towards the end of the interview, Rudi, asked whether he still knew anybody at the end of the war, answered: "Either they were dead or they were in prison... they went to the Nazis ... or they were killed during the war... After the war ended, I never met anyone whom I'd known then".

The ambiguity of the official KPD line towards the Nazis contrasts with the lived experiences of many of their working class members who spent years confronting the SA and Nazi thugs on their streets and communities before 1933.

Chapter 3 - The Aftermath of the *Reichstag* Fire, February 1933

Margaret Dewar, still a member of the KPD in Berlin in 1933, wrote later that the night Hitler became Chancellor on 30 January 1933, neither the SPD nor the KPD called protests, "yet everybody had expected some action: a demonstration, a strike" if such a thing happened.¹ But nothing happened. "Not one demo, not one strike." Eve Rosenhaft notes that many middle ranking KPD officers also opposed the KPD decision not to call a counter-demonstration.² The communist press came out with the slogans: "The worst the better" and "After Hitler, it will be us".³

The SA however seized the moment: in a mixture of revenge, hate and ecstasy, they killed between 500 and 1000 people that night and injured thousands more. On the night of the fire and the following two days, 1,500 communists were arrested just in Berlin and about 5,000 overall.⁴ In March-April alone, 40-50,000 political opponents were taken into protective custody.⁵

"The wave of arrests that followed the *Reichstag* fire decimated the hierarchy of the KPD cadres in a single night... Those functionaries who escaped often had no further precise orders".⁶ In the dark hours of the early morning of 28 February, most comrades did not know about, or did not appreciate the significance of the Reichstag fire. "Many were dragged from their beds or seized at their place of work before they had realised the full significance of the Fire or received any political guidance about it, and were taken into protective custody".⁷

Too late, on 28 February, the KPD's Central Committee issued an appeal to the three main trade union federations and to the SPD, calling for a united response of strikes. The SPD leadership ignored the call, although there were some local attempts at coordination, such as at Leipzig and Stettin.⁸

Ernst Thälmann, the leader of the KPD, was arrested on March 3, 1933, three days after the *Reichstag* fire, although not shot until 1944. Among those seized, were a high proportion of middle ranking functionaries as well as some full time regional officers. John Schehr who headed the KPD after Thälman's arrest was himself arrested in November 1933 and executed together with leading Berlin communists

¹ Dewar, Margaret, 1989, *The Quiet Revolutionary*, London: Bookmarks.

² My father, Siegi Moos, also told me how he went out that evening expecting a counter-demo, only to watch the Nazis' candle lit march-past.

³ Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists?* p.198

⁴ Weber, Hermann, 2001, *Kommunistischer Widerstand gegen die Hitler-Diktatur 1933- 1939*, Berlin: Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand

⁵ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.32

⁶ Palmier, Jean-Michel, 2006, *Weimar in exile: the antifascist emigration in Europe and America*, London: Verso,

⁷ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.33.

⁸ *Ibid*, p.39

Erich Steinfurth, Eugen Schönhaar and Rudolf Schwarz, on 1 February 1934.⁹

In the weeks after Hitler had become Chancellor, the KPD's top leadership still at liberty, after far too long a delay, started to live and work clandestinely.¹⁰ Many communist activists who had not been arrested went underground after February 1933, but many, especially the rank and file members, who hoped to disappear into the working-class areas where their friends and comrades might hide them, were picked up; these areas were already infiltrated by police and Gestapo agents.¹¹

The Gestapo became especially concerned with arresting communists and communist sympathisers, although stopping Jews was also important. From February 1933 up till the outbreak of war, about 225,000 Germans were condemned for political reasons and given prison sentences totalling 600,000 years, about 90% of whom belonged to the labour movement. In April 1939, according to Gestapo figures, almost 168,000 Germans were being detained in concentration or internment camps, 112,500 were serving prison sentences and 273,000 were held in some other form of custody.¹²

The left was particularly strong in certain areas in Berlin and were particularly subject to SA attack. The following is drawn from a report by a member of the KPD exiled leadership: "On 3 March 1933 [days after the Reichstag fire], in Prinzenallee 33 [in Neukölln], the Weddinger SA 100 tortured to death worker Karl Winkel and the well-known RFB [Red Front] official Fritz Moskau". There were about 2000 people in Red Front just in Neukölln, Berlin. Another unnamed KPD exile is also quoted: "I [and four others from the RFB] was arrested on 15 April and taken to Prinzenallee, SA barracks... I was received with Hail Moscow... With whips, steel rods, ochsenziemern and clubs, they beat us [on] our hands. 50 to 100 strokes for everyone".¹³

There was also a strong KPD linked anti-Nazi sports movement in Berlin. Red Sports (*Rote Sporteinheit*) had been established by the KPD to separate it from the SPD and Nature sports organisations. In 1931, it included over 100,000 young worker athletes and provided an umbrella for athletic, swimming, hiking and similar clubs, many composed of committed members of the anti-Nazi resistance. There were even 30 to 40 sympathetic canoeists. After 30 January 1933, the Nazis banned the sports clubs, confiscated the Red Sports grounds and arrested many members.¹⁴

Erich Hempel, a former manager of the Red Sports, was one of the driving forces,

⁹ *Ibid*, pp.80-81

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.79

¹¹ Palmier, *Weimar in Exile*, p.90

¹² Abendroth, Wolfgang, 1965, *A Short History of the European Working Class*, Frankfurt: Suhrkam, p.117

¹³ Sandvoß, *Neukölln*, pp. 161-180

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.63

especially organising the hiking section, of whom a significant minority became committed anti-Nazis, more so than many in the KPD, but they were quickly arrested. But sporting activities continued to provide some sort of cover: Red Sports people were encouraged to build illegal cells in their clubs, and produce and distribute antifascist writings. The rare extant examples read like KPD propaganda. Irmgard Klauß, widow of the executed worker athlete Caesar Horn, recalls how the young came together across party lines with the slogan "Overthrow fascism" but how their inexperience quickly led to their arrests. Of the 2,000 illegal Berlin worker athletes in 1934, 250 were arrested and 200 were charged, while some later were sent to the 999 Penal Battalions.¹⁵

Caesar Horn, KPD, was a committed member of Red Sports and organised the resistance activities among former members of the workers sports club: *Fichte*. They printed and distributed the illegal newspaper: *The Spotlight*. He was arrested in 1936 and sent to a labour camp, Dreetz, where he formed a resistance group and distributed illegal pamphlets. Later, he sent letters to members of the *Wehrmacht* asking for their help to end the war on behalf of the National Committee for a Free Germany. Somehow, he also worked the trains between Berlin and Hanover to liaise with resistance groups. Horn was arrested in July 1944, and beheaded on 19 March 1945 in Brandenburg-Görden.¹⁶



Caesar Horn

Significant members of the social democratic leadership were also detained. Some leading social democrats believed, wrongly, that as the Nazis had swooped on the KPD and not them, they would be allowed to continue as a legal organisation; a few even collaborated with the Nazis to save their Party and generally the SPD consistently failed to challenge what the Nazis were doing.¹⁷ It did not save them. On 23 June 1933, the SPD was banned; the leader of the policy of appeasement, Paul Lobe, was arrested along with many others, though he survived.

The leaders of the trade unions also failed to recognise the threat the Nazi state posed. On the 21 March 1933, Theodor Leipart, President of the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (ADGB, the German trade union federation), wrote to Hitler that "the trade unions are not intending to act directly on the terrain which

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp.26-58

¹⁶ Sandvoß, "Resistance" in *Pankow und Reinickendorf*, Berlin 1992, pp.142-145.

¹⁷ Anderson, Evelyn, 1945, *Hammer or Anvil. The story of the German working class movement*, London: Left Book Club, Victor Gollanz, pp.154-156.

pertains to state policy. Their task is rather to direct the just demands of workers in relation to the government's measures of social and economic policy." A few days later, Leipart again wrote to Hitler to inform him of the trade unions' complete dissociation from the SPD, and offering the government the collaboration of the trade unions.

Hitler declared Mayday to be a National Labour Day and a national holiday. The trade union leadership, hoping to save their organisations, even called, ineffectively, on their members to support the rally and broke all ties with the SPD. Hippe argues that the trade union leaders "threw themselves at the feet of the Fascists".¹⁸ An extraordinary paragraph from the ADGB's publication for May Day reads: "We... recognise that the victory of National Socialism... is our victory as well".¹⁹ But the ADGB leadership's open cooperation with the Nazis did not save them. The Christian trade unions declared themselves apolitical, and the trade union organisations of white collar workers, one of which was headed by the Christian trade union, and another by the centre Right, also announced their submission to the regime.

On 2 May 1933, the Nazis banned the German free trade unions, occupied their premises and packed countless trade unionists off to the concentration camps. In an action that was coordinated throughout Germany, commandos of the SS and the SA occupied trade union offices throughout the country, as well as the head offices of the Bank Workers, White Collar Workers and Functionaries in Berlin, its branches throughout the Reich, and all offices of the trade union press, without encountering any resistance. The most prominent trade union leaders, Theodor Leipart, Grassman and former Labour Minister Wissell were arrested and sent to camps, although Leipart declared that he would do whatever was asked of him.²⁰ After January 1933, Leipart initially hoped to come to terms with the new government. His attitude was partly responsible for the lack of resolute resistance by the trade unions. He was nevertheless arrested on 2 May but quickly released and survived. Wissell, who was a *Reichstag* SPD deputy, one of the very few to vote against the Enabling Act in March 1933, was briefly arrested and also survived. Nothing associates any of them with resistance activities.

The Nazis set up the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, DAF), the only union organisation allowed. It assumed responsibility for the regulation of wages, conditions of work and labour contracts, in theory, bringing an end to conflict between workers and employers. Its aims were to hold down wage rises, even if some concessions had to be granted along the way, and to minimise the effectiveness of

¹⁸ Hippe, *And Red is the Colour of my Flag*, p.143

¹⁹ Anderson, *Hammer or Anvil*, p161

²⁰ https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/theodor-leipart/

members of the KPD and SPD. The mixture of the use of force, coercive legislation and DAF repression represented an extreme form of class warfare.²¹ The German working class had lost its industrial organisation. The German labour movement, the strongest the world had ever seen, had been destroyed.²²

Then began a reign of terror which in effect lasted till 1935, designed to smash the KPD once and for all. The SA set out to exact their revenge for past blows, unfettered by any police or legal restraints.

The anti-Nazis are quickly arrested and had to be detained

The extent of early arrests indicates both the Nazis' intent on breaking working class organisations and the strength of the anti-Nazi movement prior to the Nazi take over. Most people arrested were not tried. Himmler, head of the SS, boasted that such was the SS commitment to breaking their enemies, they just pulled people of the street illegally.²³

Detainees as early as 1933 were sent to a variety of holding centres. I shall focus on Bavaria and Berlin. Berlin, the heart of political resistance before 1933, spawned many different forms of detention centres early on under different forms of political control as the number of arrests exhausted the capacity of the Berlin prisons and SA cellars.²⁴

The police had to use the former Sonnenburg penitentiary as a state concentration camp. The first prisoners there were overwhelmingly functionaries of the KPD who arrived on 4 April, 1933. Two days later, a group of prominent Nazi opponents was transferred, including Carl von Ossietzky, Erich Mühsam, Ernst Scheller, and Hans Litten. It continued to specialise in political prisoners, and later on, deserters and forced labourers.

Between March and December 1933, about 2,000 prisoners, mostly political, were murdered in the SA run prison in Papestrasse, Berlin, for example Kurt Kaiser on 13 April 1933 because he had insulted the Führer and the communists Max Krausch on 3 July 1933 and Ewald Vogt on 21 August 1933. Jan Petersen in his novel described the barbaric conditions at Papestrasse.²⁵

During the night of March 20-21, 1933 in Köpenick, Berlin, the leader of the SA

²¹ The importance of the DAF should not be underestimated: it had pretensions, which the leading Nazis did not appreciate, to become the dominant apparatus within the Nazi state.

²² Anderson, *Hammer or Anvil*, p.155

²³ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.32

²⁴ I am indebted to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum web-site for the information in this section:

https://www.ushmm.org/online/camps-ghettos-download/EncyclopediaVol-I_PartA.pdf. When no other source is given, the information is drawn from here.

²⁵ Jan Petersen: *Unsere Strasse: eine Chronik, geschrieben im Herzen des faschistischen Deutschlands 1933/34*, Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1974.

Sturm 2/15, Herbert Scharsich interrogated and tortured the SPD district representative, Maria Jankowski along with Johann Flieger, also SPD, and Werner Heber, a KPD student. The SA, with the support of the Gestapo, sequestered the Köpenicker SPD's assets and arrested about 3,000 officials. The corpses of Karl Pokern (Red Front), Johannes Stelling (SPD), and Paul von Essen (SPD), shot by the SA, were retrieved in July 1933 from nearby ponds. Of those arrested, numerous victims had their testicles and noses cut off.

Edgar André is another member of the KPD who was immediately picked up on 3 March 1933. André had belonged to the SPD but joined the KPD in January 1923 and became a friend of Ernst Thälmann's. Based in Hamburg and a member of the district leadership, he was the Hamburg jobless workers' spokesman as well as the local leader of the Red Front. He was also active in the International Union of Seamen and Harbour Workers. André was beheaded on 4 November 1936 despite the international protest movement over the case. A few hours later, Fuhlsbüttel Prison's 5,000 inmates went "on strike" in protest over his death. In the Spanish Civil War, shortly before his death, the first battalion of the International Brigades was formed under the name "Edgar André".



Edgar André

On the morning of 21 June 1933, many apartments in Köpenick were illegally searched by the Köpenick SA, including those of the social democratic Schmaus family. A son, Anton, was a member of the SPD. He fired on the SA and shot three of them. In the backlash that followed, at least 23 anti-Nazis were murdered or died because of their injuries. In the early years of Nazism, the police were still independent of the SA. They protected Schmaus against the SA mob in the police HQ but he was nevertheless shot by the SA and subsequently died.

On 14 June 1934, Richard Hüttig was executed in the Berlin Plötzensee camp, which held mostly political prisoners from March 1933. He was a member of the KPD and leader of the anti-SA *Häuserschutzstaffeln* (House protection squad), set up to ward off SA raids in his neighbourhood in Charlottenburg. Hüttig and those tried along with him were accused of having shot dead SS Kurt von der Ahé during a joint SA-SS raid on his neighbourhood. Despite his proven innocence, he was sentenced to death and beheaded in the courtyard at Plötzensee prison with an axe, one of many communists put to death at Plötzensee.

In Spandau, an industrial suburb of Berlin, the SPD and the KPD had numerous

followers and maintained party offices and meeting points. But the Nazis were also strong there with about 6,000 men by the end of 1933. The Spandau SA knew their political opponents. On March 11, Erich Meier, a functionary of the KPD youth club in Spandau, very popular amongst local youth and therefore especially hated by the Nazis, was shot by SA members. Though the exact relationship is not clear, it seems that the Spandau SA's detention and interrogation centres were essentially informal and, in 1933, they incarcerated many of the local political activists there.

There are numerous other examples from outside Berlin but here are a few examples from Bavaria: on March 10, 1933, the Würzburg prison admitted over 100 detainees. Among them were more than 50 communists, a few Red Front members, 9 social democrats and leaders of the Bavarian People's Party. On 19 April a Jewish cattle dealer, Bernhard Goldener, was arrested on the probably spurious charge of cheating local farmers. On 5 May 37 Würzburg detainees, including communist leader Dr. Kellner, were sent to Dachau camp. On March 10 the Coburg police imprisoned 15 communists and some members of the SPD, including SPD city council members: the Nazi Mayor, Franz Schwede, had wasted no time in settling old scores. Also in Bavaria, in March, the Schweinfurt prison admitted 40 detainees, mostly social democrats, including the mayor but 3 Jewish prisoners were also taken into protective custody.

Dachau in Bavaria is the best known of the early camps and was designated specially for political prisoners. It took 5,000 political prisoners within days of its opening, especially members of the KPD and SPD, an indication of the extent of the early terror. The Police Commandant said "Marxists" who "endangered the security of the State would be kept in custody as the moment they were released, they started their agitation again".²⁶

Also in Bavaria, around 600 Württemberg prisoners were held in the Ulm KZ, initially under the Gestapo, whose task was to take immediate ruthless action against the local "hard core" of the political resistance. In the Ulm-Oberer Kuhberg concentration camp, all the prisoners in 1933 were "enemies of the National Socialist State". About half had connections to the KPD, and a fifth to the SPD. There were also three Catholic priests who had publicly criticised the Nazi authorities and been classified as "Saboteurs of State Order". Not until 1938 were Jews and Gypsies separately classified as "enemies of the National Community". If Jews were imprisoned, they were held as members of the SPD or KPD.

Oranienburg KZ, one of the first camps, established on March 21, 1933 and part of the Sachsenhausen complex was used primarily for political prisoners. Most of the

²⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/1933/mar/21/fromthearchive>

inmates were working class members of the KPD, the SPD, smaller left wing organisations such as the Socialist Workers Party and the German Communist Party Opposition. Demonstrating the broadness of the anti-Nazi sweep, a few more middle-class celebrities were also held here, including the son of the former Reich president, Friedrich Ebert; the director of the Reich Broadcasting Association (*Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft*), Dr. Kurt Magnus; the chairman of the Prussian SPD parliamentary group, Ernst Heilmann; the editor of *Rote Fahne*, the official KPD organ, Werner Hirsch; the pacifist writers Kurt Hiller and Armin T. Wegner; and SPD Member of Parliament, Gerhart Seger. In principle, the killing of prisoners was not intended but at least 16 died here, including the writer and anarchist Erich Mühsam. Fifty Jewish youths were arrested and held here because of "communist activities".

Similarly, Waldemar Schapiro, a Jewish prisoner, was accused of distributing the *Thüringer Volksblatt*, an illegal communist publication, held at Erfurt police prison at Petersberg near Bonn and murdered on 15 July 1933. This was a camp where it appears that the KPD was strong and together with *Rote Hilfe* (Red Help) gave some help from outside the camp.

One of the many murdered at Fuhlsbüttel KZ in Hamburg was the social democratic editor, Dr. Fritz Solnitz, who had been arrested in March 1933 by the Lübeck Gestapo for being an active antifascist and a Jew, and who had been taken through Lübeck in a hay cart. From 1935, Jews were held here. Again in Hamburg, the Stadthaus and Holstenglacis camp held many communists, social democrats, young leftists, trade unionists and Jews. Among the social democratic detainees was Gustav Dahrendorf.²⁷

Although not established till 1938, Mauthausen, in Austria, became one of the largest, most barbaric and profitable of the camps, producing, amongst much else, planes and ammunition. This and the linked Gusen network were used for extermination through labour, especially in the quarries, for the "Incorrigible Political Enemies of the Reich". Until early 1940, the largest group were German, Austrian and Czech socialists, communists, gays, anarchists, Romani, Jehovah Witnesses and Freemasons. Later in the war, political prisoners and the "intelligentsia" constituted the largest group, including approximately 4,400 Spanish republican soldiers and activists who had found refuge from the Franco regime in France in 1939 and who the Vichy French authorities turned over to the Germans in 1940. Later, Soviet POWs and Yugoslav partisans were sent there. The Spanish republicans quickly gained a reputation for bravery and solidarity in the camp, which further infuriated the SS. In 1941, almost 75% of the Red Spaniards perished at Mauthausen. Between 122,766

²⁷ Dahrendorf, father of Ralph, was freed on 27 April 1945 by the Red Army.

and 320,000 people died here, though thousands more were sent to be gassed elsewhere; the Germans destroyed much of the camp's files so the exact death toll is impossible to calculate.²⁸

Although the camps are now associated with the mass murder of Jews, in their early years, we witness their initial purpose: to prevent the representatives of the workers' movement from being politically active and to destroy working class organisations.

Sandvoß talks about an initiative by the M division (military political division) of the KPD to procure weapons. In 1934, this led to Max Jessel being arrested and imprisoned for 10 years after *SA-Sturmbannführer* Kubick excavated a weapons depot at the end of November 1933 at Kastanienallee 86.²⁹ The Red Front cadre found hiding places for their guns in the woods or other safe places once the arrests started in 1933.

Despite severe political repression, about 50% of the approximately 300,000 membership were still in the KPD by mid-May 1933, of whom up to a half were active clandestinely. Even by 1935, about 10% of the 1932 membership were active in the underground at any one time. At least half of the 300,000 KPD members in January 1933 took part in some form of illegal political activity up till 1939.³⁰

Beating and Torture of Men and Women Communists

The Guardian, Thursday 16 March 1933

The following letter has been received here from a private correspondent in Berlin, for whose good faith and trustworthiness the recipient of the letter vouches:-

These Storm Troops (Hitler's followers) are arresting Communists in their homes or on the streets. They take them into their Nazi barracks in order to torture them, as is being told us by eye-witnesses. In the Nazi barracks they whip the Communists and break their fingers in order to get from them confessions and addresses.

In the Nazi barracks in Hedemannstrasse there lay in one room about 135 Communists who had been tortured until they were half dead. A Communist who was taken from his home on Sunday evening at eleven o'clock was also brought into the barracks at Hedemannstrasse.

There were many others there that had been arrested in other parts of the city.

²⁸ Bischof, Gunter and Anton Pelinka, 2017, "Proposals by the Advisory Commission on the Mauthausen Concentration Camp Memorial", eds Bischof and Pelinka, *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity*, Routledge, pp185-192

²⁹ Sandvoß, *Widerstand in Prenzlauer Berg und Weißensee*, p.121

³⁰ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, pp.89, 96

They were all undressed, and when they were naked had to run the gauntlet until they broke down. The comrade mentioned is lying half dead in the hospital.

The Storm Troops broke into the home of the well-known Dr. Ascher and maltreated him and his wife. Dr. Ascher died as the result of his injuries. His wife is seriously ill.

In Spandau, near Berlin, almost all Communists were arrested and taken into the barracks to be tortured. A woman Communist says that she was taken from her bed at night, brought into the barracks, horsewhipped, and thrown into a cellar. When consciousness returned she noticed that she was not alone, and was surrounded by others groaning or dying. Some are allowed to go out after they have been tortured, others never see daylight again.

We have no means of bringing these outrages and horrors to the notice of the public, as our press is forbidden. We beg you to see to it that these facts become known in foreign countries, because they are real facts. We have no possible way of getting help. According to the new police decree no police official is allowed to help us. We are outlaws.

Chapter 4 - A Brief Foray into Political Economy

This chapter looks briefly at the issue of work-based disaffection under the Nazis. What lies behind such an issue is Mason's famous and controversial analysis that such disaffection, with its subterranean association with class, was one of the few ways available of expressing opposition to Nazism. It also suggests, Mason argues, that the Nazi state, partly because of their fear of creating further working class dissatisfaction and thus losing legitimacy, were not in a position to end these actions. Mason emphasises the Nazis continuing terror of a repeat of 1918/19. The small scale industrial actions of the immediately pre-war years left the Nazi state with a fear about keeping the working class on side which intensified as the war progressed and made the need for repression, tempered with a certain level of incentives, ever greater. Indeed, Mason goes further, arguing that although the working class had been deprived of its traditional medium of organisation, such as the trade unions and the left political parties, such class conflict represented a workers' opposition to Nazism, though not politically conscious and therefore distinct from political resistance which involved politically conscious actions.

In fact, although Mason stresses the German working class history of organisation, in 1933, factory workers only numbered 46.3% of the workforce. The number of workers employed in factories with fewer than 10 employees stood at something like 7 million out of a total of 14.5 million. Thus, around 50 per cent of the workforce was employed in small, and probably unorganised, workplaces, rather than in larger collective employment where they were likely to be less fragmented.¹ In addition, the percentage of self-employed workers, an especially fragmented group, had risen slightly from 15.9% in 1925 to 16.4% in 1933.²

Moreover, unemployment immediately before and after 1933 was high: it had peaked at about 6 million in early 1933, almost 33% of Germany's working population. This figure does not include the non-registered unemployed: people who had not worked sufficiently to get the right to unemployment benefit and therefore did not appear in the unemployment figures, which pushes up the figures by between a million to a million and a half.

This high unemployment had a double, though complementary, effect. It gave the Nazi state a greater ability to control the workforce, initially through repressive legislation, and to thereby smash the working-class movement. Rearmament helped restore some negotiating room for workers, but it also contributed to the fracturing of

¹ Winkler, Heinrich, 1990, *Der Weg in die Katastrophe*, Dietz Verlag, 2nd edition (The Path to Disaster. Workers and workers movement in the Weimar Republic 1930-1933)

² Mason, *The Workers' Opposition in Nazi Germany*.

support for the two traditional left parties and the trade unions and impacted on the feasibility of resistance.

At the end of 1929, the KPD claimed 135,160 members, of whom 50% were working in factories; two years later, at the end of 1931, it had 381,000 members, of whom only 17% worked in factories: the membership was made up of 80% unemployed workers. Many KPD members, especially the militants, had lost their jobs.³

The KPD became increasingly a party made up of largely, though not exclusively, the unemployed.⁴ The impact on the leadership of the KPD was that it no longer had real roots in or a detailed knowledge of what was happening in the organised working class. The KPD increasingly turned to propaganda activities and work in the community, rather than the workplace and trade unions. The SPD also increasingly focussed their energies on local municipal administration, rather than the co-management of factories. This marginalisation from the workplace was of course intensified after 1933 as militant KPD trade union cadres and the few SPD militants were given the sack.

Economic class conflict re-emerged in Germany in the workplace at points after 1936 and therefore class continued to have a subterranean political significance. For the 18-month period from February 1936 to July 1937, the Labour Front listed 192 illegal, small short-lived strikes and strike-like protests. During a strike in a glass factory early in 1937, the Nazi spokesperson joined the 150 strikers. Employers gave way: weekly earnings in industry increased by around 17% in the 3 years before the invasion of Poland. Employers also offered supplementary health insurance, cheap canteen meals, generous holiday pay, assistance with travel bonuses, Christmas boxes, instalments on a Volkswagen etc.⁵ These actions were neither explicitly political nor organised either by an external resistance or a subterranean trade-union network. Go-slows, sick-leave, lower productivity and bad work discipline were spontaneous acts, even if collectively carried out.

During the pre-war period of full employment, the employer was more vulnerable to shop floor activity as they needed to stop scarce skilled German workers from moving jobs. The increasing shortage of labour, especially in armaments industries, made changing jobs a major source of disruption and was soon forbidden.

Even the DAF (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, German Labour Front), whose leaders were

³ Bologna, Sergio, 2005, *Nazism and the Working Class*, Paper presented at the Milan Camera del Lavoro, <https://libcom.org/library/nazism-and-working-class-sergio-bologna>.

⁴ Abendroth, *A Short History of the European Working Class*, pp.62-67

⁵ Detailed memorandum of Ministries of Labour and Economics on labour policy and legislation for the new Four Year Plan, Arbeiterklasse, doc-no. 3. cited in Mason, *The Workers Opposition in Nazi Germany*.

entwined into the Nazi Party hierarchy, experienced pressure in the building industry, glass and wood industries, coal mines, printing and paper industries. As a result, the Labour Front did not always have the strength to resist the workers' demands. Mason concludes that in circumstances where virtually any form of democratic right to express opposition was forbidden, acts of non-compliance at work need to be understood as resistance, even though not overtly political. Such acts need to be seen as a continuation of the German working class history of solidarity and trade union struggles pre-1933.

One of the contradictions in the Nazi economy was a need on the one hand to control the workers, especially to keep them free from any political influences, so as to increase productivity but, on the other hand, to secure their goodwill.⁶ The Nazi regime's continued fear of the organised working class and of the possibility of widespread dissatisfaction meant that at points they wanted to win consent or at least appear to do, for example by acceding to minor demands. But the strike wave, always small in scale, was essentially over by 1937 and the Nazi leadership never showed a political concern about its effectiveness.⁷

Is work based class grumbling the same as anti-Nazi political action?

The pre-war record of disruption at work is higher than one might expect. According to Bologna, there were more than 200 work stoppages in the period from January 1936 to July 1937 and an absenteeism rate of about 10%. In the later 1930s, there were even strike threats and strikes by skilled workers: 136 strikes between February 1936 and July 1937, according to the Nazi Information Office. Very few of these actions took place in large factories although there were exceptions: at Opel in Rüsselsheim, where on 25 June 1936, 236 workers in the body plant went on strike; Auto Union in Berlin, where 600 trim workers went on strike; and in the shipyards at Bremen, where a communist organiser, Ernst Novak, was arrested and tortured to death. The other labour agitations took place mostly in motorway building sites, in small and medium-size factories, and in textiles. 11,687 people were arrested, there were 609 trials and 3,238 sentences comprising a total of 8,294 years in prison; 898 of those sentenced were reportedly members of the KPD, 730 members of the ADGB, and 473 of the SPD.⁸

The demand for labour became so great, it enhanced workers' negotiating position. By 1938, there were no longer significant numbers of unemployed and unmet demand for labour was already around a million. The rearmament drive prior to Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938 created a shortage of labour. In

⁶ Mason, *The Workers Opposition in Nazi Germany*, p.184

⁷ Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, pp.233-4.

⁸ Bologna, *Nazism and the Working Class*.

November 1938, the Ministry of Labour estimated the unmet demand for workers as around one million.⁹

In the first weeks of the war, in the crucial armaments industry, there were replacements for only two-thirds of the conscripted armaments workers and there were also acute problems of manpower in the building of aircraft, ships and munitions.¹⁰ In March 1940, the arms industry needed 500,000 extra workers just to fulfil urgent contracts, at the very same time as the army demanded an extra 750,000.¹¹ The percentage of GNP spent on armaments increased from 8% in 1935 to about 23% in 1939 so, although an increasing number of forced foreign workers were becoming available, during a brief window, the Nazi regime shifted from its previous policy of suppressing the workers to accepting some negotiations and allowing some wage increases.

Another crucial sector where labour both suffered and was in short supply was farming. Farming was decisive because not enough food and consequently increased prices were bad for morale. The *Reichsnährstand*, the government body which regulated food production and organised the rigid, centralised methods of food extraction by the Nazi state, had legal authority over everyone and everything involved in agricultural production and distribution of agricultural goods, causing many small farms to go bankrupt. Farmers were shot, or if lucky, sent to prison, for refusing to hand over their harvest. There is a particular irony here in that a significant percentage of farmers had joined the Nazi Party and a majority, especially of larger and middle sized Protestant farmers, voted NSDAP. The peasants remarkably had their own underground organisations and paper, *Der Bundschuh*.¹² The shortage of land and labour is often seen as contributing to and justifying Hitler's decision to take over new land in neighbouring countries. There is a contradiction here: while German men were being conscripted to take over the land of others to feed the German people, so the cultivation of German land became ever more dependent on forced foreign labour.

But as the war machine geared up, work based demands became ever more dangerous. Whatever leniency there had been ended. The government ordered wage cuts (and the unpopular civil conscription whereby workers could be compelled to take on particular jobs by force of law, often separating them from their families), hours of work were lengthened and overtime bonuses abolished, and paid holidays suspended. Absenteeism and refusal to do overtime increased.

⁹ Mason, *The Workers' Opposition in Nazi Germany*, pp. 181, 185, 327.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.191

¹¹ *Ibid*, pp.185-194, 327

¹² Bologna, *Nazism and the Working Class*, pp.38.40

The Ruhr miners' successful go-slow in 1938/39, in protest against Göring's increase in hours of work, reduced production dramatically. The outbreak of war meant that privileges were withdrawn. But, in the pits in the Aachen district, the withdrawal of bonuses led to a go-slow. In a Chemnitz armaments factory where, in February 1942, leaflets were distributed calling for a whispering campaign against the war and for a slowing down of work, production dropped by 21% compared to January and there were 179 breakages as a result of a go-slow/sabotage policy.¹³ But, unsurprisingly, such details are generally unavailable. The pressure for higher wages remained strong till 1942, with the Nazi state bureaucracy aware there was little they could do and so earnings did increase. However, from 1942, the state and the employers successfully stopped further wage increases.¹⁴

How to interpret such acts? The disaffection and discontent at work such as increasing sick leave or the "disguised strike" were often atomised rather than collective, and could be seen as passive resistance or silent opposition rather than as a workers opposition. Or were such actions the only available form of class struggle, given the vicious level of repression?

From the beginning of the war, the Gestapo had become responsible for dealing with instances of "refusal to work": a lateness, a violation of the rules on smoking, an unjustified absence or a lack of obeisance. A worker was initially warned, then had their names given to the Gestapo and could then well end up in a camp or the army. This was a power the Gestapo exercised increasingly quickly as the war progressed. As early as 1939, in I.G. Farben, a chemical and pharmaceutical company, four workers in Wolfen were sent to prison for violating the rules on smoking and workers were informed that in future "slackers" would be handed over to the Gestapo. In one munitions factory in Berlin, the names of workers with a poor attendance went straight to the Gestapo. In an early sign of how concerned the employers as well as the state were about anti-Nazi political influence on their employees, one KPD member was executed for declining to work.¹⁵ The number of workers executed because of "incitement to strike" or for "sabotage" is evidence of a continuing underground organisation, though these charges might bear little relationship to the truth.¹⁶ The police and Gestapo were arresting about 2000 every month.¹⁷ Mason

¹³ Fraenkel, Heinrich, 1942/43, *The Other Germany*, London: Lindsay Drummond, pp.33-4.

Fraenkel was born in a part of Poland which was then a province of Germany. He emigrated to the UK from Germany in 1933 because he was on a Nazi suspect list following the *Reichstag* fire and became a prolific writer against the Nazi regime.

¹⁴ Mason, *The Workers' Opposition in Nazi Germany*, pp.356, 357

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 273 -4

¹⁶ Fraenkel, *The Other Germany*, 34-5

¹⁷ Salter, S., 1983, "Structures of Consensus and Coercion: Workers Morale and the Maintenance of Work Discipline, 1939-1945" in Welch, David (ed.) *Nazi Propaganda. The Power and the Limitations*, Ney York: Routledge, pp. 88-117.

quotes 20,000 arrested as slackers in just one administrative district in 1941.¹⁸

The DAF subdivided labour disputes according to what they attributed as their causes: 21% were attributed to "Marxist agitation", 14% to "general instigation", 15% to "social unrest", 25% to "wage questions", and 22% to "other reasons". Many of those involved in any of these disputes were accused of "high treason", and assumed to be associated with the KPD, when in practice they were not, raising the constant issue of how far Nazi statistics can be relied on. But for all that, 50% of the disputes were defined as not directly a product of "wage questions" as opposed to the quarter that were. Do these figures merely suggest the Nazis' paranoia about the influence of the left or are they a substantive indication of an underlying militancy and anti-Nazism? Ultimately, however, these brave acts of militancy rarely converged with publicly organised anti-Nazi resistance or coalesced in their own right into some organised anti-Nazi force.

Women and work

Women's position in Nazi Germany illustrates the ideological and economic contradictions that the regime was operating under. The position of German women in the German economy was not as simple as the slogan of "*Kinder, Küche und Kirche*" suggests; in an extraordinary quote from *Schwarzes Korps*, the official organ of Himmler's SS guards, it states that "any girl who refuses you is a deserter", no less than a male conscientious objector.¹⁹ As early as 1936, the Nazi leaders were discussing whether women could be used to ease the agricultural crisis, or even in the factories, but they feared this would be unpopular. At the same time that German Aryan women were expected to produce "new precious German life", the shortage of male labour was so great that women, many very young, were practically forced into factories and office work. In the late 1930s, the question of women working created a fundamental problem for the Nazi regime.

Between 1933 and 1939, almost half of women of eligible age were economically active, but these were mostly single and earned less than the equivalent man. There was little to encourage women to join the workforce before 1939. For starters, Nazi propaganda peddled eugenic women's inferiority to men, including in the workplace. There had been a reluctant decision to conscript German women into the workforce: an unpopular law passed in February 1938 obliged girls to work for a year on a farm or in domestic service. But this was resolved by the occupation of France and therefore the flow of forced French labour. This back-peddling on the civil conscription of women was presented in terms of the fear of weakening the racial

¹⁸ Mason, *The Workers' Opposition in Nazi Germany*, pp.338-9

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.31.

stock if women were working, but in reality it was based on a fear of popular disapproval.²⁰

Nazi policy was to dragoon foreign labour and POWs in preference to employing women, because women working did not fit the ideological stereotype of the German woman they had constructed.²¹ Even the use of despised Russian forced foreign labourers and POWs was justified on the grounds of thereby avoiding employing women. So the percentage of women employed remained low and women were therefore less likely to be involved in resistance at work.

Conclusion

As discussed elsewhere, it is not the case that there was no contact between the KPD led resistance and workers' opposition. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, many of the underground resistance groups saw the factories as a priority for their anti-Nazi propaganda, raising issues from wage demands to sabotage. But it is a moot point how far, or indeed whether, the courageous work-based disputes, whether politically conscious or not, effectively challenged, never mind undermined, the Nazi States authority.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.198-206.

²¹ see Chapter 11

Chapter 5 - Whatever Happened to the KPD?

How did Berlin, unlike Vienna in 1934 and Barcelona in the late 1930s, allow the Nazis to walk in and occupy its streets without any resistance? There were demonstrations in Stuttgart, in Frankfurt and in some cities in the Ruhr and Rhineland as well as strikes in Hamburg and other northern ports, but this activity was not coordinated and not sustained and, crucially, not in Berlin as a whole.¹

In Neukölln, a KPD stronghold, 130,000 people demonstrated on 22 January, 1933, before Hitler became Chancellor, chanting "Who chooses Hitler, chooses war". The SPD were not to be seen. But on 30 January, Hitler became Chancellor. Alfred Schaefer remembered how he urged the local leadership and membership to come out on a demonstration: "It was a real civil war mood...The next day the civil war mood was over".²

"Only one member of the ten man Politburo [Hermann Remmele]...is known to have urged an attempt to draw the workers into armed struggle in [pre-25 April] 1933 in order to prevent the new government from consolidating its power".³ Remmele, a left member of the KPD Politburo, had been one of the few to consistently argue before 1933 that the Nazis should be taken more seriously. He was removed from the Politburo in April 1933 and sent for political realignment to Comintern headquarters in Moscow, where he was purged and killed. He was far from the only comrade murdered in Moscow.

Leo Flieg, a founder member of the KPD, historically Jewish, who became a well-respected organisation man on the central committee, had close links with Moscow but was suspected of Trotskyism because of his friendship with Erich Neumann. Deprived of German citizenship in 1937, Flieg returned to Moscow where, in March 1938, he was arrested and executed in 1939. Similarly Hugo Eberlein, a founder of the KPD, fled to the USSR in 1933 where he was first arrested in 1938 and finally shot in 1941; Neumann fled to the USSR and was murdered in 1938 and Hermann Hans Kippenberger, a leader in the Hamburg uprising, from 1926 head of the military political apparatus of the KPD, who fled to the USSR in 1934, was arrested in 1936 and shot.

It was not just that the KPD leadership did not call for armed struggle but that they did not call for any real struggle against the Nazis at all. The KPD leadership's own explanation was that at the time of the January elections and soon afterwards, they lacked the industrial strength, the political allies or the paramilitary preparedness to

¹ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.27

² Sandvoß, *Widerstand in Prenzlauer Berg und Weißensee*, p.144

³ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, pp.73-5

take on the Nazis.⁴ They would have been setting up their comrades to be arrested or even slaughtered. The KPD was also no longer confident they could direct their membership, never mind a larger periphery. Their lurches of line and the Third Period sectarianism had fatally caught up with them.

The Third Period analysis

But there is another explanation. The KPD had not focused on the anti-Nazi struggle. Neither the Comintern⁵ nor the KPD Central Committee prioritised the Nazis' rise or significance. It hardly gets a mention till the end of 1930. Social democracy remained the principal enemy. In 1931, Manuilsky, the leading Comintern spokesperson at that point in Germany, equated fascism to a form of bourgeois dictatorship. Ernst Thälmann equated it to the Brüning government and even warned against an "opportunistic overestimation of Hitler's fascism".⁶ As Manuilsky put it: "The central task of the KPD is to win over a majority of the working class from its allegiance to the social democrats". The KPD Central Committee was still stating in February 1932, less than a year before Hitler became Chancellor, that the SPD and the NSDAP were political twins and equally evil. In January 1933, Wilhelm Pieck (secretary of the KPD Executive Committee and later leader of East Germany) stated, despite the Nazis gaining a higher percentage of votes than the SPD, that the SPD was the enemy, not the Nazis.⁷ Thälmann even characterised the Iron Front, the SPD's equivalent to the Red Front, as a "terrorist organisation of social fascism". Heckert, the leading German on the Executive Committee of the Comintern, was still arguing in April that Hitler's government would not last long and that proletarian revolution was inevitable.⁸

Indeed, the Comintern also did not take the rise of Nazism seriously. Even when the Nazis suppressed tens of thousands of communists, they kept silent and their silence continued essentially till the shift in line to the Popular Front in 1935. Their priority was the defence of the Soviet Union, which included having Germany as an ally as well, of course, the defeat of social democracy. There was apparently no direct contact between the Comintern and the KPD leadership for 6 weeks after the *Reichstag* fire. The last issue of *Rote Fahne*, on 27 February 1933, the night of the *Reichstag* fire, presents a list of traitors to the working class, where they lump

⁴ *Ibid*, 73-81

⁵ The Comintern was founded in Moscow in 1919 under the inspiration of the Russian Revolution and in response to the Russian civil war. Over 30 parties mostly from different countries were represented. Though committed to the spreading of socialist revolution and embedded in internationalist principles, it became the mouthpiece of Russian foreign policy and was largely responsible for the disastrous Third Period line in Germany.

⁶ Bayerlein, Bernhard, 2017, "The Entangled Catastrophe: Hitlers 1933 Seizure of Power and The Power Triangle" in Hoffrogge, Ralf and Laporte, Norman, (eds.), *Weimar Communism as Mass Movement*, London: Laurence and Wishart, p.272, 266.

⁷ Carr, Edward, 1982, *The Twilight of the Comintern*, London: Macmillan Press, pp.15, 35-7 & 50

⁸ Bayerlein, *The Entangled Catastrophe*, p.264-9

together as equal in their wish to smash communism: Seekte, the Commander in Chief of the German army from 1920, Noske, the social democratic deputy *Reichstag* leader and butcher of the revolutionary left in 1918/19, Kapp, of Nazi Putsch fame and Brüning, the Centre Right Chancellor in 1932.

In the 1928 *Reichstag* election, the SPD received almost 30% of the vote, the KPD 10% and the Nazis 2.6%, in 1930, the SPD got 25%, the Nazis 18% and the KPD 13%, in the July elections, the Nazis got 37%, SPD roughly 22% and the KPD roughly 15%. But in the subsequent election in November 1932, the Nazis got roughly 33%, the SPD 20% and the KPD 17%. Rather than focusing on the large Nazi vote, the KPD highlighted its drop of 5% between July and November.

Only Ulbricht addressed the real situation and called for a broad united front movement in 1932, a position the plenum did adopt but adding the caveat that this must not detract from the struggle against the SPD, a position Ulbricht agreed with.⁹ This confusion of policies made effective leadership against the growing Nazi threat near impossible.

Trotsky also, from his exile, called on the KPD to "close ranks with the majority of the German working class to form a united front between the supporters of the KPD and the social democratic and non-party workers against fascism: the policies of our parties are irreconcilably opposed; but if the fascists come tonight to wreck your organisation's hall, we will come running, arms in hand, to help you. Will you promise us that if our organisation is threatened you will come to our aid?"¹⁰ He did not mean that differences should be ignored but rather: "March separately, but strike together!"

Jacob Zorn, a member of the KPD, also gives us an insight into how ordinary KPD members saw the Nazis taking power. "In 1929-30...we were all convinced that this class struggle in Germany would build into revolution...The setback that occurred in 1933 was beyond my comprehension...it is quite clear that the blame lies with the social democratic leaders..."¹¹

Hitler became Chancellor in January 1933 and within just over a month, the Nazi regime had been established, only later to be legitimated by a rigged election in March 1933. But, even then, the KPD leadership failed to recognise that they had suffered a major defeat and, with one or two exceptions, did not expect the Nazi regime to last. On 6 February, days after Hitler assumed the Chancellorship, Pieck

⁹ Carr, *The Twilight of the Comintern*, p.6

¹⁰ Trotsky, Leon *September 1930 The Turn in the Communist International and the Situation in Germany*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1930/300926.htm>

¹¹ Gerhard, Dirk, 1976 *Antifaschisten*, Berlin: Wagenbach Klaus.

stated: "We are by no means pessimistic."¹² The *Rote Fahne* of 27 February, the day before the Reichstag fire and the mass arrests, stated that the swastika will not be victorious and that the working class and communists will triumph. Even at the end of 1933, Pieck was still saying: "Germany is marching towards the proletarian revolution".

The Comintern and the KPD fatally insisted, over the months after Hitler became Chancellor, that the Nazis were running into their final crisis, that the SPD leadership were bankrupt, and that this would open the doors to proletarian revolution. The KPD leadership continued to speak of the "increasing revolutionary activities of the masses" and of revolutionary upheaval. Only Thälmann referred to the fight against fascism being different from the goal of proletarian revolution.¹³ As Evelyn Anderson succinctly put it: The KPD "suffered a self-delusion which mistook defeat for revolutionary upsurge".¹⁴ This did not help building a grass roots anti-Nazi resistance.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of February, at a secret conference posing as a meeting of a sports club attended by about 40 delegates and addressed by Thälmann, the KPD did, too late, put out a call to the SDP for a common struggle against fascism. But when these approaches were ignored, the KPD leadership reverted to denunciation.¹⁵ In February 1933, Manuilsky stated: "They [the social democrats] represent now as before the main social buttress of the dictatorship of capital".¹⁶

Indeed, Manuilsky's report to the Executive of the Communist Youth International. February 1933 is a good example of the "social fascist" line:

"To many social democratic workers it still seems unjustified for us communists to call social democracy a party of social fascism. But this characterisation does not contain the slightest shade of polemical exaggeration. It is a simple observation of a historical fact in the general evolution of social democracy. If the general tendencies of development of monopoly capitalism in the epoch of general crisis lead to fascisation, i.e. to the suppression of the gains of the working class and the sharpening of terror methods, so it is quite impossible for a party, which has in practice renounced proletarian revolution and hence stands on the ground of capitalism, to do other than go along with the whole evolution of capitalism".

Even after the SPD was banned in May 1933, the KPD leadership was still

¹² Pieck is a significant and influential figure. He was elected to the *Reichstag* in 1928 as a member of the KPD and became a member of the Political Bureau in 1929. In 1931, he became the Secretary of the Executive Committee.

¹³ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.73

¹⁴ Anderson, *Hammer or Anvil*, p.161

¹⁵ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany* p.73

¹⁶ Anderson, *Hammer or Anvil*, p.137

My thanks to Harald Marpe for drawing this to my attention and to Ian Birchall for translating it.

damning their leadership.

Tragically, the Third Period line continued to influence the willingness of the KPD membership to work with or even alongside social democratic workers in joint anti-Nazi actions after 1933, thus minimising the possibility of a united resistance, even after the Third Period line had been officially scrapped at the Brussels Conference in 1935. The KPD's mistaken optimism in part encouraged the bravery of the KPD underground but also made it more reckless and fuelled a suspicion by some in or close to the KPD of the party line. But, before we condemn the Third Period out of hand as stupid ultra-leftism, let us bear in mind the historical context: the SPD leadership had sent in the *Freikorps* against the 1918/19 revolutions and had ordered the police to open fire on the 1929 Mayday demonstration.

How to explain the Third Period position

The Third Period's divisive and crippling legacy was rooted in Stalin's desire to insulate communist workers from the influence of social democratic workers. An example of this, the establishment of the separate Red Unions, had led to further isolation rather than working to build a left-wing current within the mainstream unions and thereby pressurising the official trade union movement. When united front anti-Nazi work became essential, communist workers did not trust either the social democratic leadership or their social democratic brothers and sisters. To them, social democrats were "social fascists".

Moreover, the line of "Socialism in One Country" and the survival above all else of the USSR connects with how far communist practice had shifted to an acceptance of working with European bourgeois democratic regimes and a stress on not meddling with the capitalist social order. This led into an unforeseen passivity and fatalism by many potential anti-Nazis in Germany.¹⁷

Beginning in 1924, the KPD initiated a process of Stalinisation, under Comintern influence, that resulted in the silencing of dissent and, crucially, even informed opinion within the party, which therefore made them deaf to their members' experiences of growing fascism.¹⁸ Contrary to what is now often assumed, most in the leadership of the KPD were not strongly committed to active anti-Nazi struggle as opposed to holding an anti-Nazi position. It makes the resistance of members of the KPD all the more note-worthy.¹⁹

¹⁷ Abendroth, *A Short History of the European Working Class*, pp.104-123

¹⁸ Weber, Hermann, 2008, "The Stalinization of the KPD: Old and New Views" in LaPorte, Norman, Morgan, Kevin & Worley, Matthew, (eds.) *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern*, London:Palgrave Macmillan, pp.22-44.

¹⁹ The KPD anti-Nazi role has been addressed by a number of historians who come up with different critiques. Rosenthal, though with only partial success, emphasised that rank-and-file communists did act outside Party diktat. But LaPorte, looking at Saxony, emphasised the KPD Central Committee's crucial democratic centralist role and argued against exaggerating rank-and-file agency at the same time as giving some interesting examples of local communists

Another factor in the failure to oppose the Nazi takeover was that the KPD leadership had become wary of its street-fighting comrades, such as in the Red Front, preferring, it stated, mass action and a more parliamentary route. In addition, the KPD intermittently tried to draw in some of the working-class base of the Nazis, in particular of the SA. The KPD vacillated on whether to work with or against the SA, including after Hitler became Chancellor. Indeed, the KPD had, except when under extreme rank and file pressure, generally not supported, either as strategy or tactic, the use of force against the SA.

Too many of the KPD leadership continued to act as if they did not understand how much danger they or their members were in after the *Reichstag* fire. The KPD Central Committee, or those still in Berlin, met openly in the home of a comrade a week after the *Reichstag* fire where the police arrested them all.

One reason for the failure of the KPD to confront the reality of the Nazi take over was a result of a break in the understanding of their own history. "It is an old experience that such knowledge could only be expected from experienced cadres from within the working class".²⁰ The cadres who had experienced the possibility of revolutionary change, primarily in 1918/19, and then subsequent counter-revolutions had either been killed, were dead or had left the KPD: Liebknecht, Luxemburg in Berlin, Leviné in Munich but also hundreds of other cadres who fought and died for the Bavarian and Berlin revolutions whose names are less well known. The leading KPD educators and propagandists in the early 1930s had only joined during the Third Period and often had a bureaucratic political perspective. Neither the membership, nor the leadership, understood how fast counter-revolution can follow failed revolution, as had occurred in Bavaria in 1919, and that the Nazi take-over was not just another extreme right bourgeois government that would come and go like so many had in the last fifteen years. They did not understand that, instead, the KPD needed to prepare for the long haul as an anti-Nazi underground organisation. Even if they did see the need for the KPD to prepare to operate illegally, there was no sense that this would be any different from the passing repression following the 1924 fiasco. The KPD leadership did no more than make the usual gestures towards the importance of illegal work or building an underground, without any sign of increased urgency or real commitment.

KPD formal organisation 1933-1935

Despite the warnings from fascist Italy, the KPD had not effectively prepared for illegality, underground work or an underground network, despite what some

being influenced by their local conditions eg cooperation between some KPD and SPD members in Saxony pre- 1933.

²⁰ Abendroth, *Ein Leben in der Arbeiterbewegung*, pp.143-153

communist historians subsequently want to make out. Only the Red Front, banned in 1929, had become familiar with the necessities of working underground, against whom the level of repression was especially extreme before 1933, but whom the KPD apparatus kept at best at arms' length.

Nevertheless, members of the KPD were accustomed to political activities outside the parliamentary structure which, in the last years of Weimar, were increasingly deemed illegal and therefore led to arrests prior to 1933. Thus, despite a lack of formal underground structures, many of the KPD membership had developed political habits of disciplined illegal activism which were to serve them well from 1933. Many of them, moreover, had significant roots in their local community or workplaces, both useful for future resistance activities.

The KPD leadership, believing that the Nazi regime was unstable and, even if not toppled from the left, could be replaced by some sort of coup d'etat, focused on maintaining the KPD's internal structure, rather than on potentially destabilising anti-Nazi agitation, so as to keep the party in existence. But the hierarchical structure of the party, maintained in the first period of illegality, made it easy for the Gestapo to pick up large numbers of national and district organisers.

Others had fled. The leadership shifted increasingly to Paris, where the exiled comrades proceeded to fall out with each other. This led to organisational paralysis within the KPD.

It was partly because the KPD were able to campaign for the elections on March 5, which maintained the appearance of legality, that they failed to see the threat the Nazis posed and the importance of building an underground.²¹ However, there must have been some underground network by as early as March 1933, even if very limited, because my activist anti-Nazi father walked across Germany from Berlin, as he could not risk taking a train, a journey taking him many months and one assumes he had addresses along the way.²²

To quote Carr: "It was only in retrospect that Hitler's appointment as Chancellor on January 30, 1933 was seen as the decisive day in his ascent to power".²³

The KPD was banned immediately after the March election. By the end of May 1933, the Politburo finally decided it needed to send its leading cadre to safety abroad. Ordinary party comrades were allowed to leave Germany after the *Reichstag* fire but only with party permission and this was generally frowned upon and seen as deserting the struggle unless a comrade was in direct danger. Indeed, the emphasis on

²¹ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.31

²² Moos, Marilyn, 2014, *Beaten but not Defeated, Siegfried Moos - A German anti-Nazi who settled in Britain*, Alesford: Chronos.

²³ Carr, *The Twilight of the Comintern*.

remaining in Germany only shifted after *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass), in November 1938.²⁴

The Politburo established the Home Leadership with responsibility for organising underground work led by John Scher, who partly took over from Thälmann and was almost the only member of the Party leadership to stay in Germany. But Scher was arrested in November 1933 and murdered in February 1934.²⁵ During 1933, the Home Leadership managed to stay in contact with about half of the 28 Party districts.

Wilhelm Pieck, who had assumed the leadership of the Central Committee after Thälmann's arrest, along with other central leaders set up the Foreign Directorate in Paris in May 1933. By the end of 1933, the KPD's leadership was in effect in Paris and still in contact with the internal leadership. The external KPD HQ moved in 1935 from Paris to Prague and possibly Moscow, though the centre in Prague also had to close upon invasion. Both Prague and Paris were the capitals of countries which bordered Germany, making getting material across the border easier.²⁶

In June 1933, the internal and external sections decided that the KPD paper, *Die Rote Fahne*, and anti-Nazi leaflets should be printed and then smuggled in by the external leadership from abroad. It is still not clear exactly in which city the major exile printing centre was. We know that there was one KPD printing headquarters in Saarland, at least till the Gestapo broke up the printing organisation. Papers and leaflets had been produced and smuggled into Germany. Herbert Wehner (1906 - 1990), the head of the illegal district leadership of Berlin-Brandenburg, was briefly responsible for the coordination of the resistance from the Saarland.²⁷ In 1935, when Saarland was about to fall under Nazi rule, 7,000 German exiles, many members of the underground, then fled to Paris.²⁸

Up to 300,000 copies of *Rote Fahne* were still produced from a number of German cities up till 1935 when the network was finally broken. A KPD report from 1935 about the first five months of 1933 stated that the Party published 1000 local papers with a print run of over two million. In 1934, there were over 1m factory papers. Peukert also estimates that the KPD put out over 1m leaflets annually up till 1935/36. Large quantities of printed matter were seized by German police at the frontier; over one million copies in 1934 and close to two million in 1935, revealing the continuing existence of a party structure, but far from synonymous with active resistance.²⁹ By 1935, of 422 former KPD leaders, 219 had been arrested, 14 assassinated, 125 had

²⁴ Palmier, *Weimar in Exile*, p.90

²⁵ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, pp.80-1

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp.84-87

²⁷ *Ibid*, pp.84-87

²⁸ Palmier, *Weimar in Exile*, p.119

²⁹ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, pp.115-8

fled and were in exile and 10 had left the KPD.³⁰

To give a few examples of the heavy toll of arrests: Adolph Rembte, a full-time KPD official, was arrested at an illegal meeting in March 1935, along with Käthe Lübeck, Robert Stamm and Max Maddalena; all were charged with high treason. Involved in the Hamburg rising of 1924 and after imprisonment, Rembte was sent to Moscow from 1927 to 1930. Stamm was another KPD full-timer who was elected in 1932 to a seat in the *Reichstag*. In 1934, he too was sent to and from Moscow, before being arrested in Germany. Rembte and Stamm were beheaded on 4 November 1937. Käthe Lübeck was another KPD official who was sent to Moscow and, on return to Berlin, worked for the KPD leadership, with responsibilities for women's work. Also imprisoned in 1935, unlike her comrades, she survived.³¹ Max Maddalena became a functionary in the KPD, on its left-wing, and in 1922 was elected managing director of the Metalworkers Association in the district of Singen and Constance. From 1931, he became head of the KPD Red Union, the RGO, at IG Metall and was a member of the *Reichstag*. He fled Germany to avoid a prison sentence in June 1932 and went to Moscow, moving backwards and forwards between Moscow and Berlin.³² Arrested with the others in Berlin, it is unclear whether he survived.

The Brussels Conference, 1935 and after

In summer 1935, at the 7th World Congress of the Communist International (the Comintern), a fundamental shift took place. The Congress finally called for cooperation amongst antifascist forces and the Popular Front position was adopted. This was followed by the so-called Brussels Conference (to hide the location of KPD officials) in Moscow sponsored by the KPD in exile, when the KPD adopted the Popular Front position.³³ Social democracy was no longer seen as akin to social fascism. How far the KPD leadership, or indeed many of the membership, responded by working with workers of a social democratic persuasion on an anti-Nazi platform is open to question. Certainly Wilhelm Knöchel, a member of the KPD Central Committee from 1935, saw this position as more word than deed. When I interviewed the Berlin Three, both Hans Hohoutek and Rudi Schiffmann, all those years later, still seemed to hold a Third Period analysis for the rise of fascism, blaming the social democrats.

It was not till 1936, when thousands of KPD members had already been locked up

³⁰ Mehringer, H, 1997, "La resistance du mouvement ouvrier", in Christine Levisse-Touzé (ed.), *Des Allemands contre le Nazisme. Oppositions et Résistances*, Paris: Albin Michel, p.44

³¹ Hermann Weber; Andreas Herbst. Lübeck, Käthe .*Handbuch der Deutschen Kommunisten*. Karl Dietz Verlag, Berlin & Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur, Berlin.

³² Martin Schumacher (ed.), 1991, "MdR The Reichstag deputies of the Weimar Republic in the period of National Socialism. Political persecution, emigration and expatriation 1933-1945" Droste-Verlag, Düsseldorf, p 382.

³³ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, pp.162,163

and hundreds killed that the KPD declared its support for antifascist alliances. Significantly, as we will see later, the overthrow of the Nazi regime was not presented as a move towards socialism but to a popular democracy which, it was hoped, laid the basis for broad antifascist alliances. The KPD's official perspective in effect shifted to working for the re-establishment of a democratic capitalist system in Germany, a perspective which informed the later resistance struggle.³⁴

It was also decided that the centralised nature of the party left it vulnerable to penetration by the Gestapo, and that there should be a move towards localism. One suspects that what lay beneath this decision was also the recognition of how difficult and perilous contact between the KPD in exile and local groups was. In fact, many local groups had already developed links locally with other antifascist groups, as we shall see, though some in the KPD never rejected the Third Period perspective or learnt to see members of the SPD as comrades.

But there were other problems: most existing KPD groups by 1935 were in state of organisational collapse. And the move to localism left KPD local activists even more rudderless and easily picked up by the Gestapo. After 1937, communication between the KPD Centre, the Comintern and German resistance groups was dangerous if not close to impossible.³⁵

The KPD was the only Communist Party in Europe not to adopt the Popular Front line till so late.³⁶ Even then, though they agreed, they built in a condition that its adherents had to agree to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Nevertheless, from then on, leaflets did start to call for antifascist unity, but the SPD was still blamed for the victory of fascism.³⁷

The KPD adapted to working conspiratorially by adopting the five person unit, some based in work situations, others in the community. It was rightly considered better for the cells not to communicate, as the danger of being arrested and tortured was great, as was the chance (even greater than they first assumed) of Gestapo infiltrators, some of whom at least had previously been KPD members or sympathisers. Thus there was little effective communication even at a horizontal level between cells, many of which inevitably did not include experienced comrades.

What this all meant was the small groups of KPD comrades had little to no political guidance as to how to build or work as an underground. At the beginning,

³⁴ Abendroth, *A Short History of the European Working Class*, pp.105-6

³⁵ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, pp.40-42

³⁶ Brothers, Eric, 2012, *Berlin Ghetto. Herbert Baum and the Anti-Nazi Resistance*, The History Press, p.86. Brothers interviewed former Baum-Gruppe members who had survived for his book. Interviewing them after the end of the McCarthy era, they felt free to talk; their testimony is invaluable.

³⁷ Brothers references Weitz, Eric, 1997, *Creating German Communism 1890-1990 from Popular Protests to Socialist State*, Princeton. Princeton University Press.

there were street-cells, which produced their own leaflets and distributed them locally. As discussed earlier, some KPD cells in more militant working class areas had been doing this well before 1933. Most of these acted independently of each other. The reproduction of leaflets was not the only problem. People tried to camouflage themselves as writing or book groups or as doing charity work. Everybody was, rightly, worried about traitors. The rate of arrest was phenomenal. Where there had been hundreds, soon there were a mere handful.³⁸

These small cells, almost all made up of working class people, had no support or guidance from anywhere: no functioning national organisation, no exiled Government, virtually no support or publicity from the rest of Europe and, fundamentally, little visible support from other Germans. Members in these cells felt isolated, often did not feel able to trust each other and were constantly afraid of persecution and arrest.³⁹

The activity of the early underground groupings was out of line with the KPD's official passivity. From the beginning, Nazi repression ensured that active anti-Nazi support was minimised. That the Nazis exerted such force to crush the resistance indicates how strong the working class movement had been.

From 1939

Although resistance did continue from 1935/1936 up till 1939, it was severely diminished. The resistance re-emerged however during the war. But the Stalin-Hitler or non-aggression pact had a double effect: its implication was that resistance activity be stopped and it gave the green light to the Nazis to arrest any resistance fighters who were still at large. Hundreds if not thousands of German KPDers and other antifascists were captured and sent to the camps at this point.⁴⁰ According to Walter Krivitsky, already in the summer of 1937, about 15,000 German antifascist political prisoners were held in Russian prisons.⁴¹ The Soviet government used the moment of the Hitler-Stalin pact to hand back to the Nazis hundreds of German exiles who had fled to the USSR. For example, Margarete Buber-Neumann, a communist, was taken from Karaganda, one of the largest Soviet camps, and delivered to the Nazis, one of around 350 prisoners to be handed over from November 1939 to May 1941.⁴²

But once Germany invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, illegal work was expanded: illegal leafleting went up three fold between the beginning and the end of

³⁸ Anderson, *Hammer or Anvil*, pp.165-9

³⁹ *Ibid*, pp.178-180.

⁴⁰ Weitz, Erich, 1996, *Creating German Communism*, Princeton University Press

⁴¹ Walter Germanovich Krivitsky (Вальтер Германович Кривицкий; June 28, 1899 – February 10, 1941) was a Soviet intelligence officer who revealed plans of signing the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact before he defected, weeks before the outbreak of World War II.

⁴² Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.226

1941, but so did the level of arrests. The onset of war also brought a virtual end to the already minimal contact between the KPD exiled leadership with the underground groups surviving inside the Third Reich. The leadership was therefore even less sensitive to what was happening on the ground. The exiled KPD leadership was only able to maintain communication with its active membership in Germany on odd occasions via illegal radio broadcasts from Moscow and the exceptional and highly unsuccessful parachuting in of comrades.⁴³

Trade unionists who had given up on the political fight became reactivated: trying to listen to Radio Moscow, even on occasion then producing a one-off information leaflet and engaging in forbidden "gossip".

But the nature of this second phase of resistance took on a distinct form: an enthusiasm for bourgeois democracy and working with the Allies which had not been the game plan at the beginning. If we trust Hoffman's sources about the Popular Front meetings of the National Committee, the KPD spokespersons were in favour of liberal democracy, private property and large firms, indeed were to the right of the social democrats.⁴⁴

It is easy to forget that, at the beginning, the members of the resistance groups, so many young, brave and idealistic, had no idea how to organise an underground resistance. That there was any effective resistance to the Nazis in 1933 and the years afterwards owes little to the strategy or organisation of the KPD leadership or the Comintern and, if anything, happened despite them. This autonomy from Moscow can be seen on a wider scale: the activities of the Yugoslav Communist Party, the Amsterdam workers' strike against deportations in 1941 and the mass strike of miners in the Pas de Calais in 1941 all reveal that the level of activity of communist party members was far greater than that ascribed to them by the Comintern.

⁴³ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, pp.251-256

⁴⁴ Hoffman, Peter, 1977 *The History of the German Resistance 1933-1945*, Macdonald and Jane, London. pp.362-3

Chapter 6 - Where Was the SPD?

The SPD had been the largest left party in Germany, probably the world. Its leaders had sat at the knees of Marx and Engels. It had a membership of about one million and an average vote of around five million. The Berlin SPD alone had almost one hundred thousand party members.

It rejected extra-parliamentary activity, even in order to stop the Nazis. This both effectively prevented the building of illegal underground structures and prevented it working with organisations to its left, especially as, unlike the KPD, its members would generally not have developed non-parliamentary political muscle. For example, even after Chancellor Papen's coup in 1932 against the social democratic government of Prussia, the social democrats rejected a call for strikes or joint armed resistance.

Although some individuals in the SPD were brave anti-Nazis, the SPD as an organisation was both not prepared for Nazism and rapidly reached the conclusion that it was not worth risking its members' lives and did not organise. The majority view was that the regime could only be overthrown either by a coup led by the German army or by the Western allies. The alternative view was that Hitler was such an idiot, he would not last long. I have not found any reference to an officially endorsed SPD underground group based in the workers' movement. In fact, the SPD leadership regularly expelled members who were critical of their passivity.

The SA, however, although not using the same level of violence against SPD members, did not neglect them. Straight after Hitler became Chancellor, on the evening of 2 February 1933, members of the SA, backed by the police, gathered to attack and fire at a rally of the *Reichsbanner*, an SPD led pro-democracy organisation, complaining that it was the SPD who had fired first.

The SPD leadership believed in legality and legal opposition and made the mistake of assuming that because they had not been banned after the March elections, as had the KPD, and because many of its leading members had not been arrested, that as long as they kept their heads down and followed parliamentary conventions, all would be well. It was not.

But even at local level, SPD branches, such as in Neukölln, resorted to discussing Nazism, rather than planning anti-Nazi activity. Interviewed in 1952, Eberhard Hesse stated that, after the 30 January 1933, the local SPD branch set itself the goal of summarising what was going on. They also agreed that the dictatorship would soon fall anyway.¹

¹ Sandvoß, *Resistance in Neukölln*, p.89

The Nazi Party seized the funds of the SPD in May 1933 and the party was banned in June. From October to December 1933, many in the illegal Berlin party and many of its national leaders were arrested, sent to concentration camps and tortured, others left for exile. The organisation in effect ceased to function. After the annexation of Czechoslovakia in 1938, where the exiled party had first settled, it then moved to Paris and, after the defeat of France in 1940, to London.²

An exile organisation, *Sopade* (also called *SoPaDe*), was established, and announced the need for illegal resistance, against the wishes of the SPD in Germany. Otto Wels (1873-1939), Paul Hertz (1888-1961), Friedrich Stampfer (1874-1957), Erich Ollenhauer (1901-1963) and others were assigned to build a party structure in exile, initially in Prague. *Sopade* operated in Prague from 1933 to 1938, from 1938 to 1940 in Paris and until 1945 in London.

Otto Wels was the chairperson of SPD from 1919 and a deputy in the *Reichstag* from 1920 to 1933. On March 23, 1933 Wels was the only member of the *Reichstag* to speak against the Enabling Act but was silent about the terror and arrests of members of the KPD.³ Wels first went to Saarland; he then worked to build the SPD in exile, first in Prague, then in Paris, where he died in 1939.

Paul Hertz was subjected to antisemitic attacks by the Nazis. From 1919 to 1925, he was the city councillor for the Berlin district of Charlottenburg. Like Wels, he fled first to Saarland and was also deprived of his German citizenship. In exile, he became the editor of the theoretical journal "Journal for Socialism" and after that closed, of Socialist Action. He tried to mediate between the internal German resistance and anti-Nazi work in exile. In the summer of 1937 he went to Spain and was drawn towards *Neu Beginnen*. He then left for the US but returned to Germany in 1949.

Friedrich Stampfer, the son of a Jewish lawyer, tried, without much success, to establish a better relationship between the SPD and the KPD. Like the others, he fled to Saarland and then Prague and in May 1933, was deprived of German citizenship. He too left for the US and in August 1948 returned to Germany.

Although the KPD is regularly and rightly criticised for its Third Period factionalism, the SPD was just as responsible: it did not want to share joint action with the KPD either. For example, on 22 January 1933, the Nazis prepared a march in front of the Karl Liebknecht House in Berlin, where the KPD Central Committee was based. The proposal of the KPD to the SPD leadership to cooperate in opposing this by joint non-parliamentary action was rejected by the SPD, on the grounds that it would only use legal means.

² Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, p.1

³ Abendroth, *Ein Leben in der Arbeiterbewegung*, p.95

However, there were individuals such as Adam Wolfram, an anti-Nazi SPD member, a miner and full time official of the trade union, who, after losing his job in 1933, became a travelling salesperson and who saw his political task to try to maintain some sort of network with former comrades. Wolfram later wrote about how "the mass of the population exulted in their new masters". Repeatedly arrested, he was finally drafted into the *Wehrmacht* but survived. There were a few others: Fritz Winguth joined an illegal circle of colleagues who secretly provided food to foreign forced labourers. Hans Schiftan (1899 -1941), a leftist social democrat, promoted contact with the KPD on a broad anti-Nazi platform. Erwin Auchter, who had fled Germany in 1934, sought out those social democrats who were involved with communists, in opposition to the majority of *Sopade* in Prague, and managed to send underground newspapers to SPD comrades still in Berlin. But, as ever, there was an informant. The singing circle of the Neuköllner Youth Socialist Workers sang the songs of the workers' movement. The SPD chairperson of the Neuköllner Freethinkers, Fritz Naujoks, constructed a billiards club, where former comrades secretly met up and organised support for Jews. At the end of the war, Naujoks was arrested for "passport offences" and "Jewish favouritism". After four months of imprisonment, he hid until the liberation of Berlin by the Red Army.⁴

Splinter groups within the SPD

But there were a few SPD members who, even if they were not organising to overthrow the Nazi regime, were still trying to hold together the organisation, which was far harder than it sounds. Jacob Ott from Mannheim along with Hans Heilig and Jakob Baumann held together about 1000 members illegally and tried to distribute *Socialist Action*, smuggled in from Saarland. But in December 1933, they were arrested, though Heilig and Baumann survived.⁵

An underground group loosely associated with the SPD, the Red Shock Troop, was set up, based in Berlin and made up largely of students, with about 3000 members, a significant number. They briefly set up a paper, *The Red Shock Troop*, which argued that the Nazi regime would be overthrown by German workers. The leadership was arrested by the Gestapo in December 1933 and sent to the camps.⁶

There were also ex-SPDers who became active in a variety of other organisations: in the left split from the SPD: the Socialist Workers party (SAP: its most famous member was Willy Brandt); *Neu Beginnen* (a group that was positioned between the SPD and the KPD), the KPO (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Opposition)*, a breakaway from the KPD), and the long standing illegal anti-Nazi Red Front (RFB).

⁴ Sandvoß, *Resistance in Neukölln*, pp.60, 89 & 228

⁵ Hoffman, *The History of the German Resistance*, p.22

⁶ McDonough, Frank, 2001, *Opposition and Resistance in Nazi Germany*, Cambridge: CUP, p.11

Young Socialist Workers (*Sozialistische Arbeiter-Jugend* , SAJ)

The SAJ were far more active than their parent SPD. Although sometimes seen as a group more keen on discussing ideas and enjoying themselves, the significance of the SAJ in resisting the Nazis has been underestimated; some of the younger members of the SPD who already held official positions locally now became more involved in the SAJ. A far more mixed group than most, including many women as well as men, they used walks and cycling as a way of clandestine organising and drawing in new people.

The inner core organised themselves into clandestine groups of five. But, although they initially were involved in clandestine leafleting, they were a chip of the old political block and their brave appeals demanded the legal overthrow of the Nazi system. But there was carelessness, arrests were frequent and almost all were arrested by 1936.

The SAJ groups in the Rhine-Main area were mostly associated with Willy Knothe, who had been the local chairperson of the SAJ for Hesse-Nassau and then became the head of the social democratic resistance in south-western Germany; he was arrested in the summer of 1934. He and Georg Buch, the leader of the Wiesbaden SAJ resistance group, had led the SAJ underground. The group included up to 40 young people until the beginning of 1941. But then the Gestapo arrested Buch and 14 of his comrades, mostly women.⁷

Georg Buch joined the SPD in 1921 and quickly rose to be a city councillor and chairman of the SPD in Wiesbaden. From 1928, he actively campaigned against the Nazis. He was arrested early in 1933 but released after a few months. He then became the leader of a local resistance group. He was re-arrested in 1941 and held in a number of camps, including Sachsenhausen till the end of the war. In 1946, he was co-founder of the Hessian State Association of the VVN-BdA (Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime/Federation of Antifascists, *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes/Bund der Antifaschistinnen und Antifaschisten*) in Gießen.⁸

The failure of the SPD at an organisational level sharply highlights the limits of legality when countering fascism.

⁷ Ulrich, Axel, *Fight against Hitler. On political resistance against the Nazi regime in the Rhine-Main area* [http://www.mainz1933-1945.de/fileadmin/Rheinessenportal/Teilnehmer/mainz1933-1945/Textbeitraege/](http://www.mainz1933-1945.de/fileadmin/Rheinessenportal/Teilnehmer/mainz1933-1945/Textbeitraege/Ulrich_Widerstand.pdf) Ulrich_Widerstand.pdf pp.1-11

⁸ <https://www.wiesbaden.de/kultur/archive/archive/georg-buch.php>

Chapter 7 - Anti-Nazi Splinter Groups: Neither the KPD nor the SPD

Although these small groups often had few members, they are frequently understood as contributing to the resistance out of all proportion to their size. Many of the remaining experienced cadres in the KPD had left the organisation for small splinter groups. Indeed, the only people who correctly understood that Nazism was not just another temporary right wing government but marked a qualitative change were generally to be found, not in the KPD, but in, firstly the Brandler faction, secondly in *Neu Beginnen*, thirdly the tiny Trotskyist groups and finally in a small group around a paper, *Die Weltbühne*, produced in exile. Because of the severe level of repression, there was an inevitable fluidity of people amongst these groupings. As opposed to the SPD and KPD party leaders, these groups had a well based analysis, understood the importance of building an underground organisation and working conspiratorially, and were committed to trying to form an antifascist united front both before and after the Weimar Republic had ended. ¹

The KPD Opposition (KPO)

The KPD Opposition (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Opposition)*, KPO) broke from the KPD in 1928. It took its lead broadly from Heinrich Brandler, who had led the KPD between 1921 and 1923.² The disagreements before 1933 between the KPD and the KPO over anti-Nazi resistance were profound. While the KPD were arguing that the social democrats were social fascists, with whom they could not collaborate in antifascist work, Brandler and the KPO supported united front work. The KPO were also critical of the KPD line that after the Nazis took power, the proletariat would rise up and throw them out.

The KPO went underground immediately the Nazis seized power. They had about 3000 members and immediately developed conspiratorial work, with a base in Berlin. They also created a foreign committee in Strasbourg. Resistance work focused on two main tasks: disseminating information about the Nazi dictatorship, partly through leafleting, and building illegal, especially trade union, cadre groups. In Berlin, they tried to pull in members of the KPD and then SPD.

In the Rhine-Main area, the KPO's resistance bases existed in Frankfurt and Offenbach only, with about 20 members altogether, mostly intellectuals and the unemployed, but with an orientation on factory work.

¹ Abendroth, *Ein Leben in der Arbeiterbewegung*, pp.142-145

² Brandler and Thalheimer became exiles in Cuba. Brandler returned to West Germany in 1949 and played a leading role in the *Gruppe Arbeiterpolitik*, but was never able to recover his former influence. He died in 1967.

Walter Uhlmann, a metal worker, had been a member of the *Freie Sozialistische Jugend* (Free Socialist Youth) in 1918, then joined the KPD Youth Federation and from the mid-1920s, became a district leader in Cologne, then Leipzig. He joined the KPO, after being expelled by the KPD for Brandlerite tendencies and became one of its leaders.

After 1933, he organised a network of left-leaning metal workers in several Berlin companies. Uhlmann edited the group's paper *Junge Kämpfer* (Young Fighters) and the illegal magazine: *Der Metallarbeiter, Organ des Aktions-Ausschusses Gruppe Metall*, with a weekly circulation of 600 copies in 1933 and 1934.³ Uhlmann criticised the leadership of the free trade unions for capitulating to the new Nazi trade union: the series of demands in *Der Metallarbeiter* shows strong disagreement with the KPD line: do not join the German Labour Front, no participation in the DAF or DAF events, do not try to get into the leadership of the DAF but do try to maintain a network with old comrades. The KPD's tactic of the Trojan Horse, whereby (non-Jewish) KPD members would join the legal Nazi Party institutions, such as the Nazi trade unions, was rejected. This instruction was also generally ignored by the KPD rank and file; it was also seen as providing an excuse for a few turncoats, fuelling further fear and paranoia amongst comrades.



Walter Uhlmann

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Uhlmann was able to engage in underground resistance activities until 1937 when he was arrested and sentenced to eight years; he was released in 1945. In Brandenburg KZ, because he did "field work", he was able to provide his comrades with political information. After the liberation, he lived in East Berlin and worked for BVG (Berlin Transport Corporation). He became a member of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED, East German Communist Party) but left after being interrogated. In 1953 he left the GDR and died in 1991 in West Germany.

By summer 1933, nearly 600 KPO activists had already been arrested or worse, including, in 1934, their leader, Philipp Pless. The KPO itself split and a minority KPO group formed which then joined the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*, (SAP, Socialist Workers' Party of Germany).

The KPO operated briefly out of Saarland after 1933 but then moved to Paris

³ https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/walter-uhlmann/

where, for a short time, they continued to publish *Gegen den Strom*. There was the illegal publication *Discussion organ and the class struggle*, with a print order of 100 to 200 which appeared ten times in 1933 and then stopped. In addition, other publications were produced, first in Strasbourg, then Paris, against the Nazis and against the KPD.

SAP (*Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*, the Socialist Workers Party)

The SAP (sometimes called the SAPD), the Socialist Workers Party, many originally members of the SPD who had left in 1931, was arguably the most important of the underground proletarian small-scale organisations.⁴ As the SPD leadership (and most of the membership) had vacated the anti-Nazi stage, it gave the SAP (and other small breakaways) a temporary importance, before their members too were picked up by the Nazis. In early 1933, its membership was 25,000-30,000, including a significant number of young people.

Willy Brandt was the most famous member of the SAP. Herbert Frahm (his original name) joined the SAJ as a teenager in 1929, then in 1930, the SPD and then the SAP in 1931. In April 1933 he was sent to Oslo to set up a foreign bureau for the SAP. Later, he worked as a press correspondent in Spain and supported the creation of a "Popular Front against Hitler". He attended the Paris conference of the Committee of the German Opposition in 1938. On 9 April 1940 he fled Oslo disguised as a Norwegian soldier. He was a German POW between May and June 1940. Afterwards he went undercover to Sweden, where he had contact with resistance groups in Germany. Between 1969 and 1974 he was Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.



Willy Brandt

The SAP had been joined by a significant minority of the KPO in 1932, including Paul Frölich. In effect, Frölich and Brandler became the leadership of the SAP. Unlike the SPD and the KPD, their position was that fascism represented a qualitative break, plus that the Third Reich was not just another temporary but a long term defeat for the workers' movement.⁵

Irmgard Rasch (aka Enderle), a member of the *Wandervögel* hiking group, joined the Spartacus League (*Spartakusbund*) in November 1918, then the KPD. A Brandlerite, she was excluded in 1929, joined the KPDO and then the SAP and remained active in the area around Breslau, including underground, up till June 1933,

⁴ Ulrich, *Fight against Hitler*, p.9

⁵ Abendroth, *Ein Leben in der Arbeiterbewegung*, p.189

when she was arrested by the Gestapo. She finally escaped to Sweden.⁶

As early as 1932, preparations were made for illegality: they gave themselves aliases, organised singing, walking and sports clubs and discussions on topics such as "How to do illegal work in a police state". Erich Drucker from the Brandenburg SAP, who survived, when interviewed said: "You never came together regularly and too often in the same apartment. There was never to be printed or written material in this apartment. On a table there were always chess games that had started or other games. They arranged what to say in the event of a sudden attack by the police".

SAP called for a united front but without high expectations. Within weeks of the *Reichstag* fire, on March 11, 1933, Klaus Zweiling, ex-SPD and one of the founders of the SAP in 1931, an editor of the *Sozialistische Arbeiter-Zeitung*, disagreed with both the KPD and SPD analysis, emphasising how quickly fascism had taken power in Germany, unlike in Italy, establishing complete control within weeks and revealing the bankruptcy of the labour movement. He was arrested in August 1933 by the Gestapo but survived.⁷

Pre-1933, many of the members of the small SAP youth group had transferred from the SPD's youth organisation. It seems, after the *Reichstag* fire, a handful of members, unbeknown to the SAP leadership, continued to make leaflets, paint walls, and whisper propaganda. Edith Fleischer who worked at a law firm had access to a type writer and copier but was quickly arrested. "We had to be very careful because anyone could be the enemy. Because so many people had gone from being red to being brown. One could not know at first whether this or that comrade had turned and betrayed his friends."⁸

In the spring of 1933, about 15,000 SAP members were involved in underground work, organised into small underground cells of 3-5 people; initially their focus was on distributing anti-Nazi leaflets in many of the large German cities, though the youth did this apparently with some recklessness. The largest SAP groups were in Frankfurt, Offenbach, Hanau, Rüsselsheim, Rodgau, Langendiebach, Darmstadt, Wiesbaden and Mainz, but they also had connections with Anspach, Bad Ems, Worms, Ludwigshafen, Heidelberg and Mannheim, which was the local HQ with, briefly, connections to the foreign leadership in Prague.

The leadership of the SAP also sought contact with other resistance groups. Max Köhler reported in 1959 how their aim was to "cooperate illegally with all antifascist forces.... In Berlin there were connections to Trotskyists and opposition KPD and

⁶ Weber, Hermann; and Andreas Herbst. "Rasch (Enderle), Irmgard" in. *Handbuch der Deutschen Kommunisten*. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag.

⁷ Sandvoß, *Neukölln*, p.99.

⁸ Wörmann, Heinrich-Wilhelm, 1999, "Widerstand in Charlottenburg", *Resistance In Berlin 1933-1945* Vol 5, 78

SPD comrades...Loose contacts also existed to Catholic circles and to former opposition National Socialists, who gathered around Otto Strasser's Black Front... These circles had intimate knowledge about the power apparatus of the NSDAP". But there was a Gestapo agent in their midst.⁹

Max Köhler was born in 1897 and joined the Workers Youth Movement in October 1911, the SPD in 1915, then the Spartacist group. He was one of the co-founders of the KPD in Berlin 1918 and later on the Central Committee. As one of the leaders of the Right, he was excluded at the end of 1928. Then he co-founded the KPO and became secretary of the Berlin KPO. During the split of the KPO in 1932, he went with the minority to the SAP, became managing director and *OrgLeiter* of the Berlin SAP. Arrested in 1933, upon his release, he took over organising the SAP underground. Rearrested in November 1933 and sentenced to three years imprisonment in the great SAP trial of "Max Köhler and Comrades", after his release, he went to Prague, Basel, Paris and then headed the SAP exile base in Denmark, where he stayed illegally from 1940 to 1945. Max Köhler returned to Berlin in 1955, becoming a member of the SPD in 1956. From the SAP era, he continued to be friends with Willy Brandt, although their political paths parted because Köhler remained a Marxist. He was excluded from the SPD in 1961 but reinstated in 1962. Köhler died on 15 December 1975 in West Berlin.

Heinz Albrecht (1910-1999), SAP, was arrested on 3 May 1933 together with his KPD brothers: Eberhard and Harald. The Gestapo had arrived at their home in Berlin and found a copy of *Die Rote Fahne* but Heinz was subsequently released. Interviewed in 1984, Heinz Albrecht described how, if he met a comrade, they would wait for hours, standing outside at agreed places, where they could see each other and look out for people following them.

One of their comrades worked in a small print shop where they printed leaflets, when the owner was not watching. But they had to disguise the print: they poured liquid resin on it and then printed it several times, so the letters became unidentifiable. They listened to the BBC. Heinz Albrecht rode his bicycle to Basel in Switzerland and smuggled back texts hidden in his coat for leaflets. For about two months, they spread flyers by throwing them from rooftops. "The leaflets fell down as if an airplane had dropped them". But soon the SA took to patrolling the roofs. They also pushed leaflets, inserted in advertising material, through letter slots. This continued till 1938 when the group split up.

On 22 August 1933, top SAP officials Max Köhler and Klaus Zweiling were arrested. Then the Gestapo arrested the Berlin leadership: Edith Baumann, Günther

⁹ Sandvoß, *Neukölln*, p.102-3

Keil, Karl Baier and Gustav Seeger. Within a couple of months the Gestapo arrested the replacement domestic leadership, including Joseph Lang, Stefan Szende and Hans Ils; there was a spy in their midst.¹⁰

Edith Baumann (1909-1973), a typist, joined the SAJ in 1925, then the SAP in 1931. She was also a leading member of the Socialist Youth League, the youth wing of the SAP and from March 1933, on the party executive. In September 1945, Edith Baumann was recruited to work with Erich Honecker to establish the Free German Youth and later became a member of the SED leadership.

Elise Tilse, another SAP member from Charlottenburg, when interviewed in 1989, talked about how things they were still doing in 1933 rapidly became impossible. Their members such as Heinz Albrecht and Ernst Zander were arrested straight away, "I was given 12 or 14 newspapers as a courier ... every week or fortnight, for SAP members I knew... Much of it consisted of information about who was arrested and accused of what". Herself arrested and tortured, she said she fought hard not to reveal names.¹¹

Within a year, at least a third had either left the group or gone into exile: Jacob Walcher to Paris, Ruth Löwenthal to Paris via Czechoslovakia and Walter Fabian, ex-husband of Dora, who became the de-facto head of the SAP before fleeing to Paris. Others were arrested and imprisoned, such as Otto Branden, in December 1933, Gruppe Landau, in 1934, Eugen Brehm, arrested in March 1933 and again in December 1934 and Herbert Zillman, a SAP functionary, arrested in September 1933 for high treason. Jacob Walcher, a metal worker, had been a member of the SPD, a Spartacist, KPD (expelled 1928), KPO (expelled 1932) and then SAP, becoming an active member of the Executive Committee, fleeing in 1933 first to Czechoslovakia, then Paris.

Ruth Löwenthal served on the banned SAP management committee in Berlin till 1935 when she just managed to escape.

Walter Fabian, a member of the SPD and Young Socialists, joined the SAP along with about 1000 other Young Socialists in Saxony. In March 1933, he became a member of the underground SAP EC, and fled to Paris in 1935. The Gestapo had managed to smuggle in an informer. In Berlin alone, more than 100 members were arrested between 1933 and 1945.¹²

The trial before the People's Court against leading functionaries of the SAP was

¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp.98-100

¹¹ Wörmann, *Widerstand in Charlottenburg*, p.82

¹² Brinson, Charmian, 1996, *The Strange Case of Dora Fabian and Mathilde Wurm. A study of German political exiles during the 1930s*, Peter Lang, London, pp.381-2, 392-3

one of the first mass trials against a party of the labour movement. Twenty-five SAP defendants were tried, including Max Köhler, Klaus Zweiling and Edith Baumann, arrested in August 1933, and charged with "treason", that is with maintaining an underground organisation. Dora Fabian managed to raise enough money in Britain to cover a German lawyer's costs, leading to remarkably mild sentences, a three year prison sentence, rather than the death penalty.¹³

Another case of persecution occurred just after a youth conference had opened near Amsterdam, on 24 February 1933, called by the Independent Socialist Party of Holland. The Dutch police arrived and arrested all 19 foreign delegates. Then the four German delegates were handed over to German police: from the SAP: Kurt Liebermann, Frank Bobzien, and Hans Goldstein; and for the German section of the International Communist League, Heinz Hose. Liebermann was then imprisoned till his trial in January 1935.

By 1939, hardly any member of the SAP was still free and living in Germany.¹⁴ From the summer of 1933, the SAP was organised from Paris. From abroad, the SAP published: *The Banner of Revolutionary Unity* and *The New Front*. Leaflets were also produced in the Rhine-Main area but the risk of arrest was so high, they did not continue.

The SAP had a disadvantage compared to both the KPD and the SPD. An organisation to maintain long term resistance needed significant local working class roots, a well-organised national organisation and, finally, comrades experienced in extra-parliamentary and illegal activism. Both the SPD and the KPD, particularly the SPD, had the first two, the KPD the latter. The SAP was a new organisation, only rooted in a scattering of places and with many relatively inexperienced comrades. It is therefore not surprising, that, despite the acuity of their analysis and the commitment of their supporters, they were not able to carry on the struggle for long.

Neu Beginnen

The group *Neu Beginnen* (Begin Anew) was a small group which occupied some of the political ground the SPD had vacated. Although the exact date is unclear, sometime between 1929 and 1931, a small discussion group was formed of people who had belonged to the KPD or the SPD, and who wanted to bring their parties together in an anti-Nazi front. The KPD was seen as sectarian and the SPD as bourgeois. Their emphasis was on united front work. In reality, it drew more people from the SPD, though some from the KPD with a leftist critique of the Soviet Union did join. As with the SAP, it was mostly the young who became active.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.150

¹⁴ *Manchester Guardian* 19 Nov 1934, p.13.

They were aware of the growing threat of Nazism and saw Germany moving towards dictatorship from 1929 onwards. After the *Reichstag* fire of February 1933, they emphasised that a qualitative shift had occurred. They argued that fascism represented a transformation of capitalism and what distinguished it in part was that it had come to power as a result of a mass movement. This led them to conclude that resistance work was going to be exceedingly hazardous and to emphasise the importance of tightly organised clandestine work. They pinned their hopes on a crisis in the regime and looked to a revised social democracy to organise opposition to Nazism. This whole analysis drew much criticism from some parts of the resistance who accused them of defeatism and indeed, members of *Neu Beginnen* rarely feature in active German working class resistance.

In the autumn of 1933, in Czechoslovakia, they produced "*New Beginnings! Fascism or Socialism*" by Walter Loewenheim, its theoretical head, after which the group was called.¹⁵ Published in October 1933 by the SPD Committee in exile, 5,000 copies were smuggled into Germany and into the anti-Nazi underground. It was reproduced in English and French, helping this group to become known outside Germany. They distributed their newspaper, *Sozialistische Aktion*, which was printed by exiled members and smuggled into Germany through a complicated courier system: in 1935 an amazing 27,000 copies. Despite many arrests, in 1938, its remaining members distributed more than 5,000 of the final edition of the paper. They also produced and distributed anti-Nazi leaflets, hiding them under roofs or in outdoor flowerpots.¹⁶

In 1933, the group had just over 100 supporters but with about 200 to 300 sympathisers which grew to about 500 members by around 1935, many of them young. *Neu Beginnen* had groups in Offenbach and Frankfurt, members and contacts among Berlin's working-class population, recruited several dozen trade union leaders and functionaries, including the underground leaders of the railway workers union and other factory resistance structures and developed links with a couple of anti-Nazi groups of religious socialists.

The group was badly affected by internal splits. A debate erupted in 1934-35, with the old guard around Walter Loewenheim adopting, in the view of their opponents, a defeatist perspective, convinced that further illegal activity was senseless and that the time had arrived to leave Germany and continue the struggle from exile, which Loewenheim did. On the other hand, a group around Karl Frank, Werner Peuke, and

¹⁵ Loewenheim had fought in World War 1, later participated in the Spartacist uprising of 1918-19, joined the KPD, resigned and joined the SPD, but with the aim of building united front work from both the SPD and the KPD. Loewenheim left Germany in 1935 and many of his adherents left the group or fled the country.

¹⁶ Hoffmann, Peter, 1977 *The History of the German resistance 1933-1945*, translated by Richard Barry, London: MacDonald and James, p.21.

Richard Löwenthal argued that it was still possible to carry out activities in Germany and even to build a revolutionary party.

Amongst many other arrests, 36 of the leading members of *Neu Beginnen* were arrested in February 1934 and between 20 and 40 in 1935/36.¹⁷ The Gestapo had been improving its circle of informers. The group never fully recovered. Kurt Schmidt, a leading member and Fritz Erler were spared and tried to reorganize the group. Originally Schmidt was a member and then committee member of the SAJ (Young Socialist Workers) in Berlin as well as the SPD. The SAJ was opposed to the SPD's belief in maintaining a legal anti-Nazi strategy. He and other SAJ officials such as Erich Schmidt, Theo Thiele, Eberhard Hesse, Kurt Mattick and Fritz Erler were excluded from the SPD. They contacted the exiled executive committee of the SPD in Prague and crossed illegally to meet *SoPaDe* in Prague. The aim was to initiate cooperation in Germany with a resistance group of former USPD members.¹⁸ The result was a joint 10-point statement that was distributed illegally. But the usual safety rules at *Neu Beginnen* had been loosened and the Gestapo succeeded in the autumn of 1938 in arresting twenty members, including Kurt Schmidt. This marked the end of the organisation in Germany. Schmidt was sentenced to 12 years but shortly before the end of the war, on 16 April, he managed to flee on a prisoner transport and survived.¹⁹

In 1939, almost all surviving *Neu Beginnen* members still in Germany were arrested and sentenced to long periods of imprisonment. In the camps and prisons, members attempted to carry out resistance activities, for example, Fritz Erler arranged classes among his fellow prisoners.

***Rote Kämpfer* (Red Fighters)**

The *Rote Kämpfer* was a loose resistance grouping of about 400 mostly young and left-wing socialists with council communist tendencies, who were anti-capitalist, anti-KPD and anti-SPD. It called for a unified approach by the workers' movement against fascism. Founded in 1931/32, with cells in Berlin, Hamburg, Stuttgart, Karlsruhe and Frankfurt, it was *mostly* led by former functionaries of the Communist Workers Party (*Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands*, KAP) in 1933: Alexander Schwab, Arthur Goldstein, Bernard Reichenbach and Karl Schröder and also by a few left-wing members of the SAP and the SAJ.²⁰ After 1933, they called themselves "Worker

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.22

¹⁸ The Independent Social Democratic Party (*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands/ USPD*) was established in 1917 as the result of left wing members of the SPD splitting off, rejecting the SPD's electoral orientation. It merged with the SAP in 1931.

¹⁹ <http://widerstandsmuseum.de/schmidt-kurt/>.

²⁰ The KAP was formed in 1920 by members of the left wing of the KPD who had been excluded by the KPD under Paul Levi in 1919. Their main goal was the immediate abolition of bourgeois democracy but, unlike the KPD, they

Communists".

They operated in secret from their inception and maintained cohesion through conspiratorial methods, which protected them from the Gestapo till 1936. Every two months, they produced *The Red Fighter*; their members were especially honourable in hiding Jews. By 1936, the Gestapo had penetrated them and most of their members were arrested or killed.²¹ Ernst Froebel was sentenced to three years in prison in 1936, then sent to the 999 Battalion in Tunisia.²²

Alexander Schwab joined the Spartacists, became a leading member of the KPD, left in 1922 and later joined the Red Fighters Group which then had about 400 members. He was arrested and imprisoned in May 1933 but upon release, reorganised the Red Fighters. Schwab was arrested again in November 1936. He and most of the other members were executed in 1943.



Alexander Schwab

Arthur Goldstein and **Karl Schröder** both joined the SPD, then the USPD, then the Spartacus League, then became leading members of the KPD. In 1920, disagreeing with the KPD's parliamentary orientation, they became co-founders of the Communist Workers Party of Germany, (KAP) and shared responsibility for the party newspaper *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Zeitung* but were then expelled.

In Berlin, Goldstein worked to form a Council Communist cadre organisation, which was to form the core of the *Rote Kämpfer*, formed in 1931. He also maintained contact with other left-wing organisations, such as the Trotskyist Left Opposition. In 1933, Goldstein fled to Paris and played a leadership role in a Trotskyist faction. According to documents in Auschwitz, Goldstein was picked up by the SS in France, deported on 23 June 1943 in a mass transportation of 1018 Jews from Drancy and was immediately gassed by the SS with 517 other Jews in Auschwitz.

Schröder also organised the Red Fighters but the Gestapo penetrated them in 1936, and arrested him. He was sentenced to four years in prison and then detained in several concentration camps. In 1945 he was close to death, but recovered.

rejected the KPD's concept of Leninism, democratic centralism and any involvement in parliament or trade unions. It essentially ceased to have a separate existence in 1933.

²¹ Ulrich, Axel, *Fight against Hitler*, p.18

²² Sandvoß, *Widerstand in Prenzlauer Berg und Weißensee*, p.240

Bernard Reichenbach, also of Jewish descent, fled to the UK where he settled. He then worked for the Foreign Office on various anti-Nazi publications which were distributed around Germany.

The Trotskyist groups / International Left Opposition

Despite the domination of the KPD, the Trotskyists, unlike other groups, though small, grew continuously in Germany in the years up to 1933, in part because of Trotsky's analysis and reputation and partly because of their position of building a united front. The Left Opposition was dispersed across Germany, though concentrated in Berlin, with about 700 members altogether in 1932, a number which grew slightly from 1933.

The larger of the two Trotskyists groups, with about 600 members, was the International Communists of Germany. The person who led it post-1933 was Erwin Acknecht, known as Eugen Bauer. The group had been subject to too much factionalism pre-1933, for example over how far to focus on the KPD but Bauer had been won over to Trotsky's idea of creating a new rival party to the KPD. Bauer fled for Paris in 1933 from where he led the group, now arguing that their members should join the SAP, which he later did, although this remained a minority position.²³

Their most important theoreticians and organisers were Kurt Landau, Hans Schwalback and Alexander (Sascha) Müller. They rejected the social fascism line of the KPD and argued that although the social democrats had betrayed the working class, their members were still a part of the working class and would be as much the victim of the Nazis as the KPD and that it was vital to build a united front to fight the Nazis. Moreover, the governments of Brüning and even von Papen had to be understood as distinct from a Nazi government. They gained support for the United Front only in Bruchsal and Orianenburg. In June 1933, Hans Schwalbach, the former Secretary of the organisation, followed Müller to Paris.²⁴ Landau, the leader of the Austrian *Der Funke* group and wife went to Spain and joined POUM where he became a coordinator of the volunteers.

Karl Gröhl (1896–1979) also contributed to the Trotskyist analysis of the mistakes of the KPD/Comintern, though he was not part of an active resistance. Gröhl criticised the Central Committee of the Comintern for its false policy towards the Nazis, for its belief in a revolutionary upswing and for arguing that it was "defeatist" and "anti-party" to accept there had been a "defeat of the German workers movement".

²³ Alexander, Robert, 1991, *International Trotskyism, 1929-1985: A Documented Analysis of the Movement*, Durham: Duke University press., p.415

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.416

Gröhl fled to the USSR. In Moscow, he met Erich Wollenberg, who had joined the USPD in 1918 and then the Spartacist League. He took part in the 1918/19 revolution in Bavaria which he wrote about in *As a Red Army in Munich*. He then escaped to the USSR. He returned to Germany in 1931 and became a committee member of the Red Front and editor of the Red Flag. He spoke at a Nazi meeting (in line with KPD policy) and was severely injured by the SA. He complained to the KPD that he had not received sufficient protection and at the end of 1932, had a "criminal transfer to Moscow", following an unfriendly investigation.

On March 5, 1933, a group of KPD members, including Werner Rakow (Felix Wolf) a former supporter of the Left Opposition, Karl Gröhl and Erich Wollenberg met up in Moscow, some of whom knew each other from the Munich Soviet. The Soviet secret police saw this meeting as the beginnings of the "counter-revolutionary trotskyist-terrorist organisation", centred around Wollenberg. He was expelled from the communist movement on 1933. He fled to Prague in 1934, then Paris. A list drawn up by the NKVD (USSR Secret Police) named 70 who were arrested, interned in labour camps or shot as members of the imaginary Wollenberg-Hoelz organisation.

The Left Opposition pasted flyers on the walls of factories as well as crucially distributing their paper: *Unser Wort* (Our Word). But after two editions, the printer refused to work on it. It was then published from exile and something like 1500-2000 copies were smuggled in from Basle and then distributed. Their newspaper *Permanente Revolution*, prohibited at the end of February 1933, had a run of 5,000 copies, of which 3,000 were sold by subscription. A replacement publication, also called *Unser Wort*, was printed in Czechoslovakia from early March and 1,500 to 2,000 copies smuggled into Germany per issue from Basle.²⁵ They also published a lengthy brochure: *The Soviet Economy in Danger*.

They worked in small cells of up to five people and concentrated on educating a small cadre, who would then be experienced enough to continue the fight after the defeat of Nazism. They held political discussions in private, including in a clothes washing basement. But key activists went into exile within months of Hitler becoming Chancellor, for example Leon Sedov and Eugen Bauer. Hippe states he and Alfred Schöler were the only leading comrades left in Germany.

Leon Sedov, Trotsky's son, was a key figure and activist in the Trotskyist movement, hated by the Stalinists. His key political work was *The Red Book on the Moscow Trials* (1936) which exposed the Stalinist trials at a time when almost everybody on the left was excusing them. Trotsky himself described the book as the first crushing reply to the Kremlin falsifiers. But after Sedov had an acute attack of

²⁵ Hippe, *And Red is the Colour of My Flag*, p.140

appendicitis in February 1938, Mark Zborowski, an NKVD agent who had posed as Sedov's comrade and friend, arranged to take him to a private clinic and notified the NKVD that Sedov was there. Sedov subsequently died in the clinic.

Eugen Bauer left immediately and went into exile in Paris, where he became the Administrative Secretary to the International Left Opposition (ILO). But following a visit to Trotsky in Turkey, there was a parting of ways as Bauer favoured entering the SAP, which Trotsky was against. Bauer then joined the SAP.

In December 1933, the Gestapo picked up counter-espionage KPD files which gave the names of the counter-revolutionary Trotskyists. In March 1934, the Gestapo arrested 170 people associated with the ILO. From 1933, the Left Opposition did not really have a national but rather local organisations, for example in Berlin, Frankfurt (with about 50 members) and Mainz. In 1936, in Danzig, 70 Trotskyists were arrested, of whom 10 were tried. They had attempted to get the local dockers to refuse to send arms to the Francoists in Spain.

There was also a remarkable group in Dresden. Just to the south of Dresden lies the mountainous region on the Czech border. The group, who cooperated closely with the Sudeten German Trotskyists, had been formed at the end of the 1920s in a working-class suburb within the framework of the "Friends of Nature", specifically its mountaineers section. As experienced mountaineers, the Dresden comrades knew the frontier area well and were able to evade the border controls of the Nazi police. They smuggled material into Germany and people out. But in 1937 the Dresden group was broken up and its members sent to convict prisons or concentration camps.²⁶

Wencelas Kozlecki, a toolmaker, and **Gerhard Grabs** had formed the Dresden branch in 1932. Wencelas and Käthe Kozlecki escaped to Czechoslovakia in August 1933 when the Nazis incorporated Sudetenland. In 1934 Wencelas was a delegate to a trotskyist conference of the IKD (the German Internationalist Communists) in Zurich. He was in correspondence with Trotsky in 1938, and was able to get to Mexico through Trotsky's intervention. Käthe found exile in Great Britain, where she came into contact with the RCP (Revolutionary Communist Party) and took part in forming a small German-speaking Trotskyist circle of émigrés, which after 1945 tried to exercise influence in Germany through a paper *Solidarität*. Wencelas finally died in Germany.

There was also the Minority group of the Left Opposition, with only 80 followers which was mainly in Berlin but the two groups cooperated with each other. By 1934,

²⁶ <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol9/no4/workinprogress.html>, from Barbara Weinhold, 2004, *Eine trotzkistische Bergsteigergruppe aus Dresden im Widerstand gegen den Faschismus*, Verlag, Cologne, (A Group of Trotskyist Mountaineers from Dresden in the Resistance to Fascism)

most members of both groups had either fled or been arrested. A handful joined the SAP. From 1934/35, the German Internationalist Communists (IKD), as the German Trotskyists now called themselves, were based in Antwerp and briefly published *Unser Wort* and later *Der Einzige Weg*. The German section of the Fourth International, the International Communists of Germany, was hit hard: of their 1,000 members, roughly half withdrew in 1933, while 150 were in prison or concentration camps. While some of their leading members survived, many became exiles, including some of the leadership such as Josef Weber who escaped to Paris and then to New York. They had almost no influence on the resistance within Germany.

In an exceptional initiative, a group of French comrades and German exiles in France produced a few copies of *Arbeiter und Soldat* in 1943, the second as the official production of the German Trotskyists. It was designed to win supporters amongst the German occupying forces in the Brest area of France and first appeared, in mimeographed form, in approximately July 1943 and continued for 3 months before the Gestapo closed it down. The chief editor was Martin Monath. His aim was to organise illegal cells of German soldiers and turn them against their Nazi officers in occupied France. In the early 1930s, he had been a leader of the socialist Zionist secular youth organisation Hashomer Hatzair in Germany. Fleeing from Berlin to Brussels in 1939, he joined the underground Trotskyist party led by Abraham Leon, and soon became a leading member of the Fourth International in Europe, which argued for a revolutionary struggle against the Nazis. He was arrested and murdered in 1944.²⁷

The International Socialist Combat League (*Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund*, ISK)

Another small group whose original members had been expelled by the SPD, were the International Socialist Combat League (ISK, *Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund*), a small cadre organisation. They had no more than 200 members, though with a periphery of between 600 to 1,000 people, most of whom became involved in resistance work. Unusually, about one third of the members were women. Unlike the KPD or SPD, this group was so aware of the likely repression that, in preparation for conspiratorial work, they formally dissolved in the spring of 1933. They published *ISK* - Information Journal of the International Socialist Combat League and *Der Funke* (The Spark).

As late as 1935/36, ISK was still divided into six district units, including Frankfurt, the biggest, with up to 30 members, and Offenbach, Mainz and Worms. A vegetarian restaurant acted as a temporary camouflage for the resistance centre in Frankfurt.

²⁷ Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, p.415 For further analysis, see Steve Cushion's Part 2.

In 1936, two leaflets were produced for Mayday, condemning Hitler, Goebbels and Ley (the leader of the German Labour Front), calling for a strengthening of the resistance. In 1937 numerous illegal leaflets were published, declaring that there was an increasing danger of war and "Down with Hitler". The leaflets were slipped into the pages of telephone directories in phone booths, and in sports and naturist camps. They produced a leaflet against Mussolini's visit to Germany, addressed to bakers. In November, 1937, they produced a leaflet which stated that, bad as Bolshevism was, the Nazi regime was worse, comparing the condition of prisoners and press censure. They also raised money to support the families of prisoners in Germany and Spain and one or two, such as Herbert Theis (SPD) gave shelter to deserted soldiers, with the help of the Religious Socialists.²⁸ This was helped by one of the Berlin members running a vegetarian restaurant.

This group also campaigned for some sort of anti-Nazi unity between the parties. Willi Eichler, born in Berlin and the son of a postal worker, became the chair of ISK and from 1932 to 1933, edited the ISK's anti-Nazi paper, *Der Funke*. It appealed for a left united platform for the July 1932 federal elections and advocated the creation of a united front for the workers' movement to defend the republic. In 1935-1936, Eichler, exiled in Paris, got involved with the Lutetia Circle, an exile committee established on the initiative of Willi Münzenberg in 1935 to encourage building a People's Front. He also became the publisher of the *Reinhardt letters* secretly disseminated in Germany, apparently in part by barge, and *Sozialistische Warte*. Eichler's political activities caused him to be expelled from France in 1938 and soon after he found asylum in London, where he headed a small ISK group and published ISK journals and pamphlets.²⁹

Jupp Kappius was another intriguing member. A draftsman, he joined the SAJ (*Sozialistische Arbeiter-Jugend*, Socialist Workers Youth) in 1924 and in 1933, joined the ISK, becoming responsible for illegal youth and educational work. He fled early, reaching the UK via France. He was interned after the outbreak of war by the British and held until 1942 in detention centres in Australia; then he returned to Britain. Early in 1944, he completed a training course in cooperation with the OSS, an interesting decision for a revolutionary, and jumped from a plane over the Emsland by parachute on 1 September 1944, making his way to the Ruhr area, where he remained till April 1945, making contacts with old comrades in the unions, the

²⁸ The Confederation of Religious Socialists was an organisation of mainly Protestants who advocated a socialist social order. Founded in 1926, the Nazis banned it.

Sandvoß, *Neukölln*, pp.137-9

²⁹ German Resistance Memorial centre. In 1941 Eichler and his Combat League joined the Union of German Socialist Organisations in Britain, and as a member of its executive committee, he inaugurated the unification with the SPD in August 1945. He worked at the BBC making broadcasts aimed at German workers.

ISK and resistance groups.³⁰ Back in the UK, he set up a vegetarian restaurant, "Vega". He negotiated the incorporation of the ISDK into the SPD.

The regional head was Ludwig Gehm, who also coordinated with the SAP and KPO. Gehm's father had been expelled from Bavaria as a strike leader. Aged 14, Ludwig had joined the Socialist Workers Youth, later the SPD then, in 1927, the ISK. He disrupted Nazi rallies, committed sabotage, and saved political refugees. In 1936 he was arrested and sent to Buchenwald, then sent to the death battalion 999. A year later, posted to Greece, he deserted to the Greek national liberation movement ELAS. Within this organisation, he tried to persuade *Wehrmacht* soldiers to give up fighting, using flyers and other methods. Ludwig Gehm survived the war in a British prisoner-of-war camp and began working for the SPD after his return to Germany, as a city council member in Frankfurt am Main.³¹



Hilde Meisel (Hilde Monte) is probably the best known member. In exile in the UK, she smuggled literature into Germany and helped those under threat to escape Germany. She also wrote for *Sozialistische Warte*, the ISK's exile publication. For a few years, it managed to distribute leaflets and maintained contacts abroad.

In summer 1944, Meisel was recruited for the "Faust Project" of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), who were looking for some 200 agents to obtain military and political news from Germany. The teachers were members of the U.S. Army. In September 1944, Meisel and Anna Beyer flew to France. She acted as a courier and repeatedly undertook secret operations in Germany, Austria, France and Portugal. After many adventures, on 17 April 1945, while trying to cross the border illegally from Germany into Liechtenstein, Meisel was shot and bled to death while still on the border.

Most of the local groups had been torn apart by 1935, but a few fought on till 1937. Anybody not already picked up was arrested in late 1944.

Free Workers Union of Germany (*Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands*, FAUD)

The anarcho-syndicalist *Free Workers Union of Germany* (FAUD), with a membership of 4300 in the early 1930s, developed conspiratorial underground

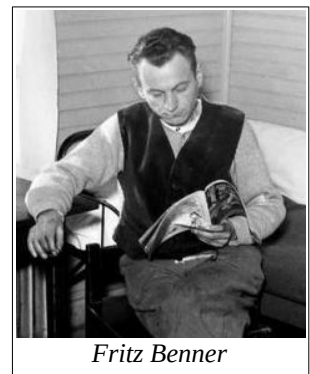
³⁰ www.juppkappius.de/jupp-kappius-eine-subjektive-biographie. Kappius gave an interview where he gives great detail as to what to do and not to do when landing by parachute in enemy territory: <https://juppkappius.wordpress.com/josef-kappius-die-politische-person/parachuting-into-the-emsland/>

³¹ https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/ludwig-gehm/

methods before 1933. Unlike the KPD, it did not look to the USSR or the working class as the engines for an anti-Nazi socialist revolution; it campaigned around issues of housing and police violence. FAUD's largest group was in Wuppertal but they also had groups in Berlin, Hamburg, Wroclaw, Königsberg and some other cities.

The FAUD formed an antifascist fighting unit, the *Schwarzen Scharen* (Black Crowds, who were dressed entirely in black and at times carried weapons) whose aim was to resist the SA, for whom they were a particular target. In 1931, Fritz Benner was a co-founder of the *Schwarzen Scharen*. He was arrested in May 1933 by the SS, accused of organising a strike. The Gestapo then raided his house. They did not find the revolver or carbine that had been hidden but did find fertiliser as evidence of a bomb factory, and rat poison was evidence that the anarchists were planning on poisoning the water supply. Fritz and his two brothers were placed into protective custody and sent to a number of camps. After release, in 1935, he escaped to Holland, then to Spain where he joined the Durruti Column.

In Wuppertal, the Nazis had a large vote and the SA were unusually strong. FAUD successfully formed a local united front of socialists, communists and anarchists, which subsequently offered some protection for the local working class against the SA. At its last National Congress in Erfurt in March 1932, the FAUD decided that if the Nazis seized power, a clandestine leadership would be set up in Erfurt and would respond with an immediate general strike. Indeed, about 500 FAUD, in quasi-military formation, came out on an effective and lively counter-demonstration in Wuppertal on the day Hitler became Chancellor, causing the SS to postpone their march by a day, but many of their members were quickly arrested.



Fritz Benner

Many posters were put up, using a mixture of glue and broken glass so that they could not be torn down too easily. The SS drafted in political prisoners to do this. They also attached rubber stamps to the base of the suitcases, moistened them with ink and would set the case down, leaving an imprint on the pavement.

They smuggled victims of political persecution out of Germany. Hans Schmitz, the Wuppertal Treasurer of FAUD, played a courier role, disguised as a cyclist. On 1 April 1937, he was arrested by the Gestapo and sentenced to two years in prison. But after release, he was conscripted. Somehow he listened to enemy broadcasts and sabotaged munitions and guns; he was second-in-charge of the weapons maintenance section, and committed self-harm to avoid fighting.³²

³² Mühland, Rudolf, *Hans Schmitz: The Last Known Survivor of the Pre-WW2 FAUD Dies*, July 2007. Mühland met Schmitz when he was very old and interviewed him. Schmitz still attended anti-Nazi demos, including when the Nazis

Julius Nolden, a steelworker and a leading activist, was another prominent figure. He was also active in a Society for the Right to Cremation. He used the Society as a cover to organise underground FAUD networks from summer 1933. First arrested by the Gestapo in April 1933, he was soon released and with Karolus Heber, organised a network to get anarchist militants over the border into Holland and smuggle anti-Nazi propaganda back into Germany which he distributed on his bike. Later, he organised the raising of funds and volunteers for Spain.

Johann Baptist "Hermann" Steinacker (1870-1944) a tailor, joined the SPD but soon became an active anarchist in Wuppertal and later a member of FAUD. From 1933, Steinacker was instrumental in organising collections for the families of those arrested. His tailor shop was a good cover for underground work. Following a denunciation, Steinacker was arrested by the Gestapo in October 1934. He received a prison sentence of one year and nine months, which he served in Lüttringhausen prison; he was re-arrested in December 1936.

Fritz Kruschedt (1910-1978) again from Wuppertal, worked in the building industry, became involved in the Association of Proletarian Freethinkers (dominated by the KPD) and then the youth organisation of the FAUD. The local SA targeted his family who had to flee. He was arrested on 7 April 1937 and tortured. Upon his release on 1 July 1939, he was immediately re-arrested and put in Düsseldorf prison. He was then transferred to Sachsenhausen. In autumn 1944, he was forcibly conscripted with 770 other prisoners into the 999 punishment battalion, first being located in southern France and then in Albania where he deserted to the Russians with 500 others.

In 1935, Julius Nolden was arrested and tried with 98 others, including Hans Saure, Ernst and Hermann Steinacker, Fritz Kruschedt and Hermann Hahn and on 5 November 1937, sentenced to 10 years imprisonment in Lüttringhausen Penitentiary.³³ Nolden was freed in April 1945 by American forces.³⁴

In December 1936, many of those remaining were arrested after the Gestapo infiltrated an agent. Then in 1937, 200 others were arrested by the Gestapo for their clandestine trade union activities and charged with "preparation for high treason with aggravating circumstances".

Those who got out established an exile office in Amsterdam and tried to help evacuate members of the resistance. In 1936, many other activists went to Spain.

were present.

³³ <https://libcom.org/history/steinacker-hermann-1870-1944>

³⁴ <https://libcom.org/history/nolden-julius-1895-1973>

The Central Association of Employees and the Unified Association of Railway Workers

This work is not looking in detail at illegal trade union resistance, much of which was focused on just keeping the structure in existence, but two groups are significant enough to be mentioned. The Central Association of Employees (ZdA) based in Frankfurt under the guidance of Paul Müller, and employing conspiratorial underground methods from 1932, including military training, was orientated on young employees, with a particular interest in sports clubs. It had a membership of about 100, with another 100 on the periphery. In 1934, the Frankfurt group produced around 500 copies of: "*The Young Fighter*", in cooperation with young communists as well as with a loose connection with Wolfgang Abendroth. It was to be the only copy as most of the group were arrested in autumn 1934.

Hans Jahn (1885-1960), a member of the SPD, later of *Neu Beginnen*, and on the executive of the Unified Association of Railway Workers in Germany, who was warning against Nazism as early as 1930, began to build a clandestine network of about 100 railway workers and managed to salvage 17,000 membership cards. Jahn built up an effective resistance organisation among railway workers, organising escape routes for persecuted persons, mostly to the Netherlands and Saarland, until his first arrest in the spring of 1935. After his release, he fled via Prague to Amsterdam in 1935. He was expelled from Belgium in 1936. With International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) support, Jahn published an opposition journal for German Railway employees between 1936 and 1938. In 1940 he escaped to London via Spain and Portugal.

Chapter 8 - Youth

The Role of Youth

Young people played a leading and often overlooked role in anti-Nazi activities. Many of the people who resisted the Nazis had joined youth organisations before then joining an adult party or tendency. The main parties in the period leading up to 1933 all had their own sizeable youth organisations which, crucially, organised hiking trips, other outdoors activities and agit-prop theatre performances, rather than merely political debate.

One example of this is the *Rote Sprachrohr* (The Red Megaphone) apparently the first agit-prop group of the KJVD (*Kommunistischer Jugendverband Deutschlands*, the youth organisation of the KPD), which became one of the leading agitprop groups and included Maxim Vallentin and my father, Siegfried Moos, featured in the film *Kuhle Wampe* (Who owns the world?). At the beginning of 1929, the KJVD had 21,470 members, by late 1932. 58,000. Indeed, half of 14-25 year olds in the 1920s, 5 million by 1932, belonged to some sort of youth group, though the majority were non-political.¹ Youth groups also encouraged female involvement which was not always the case in the adult resistance groupings.

Organised youth groups were a feature of adolescence in Germany. They took many forms: from religious to political to back to nature. What happened before and during Nazism was a battle for youth's ideological soul. The youth movement of the 1930s had deep roots in German society, for example the *Wandervögel* in the early twentieth century which gave rise to the Free German Youth. Their emphasis was on comradeship, self-expression and a rather metaphysical love of nature, which provided the seed-corn both for the Hitler Youth and the youth movements of both the main left parties and other youth movements.

Hitler considered influencing young people as his top priority. He saw the young as the foundation stone of the 1000 year Reich. All Aryan youth therefore had to be moulded. The Hitler Youth initially set up by the SA not the Nazi State, provided a militaristic, supposedly non-class "German community" for "German loving" youth, although divided between girls and boys and counterpoised to those youth who were the "People's enemies". After the Hitler Youth Law of 1 December 1936, membership of the Hitler Youth became in effect compulsory.² It was constructed to

¹ Papathanassiou, Maria, *Secular and Christian Youth Associations in Interwar Germany: a comparison of public life and socio-political ideology*, International Conference, 8-9 May 2015, "Forms of Public Sociality: Collective Action, Collective Subjectivities and the State in the Twentieth Century". University of Crete, Department of History & Archaeology, Rethymno, Crete

² Marsland, John, 2010, *Edelweisspiraten, youthful rebellion as legitimate resistance against the Third Reich*, p.10.

be the main source of a young person's identity and ideology, rather than school or home. All youth activities were to be brought under the Nazi Party umbrella. Dissent was forbidden, as was jazz, which was considered to be degenerate music.

By the time war broke out, the routine of the Hitler Youth had lost its more fun elements and become even more militaristic, with serious military training, a stress on obedience becoming even more pronounced and non-compliance punished even more severely. The truancy rate became very high, although the consequences could be dire.³

But the Hitler Youth patrols had another function: hunting and fighting with the Edelweiss Pirates and similar youth groups. Because of a rule that disallowed police from arresting members of the Hitler Youth Patrol Service for criminal activity, such deeds were carried out without the fear of consequence.⁴

Yet, again and again, it was young people who were the anti-Nazi activists. The innocuous sounding "Friends of Nature" is a far more significant grouping than is usually recognised. They represented a romantic current within Germany of loving nature and rejecting how capitalism crushes the soul. They gave young people the chance to have fun away from parents and school. Though in no way revolutionary, they opposed the disciplinarian Nazi youth groups. Banned like most other non-Nazi youth organisations in 1933, except for the Jewish youth groups, hundreds of their members turned to left-wing underground activities and paid with their lives.

Although arrests, detention and death sentences are better documented, there is, as ever, a problem about finding material, especially oral evidence, even from those who survived, about the "Friends of Nature". Hilde Luke/Schimschok became active in the Friends of Nature as well as the SAJ. The Dortmund group had formed before 1933 under the leadership of Paul Winzens as a *Wanderbund*, committed to an anti-Soviet Marxism mixed with a belief in humanism. It was known as the Winzen group and included former members of the Youth Freethinkers, Socialist Workers Youth as well as Friends of Nature, illustrating how permeable these youth anti-Nazi groupings were. After the outbreak of war, they printed and distributed leaflets. Hilde was arrested in August 1940, then sent to camps, survived, but essentially would not speak of her experiences.⁵

Edelweiss Pirates

The so called Edelweiss Pirates (*Edelweißpiraten*) were based primarily in Cologne, although they also appeared in Düsseldorf, Essen, Wuppertal and Duisburg,

³ *Ibid*, p.16.

⁴ Kellerman, Katie, 2006, *The Edelweiss Pirates: A Story of Freedom, Love and Life*, Raoul Wallenberg Foundation.

⁵ Notz, Gisela, *Freidenkerinnen und Freidenker: Hilde Schimschok und die Widerstandsgruppe um Paul Winzen*, p.129.

but did not have a national presence. The Pirates were aged roughly between 14 and 18 and included both girls and boys. Most of their members came from the working class.

Unlike the well-publicised, middle-class White Rose youth group, the Edelweiss Pirates have received little publicity and then often not favourable. They were regularly branded as being lazy, a common and potentially lethal Nazi accusation. The Gestapo declared the group criminals in the 1940s, a tag which was allowed to remain for 60 years, indeed they were only recognised as part of the resistance in 2005. As Gertrud Koch, born 1924, aged 81 at the time of the interview in 2005, otherwise known as Mucki,⁶ is quoted as saying: "We were from the working classes, that is the main reason why we have only now been recognised...After the war there were no judges in Germany so the old Nazi judges were used and they upheld the criminalisation of what we did and who we were".⁷ There is still a debate as to whether the misdeeds of the Edelweiss Pirates were essentially delinquent (the Gestapo definition) or political: they assaulted Hitler Youth patrols, purchased firearms, and committed burglary and theft.

The Edelweiss Pirates emerged in the late 1930s and were mostly, till the very last spasms of war, too young to be recruited into the military. As opposed to the Hitler Youth, girls and boys mixed together. Although there was no central Edelweiss headquarters, they managed to hold together as an anti-Nazi force at a time when resistance had become close to impossible. It was a far looser group than is sometimes suggested, whose characteristics varied between different places. Its looseness makes knowing the numbers involved almost impossible. It seems that there was a small core membership and a larger periphery, possibly a deliberate strategy for avoiding the Gestapo.⁸

Most Pirates, in their teens in the 1930s, had no earlier experience of resistance, but their members generally opposed the discipline and ideology of the Hitler Youth. Girls as well as boys would gather in parks and on the streets, and take walking trips out of the cities into the open air and away from prying eyes, parental and police.⁹ Pirates from different towns would meet in the countryside, to swap information gained from illegally listening to the BBC World Service, or to plan leaflet drops in each other's towns so the local police would not recognize them.¹⁰

⁶ see Chapter 15

⁷ Cleaver, Hannah, "Teenage rebels who fought Nazis are honoured at last. Vilified Edelweiss Pirates are hailed as resistance heroes", *Daily Telegraph*, 25th June 2005

⁸ Nelles, Dieter, Armin Nolzen und Heinz Sünker *Kinder des Widerstands und Politik nach 1945 Die Kinder kommunistischer Widerstandskämpfer gegen das NS-Regime und deren Verhältnis zur Politik nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/27024>, 2008

⁹ Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, p.72

¹⁰ Cleaver, *Teenage rebels who fought the Nazis*.

They managed to hold together as an anti-Nazi force in the late 1930s when resistance had become close to impossible. They emphasised group activities and developed many songs which they often politicised. What started as resistance to their leisure time being co-opted, turned into open political rebellion. They wore unconventional clothes, sang anti-militaristic songs, refused to join the Hitler Youth or give the Nazi salute, assaulted Hitler Youth patrols on the street, insulted uniformed officers and party functionaries, robbed the homes of Hitler Youth and purchased illicit firearms. At least some of them became involved in the highly dangerous activity of distributing anti-Nazi leaflets urging soldiers to put down their weapons, containing Allied propaganda or encouraging German soldiers to quit their fighting and return to their families. On one occasion, in 1942, they shot one leader of the Hitler Youth and injured another. Some Pirates hid Jews.¹¹

When possible, they committed sabotage. There is some limited evidence that when apprentices were members of an Edelweiss group, they turned to industrial sabotage, using broken glass and such like to disrupt production and cause tyres to flatten and that there was also some limited contact with foreign forced labourers.¹² Jean Jülich, a survivor, recalled how he and his friends threw bricks through munitions factory windows and poured sugar water into the petrol tanks of Nazis' cars. Though I did not find a concrete example of this, Marsland suggests that they derailed trains which were carrying ammunition and supplied adult resistance groups with explosives. Some stole food and supplies from freight trains.

As the war progressed, the Edelweiss Pirates became increasingly political. In 1943, their graffiti read: "Down with Hitler. Down with Nazi brutality. We want freedom". In Düsseldorf, a Nazi report from 17 July 1943 reported the graffiti: "Down with Hitler. We want freedom. Medals for Murder", and that, however often such graffiti was removed, it would quickly reappear, especially during air-raids.¹³ According to the official, these daubings were negatively affecting the morale of some soldiers, who were even beginning to congregate among the Pirates.¹⁴ In Duisburg, in around 1943, the Pirates travelled in groups of 60 or 70 and attacked the leaders of the Hitler Youth with brass knuckles, apparently contributing to a significant leakage from the Hitler Youth into the Pirates, partly because of their dislike of the doctrine of "Aryanism". In Wuppertal, one Pirate leaflet warned that the Hitler Youth was just cannon-fodder for Hitler's insatiable lust for power.¹⁵ One spectacular action was a "leaflet rain" from the dome of Cologne Station. In Cologne,

¹¹ Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, p.159-164.

¹² Hippe, *And Red is the Colour of My Flag*.

¹³ Marsland, *Edelweisspiraten*, p.20.

¹⁴ Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, p.160.

¹⁵ Marsland, *Edelweisspiraten*, pp.20-1.

they "offered shelter to German army deserters, escaped prisoners from concentration camps and escapees from forced labour camps", while others "made armed raids on military depots and deliberately sabotaged war production."¹⁶

There was occasional contact with the local communist underground, at least in Düsseldorf. Werner Heyden had contact with, for example, Wilhelm Knöchel (1899-1944), the then national KPD leader, when the Pirates and the KPD comrades swapped information and leaflets. In 1942, Heyden distributed communist leaflets in Düsseldorf.¹⁷ But such contact does not imply a political alliance, other than that the communists were known as anti-Nazis. In the last years of the war, the Pirates also made contact with the Allies, aided downed pilots and distributed Allied leaflets,¹⁸ although Hippe suggests they turned against the Allies when Germany came under Allied control.

There was one tiny Edelweiss group in Hamburg, though not typical. Helmuth Huebener and his friends, Karl Heinz Schnibbe, Rudolf Wobbe and Gerhardt Duewer, all apprentices, saw one another at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormons, generally not known for their opposition to the Nazi regime), although Huebener discovered that Nazi spies monitored the meetings at their church. From 1941-43, they defied the Nazi regime by distributing leaflets to working class sections of Hamburg.¹⁹

Huebener and Schnibbe listened to forbidden foreign broadcasts from Britain. The friends then produced leaflets. The first leaflet roughly read: "Who is Lying? The official report of the German High Command of the Armed Forces claimed the roads to Moscow, Kiev and Leningrad were opened. And today, six weeks after Germany's invasion of the USSR, severe battles are still occurring far from these places. This is how they are lying to us!". He made seven copies. Helmuth typed another leaflet on red paper so it would be noticed and made ten copies: "Down with Hitler. People's Seducer. People's Corrupter. People's Traitor. Down with Hitler". He put them in the telephone boxes of apartment buildings with the notice, "This is a chain letter, so pass it on". He also distributed about sixty letter sized leaflets describing the brutal treatment given to Russian POWs. For almost two years, they distributed the leaflets to apartment buildings all over the city.

There were many French POWs working in the factories of Hamburg and the little

¹⁶ Rogow, Sally, Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, <http://www.vhec.org/library.html>

¹⁷ Peukert, Inside Nazi Germany, p.164.

¹⁸ Marsland, John, 2010, *Edelweisspiaten, Youthful Rebellion as Legitimate Resistance against the Third Reich*, University of Colorado, p 12,

¹⁹ The following section is based on the narrative of Karl Heinz Schnibbe in *When Truth was Treason: German Youth Against Hitler, The Story of the Helmuth Huebener*, compiled by Blair R. Holmes & Alan F. Keele U. of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1995, and referred to in <http://www.holocaust-trc.org/faces-of-courage-children-who-resisted/faces-of-courage-the-helmuth-huebener-group>. Note that this source was written by Mormons about Mormons.

group decided to have one of the leaflets translated into French but the apprentice Helmuth approached to translate it reported him to the Gestapo and in 1942, Helmuth was arrested, followed by his two friends. Helmuth Huebener was seventeen years old when he was executed. He was the youngest resistance fighter to lose his life in Plötzensee. The other two were imprisoned and sent to forced labour camps in Poland and Russia; Karl Heinz Schnibbe (1924 - 2010) one of the three, was sentenced to five years. In 1952, after his release from a Soviet POW camp, he emigrated to the US.

The Gestapo hated them. Hated them not just for what they did but for what they represented. Nazi patrols went out looking for members of the Pirates. The Gestapo hunted them and imprisoned boys and girls as young as 15 or 16 for acts as trivial as not giving the fascist salute or for the unconventional clothes they wore. Their songs were also seen as glorifying non-Aryan types. Those who were caught were imprisoned, sent to jails, reform schools, psychiatric hospitals, labour and concentration camps and many lost their lives. In a single day of raids in December 1942, the Düsseldorf Gestapo made more than 1000 arrests of those they saw as members of the Edelweiss. During the round-ups, the Nazis were brutal. Captured Pirates had their heads shaven, were threatened and beaten, and often cruelly punished. In Cologne, a member of the Pirates was publicly hung.²⁰ Hundreds of Pirates were sent to the camps.

But worse was to come. An escaped prisoner, Hans (Bomber) Steinbrück planned to blow up the Gestapo HQ and led a raid on a local arms depots but an acquaintance informed the Gestapo. Although the details are not clear, there ensued a battle between the Pirates and the Cologne Gestapo in which the chief of the Cologne Gestapo was killed. In November 1944, thirteen leading members were publicly hanged in Cologne and others sent to camps.

A survivor, Mayer, gave an interview many years later. He recalled how they would deflate the tyres of the bikes of Hitler Youth and then how whole bicycles would disappear. He hid a Jew in the family basement and formed a gang which helped French POWs. He described their daily lives: "Well there was a cafe and in the back of the cafe was a pool room. Uh, we used to play pool, and we had our little meetings there and one would say, 'We have a new member', and, uh, we would ask him questions, test him, and "Why do you like to join us?" and, you know, wanted to have some assurance. And, and, uh, then we...'What are we going to do next?' and maybe one would say, 'You know, the Hitler Youths, they all, uh, store their, uh, equipment at such-and-such a place. Let's make it disappear'. 'Okay, when are we

²⁰ <http://www.holocaust-trc.org/faces-of-courage-children-who-resisted/faces-of-courage-the-edelweiss-pirates/>

going to meet?""²¹ He said that the Hitler Youth Patrol were continually on the lookout for Pirate members. Their motto was:"Eternal War on the Hitler Youth".²² They had to defend themselves and there were fights, including with guns.

Mayer described what happened in court after his arrest: "Well, when the judge came back and said, on the grounds of his [Mayer's] outstanding, uh, involvement in, in athleticism, and considering, uh, the age and the circumstances, I condemn you to one to four years in prison [and not to execution]." He later escaped and finally settled in the US. Although one should not build too much on this one example, it can be seen as an expression of the old German establishment's ambiguity towards the Pirates, seeing them as neither revolutionaries nor Jews.

The Wuppertal Edelweiss Pirates were predominantly working-class, they drew especially from young people coming from a political, especially KPD, background, offering them a space which was both free from their parents but still a continuation of their parents' commitments. At least some of them had witnessed the street fights between the SA and the local Red Front, including their parents leading up to 1933, or seen their parents being arrested for political activities. They had become in effect street-kids. The Pirates were their family. Their involvement in the Edelweiss was both to act against the Nazis and to defend their families.²³

That as many young people who took part in resistance activities survived was in part because of the loose and non-hierarchical structure of the Edelweiss and associated groupings, as well as because the Nazis needed young people as cannon fodder and as a work



force for the war economy, they could not be exterminated like communists and Jews. It is thus worth emphasising quite how much the young, many of whom did not belong to the more formal organisations, gave to the anti-Nazi struggle.

²¹ <https://libcom.org/library/edelweiss-pirate-interview> from the USHMM

²² <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/oral-history/walter-meyer-describes-his-1943-trial-for-looting-and-the-impact-of-his-role-in-the-edelweiss-pirates->

²³ Schott, Christian & Steinacker, Sven, 2004, *Wilde Gesellen am Wupperstrand, verfolgt von Schirachs Banditen. Jugendopposition und -widerstand in Wuppertal 1933–1945*. Grafenau: Edition Wahler.

Chapter 9 - The Struggles of KPD Members in the Organised Resistance from within the Working Class Movement 1933-1945

Finding out with any accuracy the details of the resistance groups' activities as opposed to their professed aims is difficult. The KPD, though more at a rank and file level than the official leadership, continued to dominate resistance activities: probably one-half of the pre-Hitler membership of 300,000 engaged in illegal political activities at some point during the Third Reich. These were mostly industrial workers of some form. There were relatively few women and their work generally seems to have been one form or another of office work. The groups operated on the usual principles of clandestine work where only one person was responsible for and knew about one task.

The resistance falls into two broad periods, the first roughly 1933 to 1935/36, when the KPD's position was in effect still that of the Third Period. We then consider two of the more organised groups which existed later on. As Jacob Zorn (KPD, Cologne) stated, much of the KPD's underground work consisted of humdrum but illegal activities: collecting money and distributing leaflets which, at the beginning, they foolishly continued to do fairly openly when they needed to move from offensive to clandestine activity.¹

Though I do not go into the significant policy rifts in the KPD at the time, their Third Period position and continuing belief in the imminent collapse of Nazism, made it nearly impossible for working class anti-Nazis to work together in 1933/34. Rudi Goguel from Alsace, who wrote the *Moorsoldatenlied*² and a member of the Revolutionary Trade Union Opposition (RGO), after his release in 1934, worked underground in Düsseldorf to revive the trade unions at branch level, especially in under-organised heavy industry, producing three issues of a trade union paper and about 5000 copies of about a dozen leaflets. Goguel criticised the KPD leadership's sectarianism, disapproving, for example, of the maintenance of the RGO as a separate organisation.³ The party were in a whirl of optimism at that time, he later wrote. But he continued that the reality was that there were only large handfuls of activists spread through the factories and in different illegal organisations. For example, in Wroclaw, in Silesia (at the time in Germany) in January 1933, there were 4600 communists but by November, only 115 members were left, of whom only about 65 had paid their contributions and numerous associated organisations no longer existed.⁴

¹ Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, p.123

² Johann Esser wrote the lyrics.

³ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, pp 153-156

Zorn argued that this decline in membership was in part because the rank and file were reluctant to accept the KPD's ultra-left sloganising and that the old party machine was on auto-pilot and really believed the masses were ready to rise up against Hitler. He noted that, by 1937, the resistance had just melted away. Many party cadres were under arrest; all individuals could do was keep their political perspective alive.⁵ Increased living standards from around 1936, along with conscription, helped break the links between resistance and most of German civil society. By the time war broke out in 1939, the underground groups had been largely inactive for some years.

One constant problem was that of infiltration. For example, a member of the S A called Nosbusch posed as an underground communist in Düsseldorf and, from 1934-1935, infiltrated a number of groups, with the result that many members ended up in court.⁶ Tragically, there seem to have been informers in almost every group, some operating from outside but many others who were already comrades but were turned because they wanted to save their loved ones or as the price of release from detention and torture. For example, a long standing, active and trusted underground member of the KPD in Breslau called Pöhlich voluntarily approached the Gestapo in 1934. He was the only free member of the Wroclaw KPD underground leadership in 1935, with responsibility for cross-border work.⁷ Pöhlich, who was called the most effective of the many V men, undercover agents of the Gestapo, played a fatal role for the communist resistance movement. The fear of infiltrators created an atmosphere where comrades were loath to trust one another. In another case, Georg Paris was, probably rightly, suspected of being a spy/V man and seen as responsible for the arrest of about 50 comrades.⁸

Many of the left wing groups developed more or less spontaneously and were a consequence of their leaders' own politics, no doubt learnt at KPD meetings, rather than being established by outside diktat. In the continuing debate as to how far the activities of these resistance groups were a result of KPD instruction or how much local initiative, the evidence presented here indicates the importance of the role of experienced local comrades. Many of these resistance groups discussed below were small and lacked more than local support. On a pragmatic level, as again will be seen, the KPD leadership had few if any ways of reaching their members. Rather, it was up to the more experienced comrades to organise the resistance.

⁴ Grashof, Udo, *Resistance as a farce? V-men in the illegal KPD in Breslau 1935-1939* http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1475172/3/JHK_Breslau_final.pdf. The 'line' of Grashof's analysis is indicated by the title

⁵ Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany* p.123-4. See more on Zorn in chapter on Cologne.

⁶ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, pp136,137

⁷ Grashof, *Resistance as a farce?*, p 6-8. Pöhlich is supposed to have also betrayed SAP comrades.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp.15-17

As we will see, a few small groups, many though not all dominated by members of the KPD, carried on the struggle from soon after the Nazis gained power until the early years of the war. They were usually largely independent of the parent organisation and often profoundly isolated from other similar groups.

The second period was from the outbreak of war, especially after the *Wehrmacht* attacked the USSR in June 1941 ending the Hitler-Stalin pact and even more so after the Nazi defeat at Stalingrad, when the KPD were far more likely to regard themselves as part of a popular front.⁹

By around 1943, any thoughts by KPD members in the resistance of building socialism was overtaken by an official emphasis on building a new non-Nazi but capitalist Germany.¹⁰ Most of the left wing resistance groups which functioned after the *Wehrmacht* invaded the USSR differed from the bourgeois opposition groups which formed in the last years of the war in the internationalism of their outlook. Theirs was a struggle to free all of Europe from fascism, not just Germany. Their emphasis also differed in that they saw the German people, in particular the working class, as taking part in the struggle to overthrow Nazism, rather than focusing on an elite.¹¹ Sabotage, especially of arms production, was a key part of their strategy. In addition, many of these left resistance groups aimed to work with forced foreign workers.

Although still often identifying as communists, the reality was that the resistance groups had by then a much looser connection to the KPD than in the years immediately after 1933. Another difference from the post-1933 groups was the shift in political emphasis. By 1942, the Third Period line was long gone and the order of the day was to end the war through collaborating with almost any form of anti-Nazi.

In the final years of the war, conservatives and nationalists, including a few who had supported Hitler's policies, such as Carl Goerdeler, Lord Mayor of Leipzig, a monarchist and conservative who was the projected post-Nazi Reich Chancellor, had become oppositionists. They wanted the Nazis to be deposed because they were losing the war and wanted to save and then run Germany. They were, they believed, traitors to the Nazi government, not to their country. They saw themselves as a future part of a European federation, but retaining the 1938 eastern border of Poland and the pre-First World War border, including Alsace-Lorraine. However, members of the bourgeois but more social-democratic Kreisau circle, whose leading figures included Adam von Trott and Helmuth von Moltke, had a more realistic view of the borders of a post-Nazi Germany, if they were to be accepted by the rest of Europe.

⁹ Abendroth, *A Short History of the European Working Class*, p.117

¹⁰ Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance*, pp. 243-245

¹¹ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.278

The conservatives' focus, unlike the earlier working class based resistance groupings, was not on galvanising an organised opposition in the factories and communities. They often saw themselves as opposed to the *left* opposition, because they were being loyal to Germany. Different sections of the State, judiciary and, famously, also dissident members of the military, even including some ex-Nazis, conspired to assassinate or depose Hitler, of which the assassination plot of 20 July 1944 was the closest to succeed.

The July would be assassins, although they had contact with the left, do reveal how very different their position was from a working class based resistance, with many wishing to continue the war against the USSR and some, it has been argued, although deploring the excesses of the Holocaust (arguably because they thought it would appal the Allies), were antisemitic. Claus von Stauffenberg and von Trott, both part of the attempted July 1944 coup, wanted to work with the Allies to undermine the communist section of the underground. Von Stauffenberg, an army officer and one of the leaders of the 20 July plot, rejected working with the National Committee on the grounds that what he was doing was treason against the government, but what the National Committee was doing was treason against the country: this definition of the left resistance as traitors against Germany had a long historical arm.¹² Von Trott also looked to the West hoping for their support in a crusade against the USSR (and against atheism) and refused to cooperate with members of the National Committee. Indeed, von Trott is reputed to have wanted to inform and warn the Allies about who was in the German underground.

Once war began, the Gestapo and the justice system became even more determined to smother opposition, a repression which intensified further when it began to appear that Germany might be losing. In the last years of the war, the Nazis murdered even civilians without bothering with any bourgeois legalities, for as little as listening to the BBC or cracking the wrong joke. Resistance from within the working class movement to the Nazis became ever more dangerous and fragmented.

There was an appalling arrest and death rate and so resistance groups were inevitably fluid with the same people moving between networks. When the members of one group were arrested, another grouping often took its place. These were extraordinary, brave and committed people.

¹² In 1977, Herbert Wehner (KPD) was first invited and then disinvited to speak at a commemoration ceremony at the German Resistance Museum in Berlin as a result of pressure from von Stauffenberg's son, who felt Wehner was an inappropriate speaker given his previous politics. (David Case, 59)

First period of the resistance

Gebauer and associated groups

Although even less well known than other clandestine groupings, I start with Rudolf Gebauer and his comrades, who were based around Dresden. This is the only group I have found which organised an anti-Nazi protest as early as 7 February 1933, after Hitler became Chancellor but before the *Reichstag* fire, and because Dresden, about 50 miles from the Czech border, assumed a political importance for anti-Nazi activity and couriating between Germany and Czechoslovakia. Its early resistance activities were partly a consequence of a tradition of joint work between at least some elements in the KPD and SDP in Saxony which had been the base for the attempted United Front Revolution of 1923 and had continued up till 1933 in some collaborative antifascist work and self-defence organisations.¹³

Rudolf Gebauer, a member of the KPD from 1931, was the local party chair and a city councillor. At the end of 1932, he had initiated local joint actions by the KPD and the SPD against the rising Nazis, in contrast to the prevailing KPD line. From the first, this grouping was hit hard. Saxony was an area which had experienced a long history of working class struggle and there was a strong Red Front presence. In Dresden, the Nazis were in a strong position, especially in the state apparatus, in particular the police who, within days of the *Reichstag* fire, carried out house searches, arrested and tortured leading members of the local KPD and, after the March elections, confiscated their property.



Rudolf Gebauer

In July 1933, Gebauer was arrested carrying a leaflet and taken to the Hohnstein camp where he was badly abused by the SA. In the camp, Gebauer made contact with KPD comrades from Heidenau: Emil Schemmel, Bruno Gleissberg, a member of the Red Front and Robert Müller. Emil Schemmel, the head of the KPD local organisation in Heidenau, as well as a city councillor, had been arrested immediately after the *Reichstag* fire and placed in preventative detention. By the summer, most of the comrades from the formerly strong KPD groups and the Gebauer grouping in Dohna and Heidenau were also in protective custody.

On 25/26 January 1933, there was a bloodbath in the Keglerheim Hall, Dresden, where up to 800 attended an antifascist meeting called by the local KPD. The chant

¹³ [http://www.geschichte-pirna.de/Berichte Widerstand.pdf](http://www.geschichte-pirna.de/Berichte%20Widerstand.pdf)

was: "If the Nazis beat us, then we beat them too. The Nazis stab us, then we stab them. If the Nazis shoot at us, then we shoot at them too". This was followed by the singing of the International.¹⁴ A policeman then jumped on a chair and started to shoot. The emergency exit was blocked. Nine local antifascists were murdered and 11 seriously injured by the police.

On 31 January 1933, the day of the funeral of the victims, a united front demonstration of over 30,000 took place. Numerous social democratic workers took part, despite the ban by the SPD executive, alongside many from the Red Front and the KPD.¹⁵

Along with Kurt Schmidt and Erhardt Wiedrich, both KPD members, Gebauer then organised a demonstration on 7 February 1933, before the *Reichstag* fire, demanding "Out on general strike!" and "Down with Hitler!" Kurt Schmidt and other comrades produced and distributed illegal leaflets. On 11 February there was a joint demonstration in Pirna against the fascist dictatorship of about 1500, including the KJVD (the Young Communist League, KPD youth organisation), the SAP and the Red Front.

The strength of the KPD in Pirna is also suggested by the wide variety of associated organisations: Workers' Sports Clubs, Worker Samaritan, Workers' Singing Club, Worker Tourists, Workers' Water Sports, Esperanto, the Red Front and especially the Red Sports movement, whose members were excluded from other sports organisations.

Kurt Schmidt was initially in the SPD then from 1928 in the KPD, of which he was a member of the leadership of the Dortmund sub-district. Imprisoned in early 1934, he fled first to Holland, then to the Saar and later emerged as August Hartmann in France, where he continued resistance to the Nazi regime. From 1937 he fought in the Spanish Civil war in the Edgar André battalion, and fell in a battle near Alcañiz in the Teruel region.

Before the 5 March 1933 elections, in a sign of political defiance, the Red Flag was attached to a number of local factory chimneys and Vote KPD written on the chimney of the glass factory in Pirna, in Saxon Switzerland in the Ore Mountains, adjoining the Czech border. The first of the frontier crossings took place, including material already unmasking the *Reichstag* fire. A few months later, in early July, in another sign that the resistance was not yet broken, about 30 local KPD supporters met at night in the grounds of the local brick factory to be addressed by a KPD functionary. One goal, they were told was to protect worker athletes, a small sign of

¹⁴ <https://www.bommi2000.de/geschichte/20jh/1933/1933kegler.php>

¹⁵ <https://www.bommi2000.de/geschichte/20jh/1933/1933kegler.php>

how important the Red Sporting groups were.

In Pirna, a leading KPD member, Erich Richter, who was head of the Pirna branch of the Red Front, secured a printing press for the local group. Apparently, the Red Front members were invaluable because of their experience, especially at working conspiratorially underground. Together with Martin Richter, he succeeded in transporting the press at night and bringing the necessary accessories, including coloured ink. They printed leaflets calling for a fight against fascism. The press was then hidden under rocks in a quarry at Satanskopf.

Eric Richter went on to attend the International Lenin School of the Comintern in 1934/35 and participated in the VII World Congress of the Comintern in 1935. Back in Germany, Richter published illegal antifascist newspapers from the end of 1935 onwards and worked illegally in Leipzig and in the Ruhr area. In 1937, he emigrated to France, later to Czechoslovakia, then in 1939, to England by plane. There he worked as a mechanical engineer, toolmaker and dishwasher. He later returned to East Germany.

The group also sought weapons. The Red Front members already had weapons which they had hidden, apparently, in a field where they could 'pick mushrooms' near the Czech border. Elisabeth Hartmann reported that in May 1933, they retrieved two machine guns, a few carbines, revolvers, ammunition and explosives. Matthias Kajer, who had been involved in the insurrectionary days of 1924, kept a secret cache of weapons in his workshop which had to be rushed to safety across the border.¹⁶ Arthur Thiemann took on the responsibility of giving instructions on the use of small arms. Apparently, the couriers were expected to carry small firearms and to know how to use them, but were strongly advised against deploying them if at all possible. From 1933 until August 1935, there were apparently only five local armed clashes. Anybody caught could expect a 10-15 year sentence.

But, as Walter Titel later wrote : "After the *Reichstag* fire on 27, February 1933, the fascists began hunting for the Communists".¹⁷ Many of the group escaped into Czechoslovakia, others were arrested. But there was a traitor, Alfred Thierman, in their midst who hid his presence by his apparent dedication to getting illegal papers across the border. This led to further arrests in November 1933 and brutal incarceration.

¹⁶ Walter Titel with Willy Mummeshohl and Alexander Retzler, *Contributions to the History of the Local Labour Movement in Pirna County*, No. 11, June 1984, Kreisleitung Pirna der / SED, Commission for the Study of the History of the local labor movement. Reports on the antifascist resistance in the Pirna district, http://www.geschichte-pirna.de/Berichte_Widerstand.pdf. Other source material referred to in following paragraphs in this section come from this source, unless otherwise stated. The reports were part of a commission for the study of history, but it is not clear for whom exactly this report was written and many of the reports are not dated, but one of the reports in the collection is dated 1984.

¹⁷ Titel, Walter, *Contributions to the History of the Local Labour Movement in Pirna County*

After his release in January 1934, Gebauer resumed illegal work and formed a resistance group, which included Arthur Schirmer, Emil Schemmel, Anna Hirsch, Alwin Hontzsch, Bruno Ziesche and Heinrich Flegal. Gebauer and Schirmer agreed that they should make careful personal contacts with communists, social democrats and non-party antifascists in the area in Saxony around Dohna, Heidenau and Pirna, who had not yet been targeted by police and SA and who were seen as reliable, to persuade them to participate in the resistance. However, in view of the large losses already suffered, especially by the KJVD (KPD Youth) and the SAJ (Socialist Workers Youth) in the area, the work was organised into groups of three or four. They campaigned around unemployment and the economy. They also hid wanted persons, procured false papers and supported the families of arrested comrades, those who were living as exiles in Czechoslovakia as well as supporting the Spanish fighters.¹⁸

Gebauer set about working out how to get wanted people out of Germany. He already knew Walter Richter (Florian), who had many years of political experience in the KPD, and his border workers' group from Tyssa, Czechoslovakia, who were key to the cross-border organisation. Richter had been the strongly antifascist leader of the Party cell in Dohna before 1933 and in 1933, followed Party instructions to emigrate to Tyssa in Czechoslovakia. Walter Richter, Arthur Thiermann and about five others were involved in this underground cross-border work. Thiermann, KPD and a former functionary of the Red Front with responsibility for arms until January 1933, was arrested by the SA in March 1933 but managed to escape.

From 1933, the mountaineers became involved in transferring illegal literature which they hid in mountain caves, which the Nazis were to discover. The cave apparently also held a duplicator. The police files, quoted by Titel, state that about 6-9 men, led by Comrade Georg Haak and organised by Walter Richter, collected antifascist literature at the border, but material frequently had to be abandoned. The first major shooting took place on the tourist trail at the Großer Winterberg. Two people had heavy rucksacks full of material. Two others, behind, were armed. Fired on by the SS, somehow nobody was hit. The comrades escaped without their backpacks. But their luck did not last and in 1935, three of the best frontier comrades were shot.

In March 1934, they started experimenting with bike trips in the area on the German side. At Easter 1934, Walter Hauptvogel, Gebauer's former school mate, Walter Schmiedel and Adolf Jentzsch, posing as tourists, took their bikes to the

¹⁸ Günter Endler Kapitel 7 Widerstand in Pirna und Umgebung in den Jahren 1934 bis 1938, <http://www.geschichte-pirna.de/Kap.%207v.pdf>. Much of this information is drawn from this source. I cannot assess its accuracy but, even if it is not completely reliable, it is one of the very few which gives a detailed description of resistance activities in these early years. Also: http://www.ns-gedenkstaetten.de/fileadmin/files/do_arbeitsbogen_widerstand_spd_kpd.pdf

People's House in Tyssa in order to contact Rudolf Gebauer. Elisabeth Morche had leased the People's House and became "Mother". The 'Easter trippers' then received instructions for further illegal work. Easter and other Bank holidays were favourite times as the comrades could blend in more easily with the holiday traffic. These sorts of disguise did not always succeed. In late 1933, a group of 'mushroom pickers' were picked up by the Gestapo.

Emil Schemmel, a train conductor, joined the Spartakusbund and in 1919 the KPD. He was also a member of the Red Front from 1920 to 1933, and was a city councillor. On the night of the *Reichstag* fire, he was arrested at his workplace at Heidenau Station and taken to the Dresden Police HQ, then to Königstein-Halbestadt camp where he was tortured. Released, he was immediately re-arrested. Upon re-release, on 23 December 1933, he contacted Gebauer and became a leading member, deeply involved in the courier liaison between Germany and Czechoslovakia. On 21 January 1939, Schemmel was arrested again and sentenced to four and a half years in prison for "preparation for high treason". In the same trial, Walter Hauptvogel from Pirna was sentenced to five and a half years and Arthur Schirmer from Dohna to seven years in prison. Schemmel was then deported to Sachsenhausen. Freed by the Russians, he died soon after as a result of his long-term imprisonment.¹⁹

Gebauer's group, unusually, continued to be active between 1936 and 1938 in Dohna and Heidenau, Saxony. Until December 1933, the organisation of the frontier work was local. After 1933, Pieck, representing the Central Committee of the KPD, attempted to take control but in reality was too far away to have much effect. There were complicated arrangements, partly through a courier, for the transmission of directions from the KPD leadership abroad advising the continuation of illegal work in 1936, in 1937 and again in 1938. As with most KPD local groups, it is unclear and often contentious how far initiatives were local, how far directed from above. In the case of the Gebauer group, the evidence suggests a strong local component.

After the 1935 Brussels Conference, the KPD line had shifted from "the disintegration of fascism as a result of inner contradictions" to the "united front" of the working class, including social democrats, though a question still remains as to whether the KPD was suggesting cooperation or dominance. Some groups of social democrats and non-partisan antifascists were willing to cooperate in Dohna, Pirna and Heidenau. Gebauer was also advised to encourage the formation of illegal cells in work places, but that they should also be "in the DAF or in others organisations "of the Nazi movement to be able to act "from there." As has already been suggested, this instruction did not meet with undiluted support from KPD members. It is also not an

¹⁹ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emil_Schemmel

easy thing to do when everybody locally knew everybody else. But apparently one person was placed in 1935 in the Rütgerswerke in Dohna, and one person in the Elbe Valley Electricity AG Heidenau.

In May 1935, Walter Richter was given a commission by the KJVD Central Committee through Kurt Hager. Until 1937, Hager, still only just over twenty and a member of the KPD from 1930 and the Red Front from 1932, was used as a courier to Czechoslovakia on behalf of the Communist Youth Association of Germany. Walter Richter and three comrades began the march, which lasted several hours, in the woods in pitch-dark towards the border. There they came on a border patrol of the SS. Shots were exchanged. Kurt Hager was shot in the left foot and had to be carried for hours to safety and medical attention in Tyssa. After that, this crossing point was not used again. From 1937 to 1939, Kurt Hager participated in the Spanish Civil War as a journalist. In 1939 he was interned in France and then emigrated to Britain, where he was also interned. He returned to East Germany and had an illustrious if chequered career. These trips coordinating with comrades in Czechoslovakia were dangerous. There was a long joint border, part of it rugged and woody and difficult to patrol. Until 1938, Czechoslovakia was a democratic state which guaranteed asylum rights, though political activity by refugees was banned. At the border points, there were German and Czech police and border guards and Czech customs officers as well as members of the SS and many Gestapo spies in the area close to the border.²⁰

Aided by the couriers, about 4000 German leftists were helped to get into Czechoslovakia between 1933 and August 1934. Some couriers helped those fleeing across the border over 40 times. According to Bruno Retzlaff (otherwise known as Walter Kresse), a regular cross frontier courier in his twenties, there were over a thousand crossings in just one section of the Czech frontier between 1933 and 1936.²¹ Max Niklas who had been imprisoned immediately after the Nazis took power, and who, after his release, emigrated to Czechoslovakia, regularly crossed the border, armed with weapons and ammunition.

The marches to the Czech border took hours during the night and, on the return lap, the comrades would carry several hundred weight of paper in specially adapted rucksacks. Under the direction of Gebauer, Walter Richter organised the delivery of illegal literature, including miniatures on thin paper camouflaged in bags as Dr. Oetkers baking powder. *The Red Flag* and *The Counter Attack*, the Brown Books I and II (exonerating Dimitrov from the *Reichstag* fire which appeared in August 1933)

²⁰ Endler, Günter, *Border work - an integral part of the resistance from the beginning* <http://www.geschichte-pirna.de/Kap.5v.pdf>. Endler died in 2017.

²¹ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.87-8

Retzlaff/Kresse was helped to get out by the Manchester Quakers and brought to the UK, Williams, Bill, *Jews and other foreigners: Manchester and the rescue of the victims of European Fascism, 1933-1940*, 2013, 193,194

and, later, the *White Paper on the shootings of June 30, 1934* (The Night of the Long Knives against the SA), under the cover sheet *Advice and help in cases of illness* were passed over at the border. Money was passed the other way for the exiles. 52,000 copies of *The Red Flag* two or three times a month were smuggled across the border until 1935. Different bases were organised for these drops and, on occasion, material was just left in an agreed place. But on 4 July 1935, Walter Richter, Arthur Thiermann, Max Niklas and Hans Müller were ambushed near Altenberg in an illegal border crossing with antifascist literature. Forewarned it seems by Gerhard Berthold, the Saxony SS immediately opened fire, which the comrades returned with pistols. Walter Richter, Arthur Thiermann, Max Niklas and Hans Müller were all shot dead. Only Johannes Müller escaped. On 27 September 1938 Gebauer was arrested again by the Gestapo and murdered on 10 December 1938 at the police HQ, Dresden.

Struppen was another local working class centre of anti-Nazi activism from before 1933. From 30 January 1933, the SA started home searches and arrests of members of the local Red Front, who were then sent to the 'protective detention' camp Königstein-Halbestadt. Some were killed there, others, subsequently released, died as a result of their ill-treatment.²²

Some sense of the cat and mouse life is given in a report by Johannes Pätzold, KPD, about early resistance in Königstein, another small town near the Czech border and therefore of especial concern to the SA and the police. Illegal material was briefly stored in an auto repair shop, a ditch by the river and a garden of an outbuilding and then distributed by Pätzold. He and his wife again used a pram carrying their 6 weeks old baby. The SA soon searched his house, arrested him and took him to Königstein / Halbestadt camp but he survived.²³

The mountainous area of Saxon Switzerland along the Czech border also featured a number of left-wing mountaineering organisations such as the Saxon Mountaineering Federation, the Free Mountaineering Club and the strongly antifascist VKA (*Vereinigte Kletterabteilung*, United Climbing Division), which had a membership of about 350, drawn from members of the SPD and KPD. Their magazine, *Sport und Bergwacht*, condemned rapacious capitalism and extolled the virtues of the Soviet Union. The Gestapo especially hated the VKA mountaineers. When they could find them, the SA attacked their meetings (and also attempted to infiltrate them). But VKA members had the advantage that they often held their meetings in lonely, sometimes rocky, spots amongst the mountains which required climbing shoes and rope.²⁴

²² [http://www.geschichte-pirna.de/Berichte Widerstand.pdf](http://www.geschichte-pirna.de/Berichte%20Widerstand.pdf) , pp27-30.

²³ *Ibid*, pp.25-30

²⁴ The United Climbing Department (No author or date given), [http://www.geschichte-pirna.de/Berichte Widerstand.pdf](http://www.geschichte-pirna.de/Berichte%20Widerstand.pdf), pp49-65

Unusually, there is some limited but revealing information on some of the local comrades. Olga Körner, a maid, a worker in a corset factory, and then a worker in in the Dresden curtain and lace factory, first joined the SPD and was a co-founder of the Proletarian Women's movement in Dresden. She joined the USPD in 1917 and in 1920 the KPD. Körner was also active in Red Aid, the *Rote Frauen und Mädchenbund* (Red Women and Girls League) and a workers' gymnastics and sports club. In 1933, she became head of an illegal resistance group in Radeberg and then in Chemnitz. At the end of 1933, she was arrested and sentenced to three years imprisonment. In 1939 she was arrested again and sent to Ravensbrück. She survived.²⁵



Hanns Rothbarth, a textile worker and KPD member was a climber who joined the United Climbing Department of the Association of Friends of Nature. He participated in the illegal resistance and was arrested at the end of June 1936, transferred to Sachsenhausen and shot in October 1944.

Betto Galle, a shoemaker, joined the KPD, actively participated in the Revolutionary Trade Union opposition, and was involved in the production of leaflets. From 1933, Galle was one of the first to make contact with the prisoners in the Hohnstein concentration camp and smuggled illegal materials into the castle. In January 1934, Galle was arrested but after his release, was again active in the resistance. Again arrested, he was executed at the end of June 1944.

Kurt Schlosser was apprenticed as a cabinet maker, lost an arm, yet he formed a climbing group with young worker athletes and was a member of the woodworkers' association and the tourist association *Die Naturfreunde*. In 1923 he joined the KPD, was a member of the Revolutionary Trade Union Opposition (RGO) and head of the Saxon mountaineering choir. From 1933 onwards, he worked with other climbers in illegal border work. His carpentry workshop became the meeting place of resistance fighters against the Nazi regime. There was a close connection between German and Czechoslovak worker athletes. On 3 December 1943, he was arrested and beheaded on 16 August 1944.

Robert Matzke, a basket maker, joined the USPD in 1919, then the KPD and was a member of the Proletarian Freethinkers. At the beginning of May 1933, after many attempts to stay invisible, Matzke was arrested, and spent years in and out of prison. After his release in March 1937, Matzke joined the Kurt Schlosser Group. He had

²⁵ Herbst Andreas and Hermann, Weber, "Körner, Olga", *Handbuch der Deutschen Kommunisten*. Karl Dietz Verlag, Berlin & Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur, Berlin.

been active in illegal border work since 1933 and smuggled leaflets across the border into Czechoslovakia. In October 1943, the Gestapo arrested him and beat him to death.

Parallel and cooperating with the Gebauer group, in January 1933, Walter Schmiedel, of the KPD and RFB, founded the resistance group Zuschendorf.²⁶ Some of the same people appear in both groups. They also saw their main task as the illegal transport of Party material from and to Czechoslovakia, the distribution of pamphlets and other printed matter and the collection of money to support the exiles. In April 1933, Schmiedel was arrested for the first time and then again in January 1939, when he was taken to a Dresden prison where he was murdered on 2 February 1940 by the Gestapo.

Although the pattern of resistance operated by Gebauer and all the associated groupings was not in line with the KPD's official position, the history written in 1983 in East Germany recognises the KPD led resistance in Pirna, Saxony as one of the strongest and most effective in Germany. The KPD, the Marxist revolutionary opposition of workers' gymnastics and sports movement, the Red Sports Unit Combat Community and even the Red Front were all recognised and praised for their leading role in the fight against fascism. The Proletarian Mountaineering organisation, VKA Dresden and sporting organisations are singled out for their border meetings with Czechoslovakia. This account even briefly praises the SPD.

SPD members do their bit

Though not nearly as developed and involving fewer people and few, if any, organised SPD underground groups, the SPD did have an external headquarters in Czechoslovakia and operated cross-border clandestine couriers. They had a neat trick. The illegal Berlin SPD officials travelled with proper passports by train from Berlin via Dresden. In Niedergrund (Dolni Zleb), Walter Richter (of KPD fame) bought them new tickets to Bodenbach (Podmokly). This gave the impression to the German border guards, which included the SS, that this is where they had come from. It still took time and was nerve racking but successful.

It is estimated that about 14 million copies of *New Forward* were smuggled into Germany between July 1933 and September 1934. In one brilliant piece of camouflage in June 1933, the cover for *Revolution against Hitler* was entitled *Julius Caesar: The Gallic War*. Pamphlets were sometimes posted to Germany, sent, for example, to comrade lawyers, at other times, the couriers wore specially designed vests with many inside pockets. The Sudeten German social democratic couriers, who

²⁶ *Cenotaphs, memorials and memorial sites of the working movement and the antifascist resistance struggle in the district of Pirna* 2nd revised edition, 1984, originally published 1969, www.geschichte-pirna.de

also frequently used the Pirna route, are singled out for praise: Konrad Gersch, Richard Prasse, Oskar Tausche and Rudolf Zschke. Konrad Gersch crossed 20 times before he was arrested on 15 May 1935, in each case, carrying more than 3,000 copies of the *Socialist Action*, but he was betrayed by one of his comrades.

Alfred Schaefer remembered that in 1934 a couple of local social democrats tried to work together with KPD comrades. "It was 1934 and at this time [the united front] was still forbidden by the party. The main enemy was still the SPD, as the mainstay of the bourgeoisie in the working class...For me, the NSDAP was the main enemy. I arranged... to create united front [paper] with them [which the district leadership disapproved of]". Arrested by the Gestapo in 1934, and thinking he had minutes to live, he spent the journey yelling anti-Nazi slogans: "Long Live the Proletarian Revolution". He wrote afterwards: "If you're going to die, die with music!". Schaefer was sentenced but survived and subsequently wrote prolifically.²⁷

The struggle almost continues, 1939; the Kapelle group

Even in 1938/39, there was some resistance in parts of Berlin. Alfred Schaefer, KPD, and a leading member in the agit-prop movement, remembered a typist, an employee at the Ministry of Finance, who, told what to write by Schaefer, inscribed the wax plates for the *Rote Sturmflagge* (Red Storm Banner), of which 100-200 sheets appeared about once a month.

In 1939, Heinz Kapelle (1913-1941), who was first arrested in 1934 and thereafter repeatedly arrested, along with Erich Ziegler (1914-2004) built up a resistance group of about 60 young people in Berlin, including young activists from the Young Communist League, the Socialist Workers Youth and Catholic youth groups. He distributed leaflets by scattering them in Berlin's working-class neighbourhoods at night from his motorcycle.



Heinz Kapelle

Erich and Elli Ziegler opened two bookshops that distributed underground anti-Nazi propaganda and were involved in the printing and distribution of illegal material, including the Neuköllner *Rote Sturmflagge* and the anti-war leaflet "I call the youth of the world" calling for the overthrow of the Hitler regime:

"Berlin Youth resist
Resist the warmongers everywhere
Girls! It depends on you. Refuse to make ammunitions.

²⁷ Sandvoß, *Neukölln*, pp.150-153.

The faster you act, the shorter the war.
Think of our 2 million dead fathers and brothers of the World War 1
Never again!
Only the overthrow of Hitler and his wartime gang brings peace".

When Hitler justified the attack on Poland, Erich Ziegler later wrote that, the same night, Heinz Kapelle and comrades deposited leaflets in telephone booths and stuck them on walls in Kreuzberg, Berlin. "We called Berlin Youth to resist. As a result, the Gestapo hunted the illegal group. The letter types of all Berlin printers were checked. They came across the Druckerei A. Zeh in the Schönhauser Allee 9, Prenzlauer Berg and seized the personnel files of the employees.... During the search of the motorcycle shed of Heinz Kapelle, they came across 200 leaflets".

Between 15 and 17 October 1939, the state authorities conducted a crack-down on the resistance activists in Berlin and most of the group were arrested by the Gestapo. Heinz Kapelle was arrested on 15 October 1939, Erich Ziegler two days later. Both were horribly tortured, On 1 July 1941, Kapelle was killed at Plötzensee prison in Berlin.²⁸

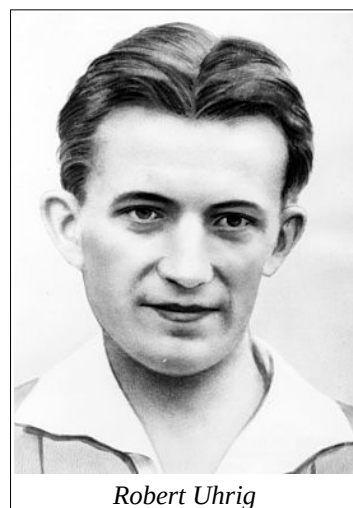
Second Period of the Resistance

The Uhrig group

The Uhrig group spanned both periods of resistance. Despite the destruction of almost all Berlin subdistricts of the KPD in 1935/36, Robert Uhrig succeeded in establishing a contact network with more than 20 Berlin operating cells until the beginning of the war which continued until February 1942, doing illegal work in many armaments factories.

By then, its comrades had experience of working underground. It was essentially based in Berlin, which, had a larger percentage of factories than most German cities and therefore a large working class. Uhrig was regarded as in the leadership of the Berlin KPD and a leading member of the KPD in the underground. As with so much clandestine work, it is still generally not possible to establish much detail about the precise activities.

Born in 1903, a toolmaker and active member of the KPD, in 1929, Robert Uhrig took a job in the Osram research department for radio tubes, where he led a



²⁸ *Ibid*, p.163

communist workplace cell. From 1933, he edited an underground newspaper and organised collections for the families of people in prison. He was first arrested by the Gestapo in 1934 and sentenced to hard labour; released in summer 1936, he again found work in the Osram electricity works in Berlin where he resumed building an underground group.

But the German-Soviet non-aggression treaty and Hitler's initial military successes led to a standstill in much of the resistance. After the invasion of the Soviet Union ended the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1941, Uhrig contacted sympathisers and other groups, including Herbert Grasse, a printer, and Otto Grabowski who had already organised cells in some Berlin factories. By the beginning of 1942, Uhrig had links with 89 factory groups with cells in several of the city's factories with around 200 experienced comrades in Berlin, especially *Siemens*.

The group was almost entirely working class, composed overwhelmingly of industrial workers and some professionals, including Wilhelm Guddorf and John Sieg, journalists on *Rote Fahne*. Born in Belgium, Guddorf joined the KPD and worked for several of the party's newspapers. After 1933, he began distributing articles against the regime. Arrested in April 1934, he was sentenced to hard labour at Sachsenhausen until 1939. Rearrested in 1942, he was executed in February 1943.²⁹

In September 1941, Uhrig set up a group led by Walter Budeus which had members in the Berlin weapons and armaments works *Deutsche Waffen und Munitionsfabrik Berkawerke*, near Berlin and by 1942, the group had at least 80 members there.³⁰ Another branch of the German armaments industry which the Uhrig group also had contacts with was the *Borsigwalde* works which used forced labour. It has not been possible to find more details.

From 1940 to 1945, *Berkawerke* employed the labour of more than 50,000 forced civilian labourers, prisoners of war and concentration camp inmates. No repercussions followed for the employers post 1945. There were close ties between many firms and the Nazis. AEG donated 60,000 Reichsmarks to the Nazi party in 1933. They joined with other large companies such as I.G. Farben, Thyssen and Krupp in their support of the Nazis. Many of the firms that colluded with the Nazis knew when to jump ship. On August 10, 1944, there was a meeting of company representatives from Krupp, Bosch, Thyssen, VW, Rheinmetall, Saar-Röchling, Messerschmidt and Wintershall / Quandt with SS, Reich Security Main Office RSHA and ministries of the Reich Government in the Hotel Maison Rouge of Strasbourg to discuss German survival strategies after defeat and security for Nazi assets. Indeed, many German firms still have a habit of rushing past the period between 1933 and

²⁹ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.238

³⁰ *Ibid*, pp.225, 237

1945 in any written statement without providing any sort of detailed analysis.³¹

Uhrig also managed to forge contacts with other communist resistance groups in Hamburg, Hannover, Mannheim, Leipzig, Essen, Vienna and Tyrol and Munich in the hope of building a nationwide resistance movement that could take on the Nazi state. The network consisted of KPD members, some social democrats, independents and foreign forced labourers. They also had contact with the Baum group, of which more later in this chapter, through Hildegard Jadamowitz. Though Baum had attended meetings in 1939 but around 1941, for reasons which are not clear, Uhrig and Baum ceased to collaborate.

The priority of the Uhrig network was to organise sabotage and go-slows in factories contributing to Germany's war effort. Armament production was crucial, yet conscription and the war economy had created acute labour shortages and gobbled up resources. They focused on armament production because the German war effort depended on their production. Secondly, armaments production used large numbers of forced labourers and camp prisoners.

Using his contacts in Berlin armaments factories, Grasse and his comrades, many in the Uhrig network, leafleted armaments factories, including the AEG transformer factory, which were involved apparently in producing a so-called secret weapon decisive for the war as well as AEG's production of electrical equipment at Auschwitz using slave labour. They also leafleted the German Weapons and ammunition factory: *Hasse & Wrede* machine tool company in Wedding (known today as Knorr-Bremse) which was built by and employed forced labourers. The victims were buried at the nearby Parkfriedhof. There were also supporters and links to foreign workers at *Gaubtschat Fahrzeugwerke GmbH*, which produced armaments but also the superstructures for the special vehicles which the SS used to gas its victims. The leader of the illegal group was Erich Lodemann, KPD, who was arrested in February 1942 and executed in October 1944.³²

Herbert Grasse, an experienced comrade, ran a small print shop which produced leaflets, distributed especially by local KPD Youth. With Eugen Neutert, Karl Boehme, John Victory and Hans Coppi, Grasse built cells in various Berlin companies: BEWAG (*Berliner Städtische Elektrizitätswerke Akt.-Ges*), *Shell-Öl*, *Bamag-Meguin-AG* (*Berlin-Anhaltische Maschinenbau Aktiengesellschaft*), *Lorenz Aktiengesellschaft* (in Tempelhof, electrical and radio products) and *Deutsche Waffen und Munitionsfabriken* (German Weapons and Munitions). The owners of *Deutsche Waffen* were close associates of leading Nazis and used more than 50,000 forced civilian labourers, POWs and concentration camp workers. We do not know how

³¹ https://www.nrw.vvn-bda.de/./1839_historische_termine_2018

³² Sandvoß, *Neukölln*, p.177

successful his attempt to persuade foreign forced labourers and others to sabotage war production was.³³ One leaflet says: "Unite! Write on the walls, whisper to your friends... For peace and freedom and bread! Down with the warmongers! Down with Hitler!". In an only too rare moment of unity, it was signed by trade unionists, members of the SPD and KPD.

Uhrig, amongst others, published the crucial underground paper, *Informationsdienst* (Information Service), which endeavoured to report on the economic and military situation and also called for acts of sabotage. They produced 600 copies fortnightly/monthly until autumn 1942, concentrating on exposing Goebbels's lies and the probability of defeat, and calling on workers to weaken key industries through sabotage and go slows. One pamphlet, published in mid-December 1941, has survived. It states its purpose is to educate political fighters, reviews the military, economic and political situation and calls for sabotage and go slows. In 1941, Uhrig, along with John Sieg, Herbert Grasse, Otto Grabowski and in cooperation with the Saefkow-Jacob-Bästlein Organisation, amazingly also produced about 400 copies of the clandestine newspaper, *Innere Front*, also the name of their group, concentrating on undermining Nazi lies and the probability of Nazi defeat. Within its pages were leaflets, for example analysing the military situation.³⁴ Such was the clandestine and sometimes interwoven nature of such work that Merson, publishing at least twenty years earlier than the German Resistance Memorial Centre, has a different list of people producing *Innere Front*, revealing both the clandestine nature of these activities and how under researched this area has been.

This was one of the few groups to receive courier reports from the exiled KPD leadership and to attempt to maintain contact through illegal broadcast on radios supplied by the Soviets, though it appears the KPD leadership did not always approve of what they were doing. On one of these rare occasions, in 1941, Charlotte Bischoff arrived by ship, entering illegally and bringing instructions from the International Relations Department of the Communist International for Uhrig and also the Saefkow-Jacob-Bästlein Organisation. Charlotte Bischoff, born in Berlin, joined the KPD in June 1933 and went to work for the propaganda department of the KPD. She went to Moscow in 1934, where until 1937, she worked for the International Relations Department of the Communist International, before illegally returning to Germany. She was one of the few to survive.

Another comrade associated with the Uhrig network and who also was involved in the attempt to get in agents from the USSR was Felix Tucholla. Born in 1899, so relatively old, a locksmith and member of the KPD from 1928, he worked for the Red

³³ *Ibid*, p.196

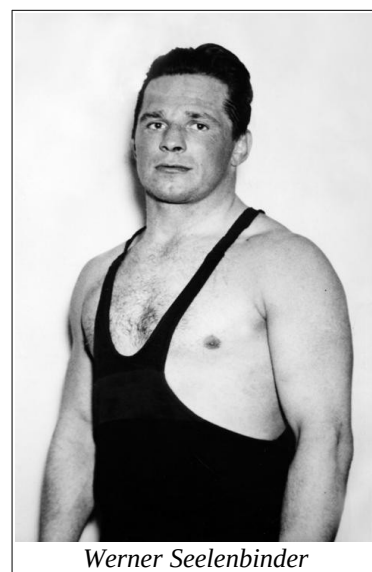
³⁴ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.237-8

Sport Unit and directed the KPD cell in the Lichtenberger Lessingstraße. After 1933, he distributed leaflets and formed a training circle. He and Käthe Tucholla, his partner, helped parachutist Erwin Panndorf, in June 1942 providing him with accommodation. But the Gestapo were tracking Panndorf. The Tuchollas were arrested and murdered in 1943.

Uhrig worked with some extraordinary comrades. Beppo Römer (1892-1944) a founding and active member of the *Freikorps Oberland* who fought against the Ruhr workers in March and April 1920, but became an organiser for the KPD by 1932 and edited the magazine *Aufbruch*. He plotted an assassination of Hitler in 1934, and was arrested. Following his release from Dachau concentration camp in July 1939, he once again gathered a network of opponents of the Nazi regime around himself in Munich and Berlin. Römer was again arrested early in 1942, sentenced to death on 19 June 1944, and murdered in Brandenburg-Görden on 25 September 1944. He is seen by some commentators as working closely with Uhrig, or sometimes as organising separately but has received little attention.

Werner Seelenbinder, a wrestler and KPD member was another of Uhrig's comrades. In 1933, he refused to give the Nazi salute when receiving his medal at the German Wrestling Championship, was punished with a sixteen-month ban on training and sports events but was allowed and agreed to participate in the 1936 games. In 1941, he acted as a courier, helped produce and distribute illegal material to front line soldiers and provided a political conduit to other Berlin athletes. He was arrested in February 1942, along with 65 other members of the group, and he was beheaded on 24 October 1944.³⁵

Charlotte Eisenblätter, who was heavily involved in Friends of Nature and the *Fichte*, a popular sports network linked with the KPD, became active in the Uhrig group, where she acted as a secretary, duplicating and distributing leaflets and pamphlets for the *Informationsdienst* about the crimes of the Nazi system. It was to Charlotte Eisenblätter that Charlotte Bischoff delivered her secret material. Eisenblätter was arrested in February 1942, and apparently took on all the responsibility for the *Informationsdienst*, thereby saving lives of others. She was sent to Ravensbrück camp and beheaded in the infamous Zuchthaus Berlin-Plötzensee on 25 August 1944 for "preparing for high treason".



Werner Seelenbinder

³⁵ Sandvoß, *Neukölln*, p.37

John Sieg, who crops up frequently in connection with different groups, had been born in the US, returned to Germany in 1928, started to work for the *Rote Fahne*, where he became one of the editors and joined the KPD in 1929. Imprisoned as early as March to June 1933 by the SA, he then became a key organiser of communist resistance in Berlin-Neukölln. In 1937, he got a job with German railways and consequently was able to travel and build connections with resistance groups, around, for example, Bernhard Bästlein. He was involved in *Die Innere Front* and later took part in leafleting campaigns. He was also a member of the *Rote Kapelle* (Red Orchestra) and had close contacts with Arvid Harnack and Adam Kuckhoff from the mid-1930s. Rearrested on 11 October 1942, he hanged himself on 15 October 1942.



Beppo Römer

Arvid Harnack, an academic and writer on political economy, was a part of the Red Orchestra and is an important figure in his own right, though not really a part of the workers' resistance. In 1933, he had formed a study circle, initially with young workers to study political economy. From 1937–41, he had close contact with the US Embassy and subsequently informed a member of the Soviet Embassy about the preparations for the military attack on the Soviet Union. As a cover, Harnack became a member of the NSDAP in 1937 and in 1942 was promoted to the post of Senior Executive Officer. At the beginning of 1942, Harnack wrote and circulated "The National Socialist Stage of Monopoly Capital". Harnack was arrested in September 1942, and killed on Hitler's orders on 22 December 1942 in Berlin-Plötzensee.³⁶

Herbert Grasse, who has already been mentioned as an integral part of the Uhrig network, worked closely with John Sieg. A printer, he joined the KPD in Berlin and after 1933, helped to produce and distribute the illegal newspaper *Neuköllner Sturmflagge*. Arrested in 1936, he was sentenced to two and a half years. Upon release, Grasse distributed leaflets and flyers in various resistance circles, using his contacts in Berlin armaments factories, including the AEG transformer factory and the weapons and ammunition factory: *Hasse & Wrede*. Together with Eugen Neutert, he sought to recruit foreign forced labourers for joint sabotage campaigns against the war production. Grasse was re-arrested on 23 October 1942. He committed suicide on the way to his interrogation in the Berlin police headquarters the next day.

Erich Kurz, who had volunteered in World War 1, became a KPD activist in Charlottenburg, a district councillor, and a functionary of the Red Front. In 1931, he

³⁶ https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/arvid-harnack/

took over the chairmanship of the workers' sports organisation in Charlottenburg. He was also the conductor of a mandolin club many of whom, under his influence, joined the Uhrig network. After 1939, Kurz worked as a technician at the *Telefunken* tube factory, part of AEG, and somehow procured typewriters, paper and stencils to produce pamphlets and maintained contacts with forced labourers. Arrested in February 1942, he died in Brandenburg-Görden in 1944.³⁷

There were others in Brandenburg who were part of the Uhrig underground: Willi Klopsch at the AEG turbine, Paul Timm at the *Siemens* switchboard, Gustav Kensy at *Wernerwerk* and the social democrat, Leo Tomschik, an engineer who sent Uhrig secret information about BMW aircraft construction in Spandau and was part of the Uhrig group leadership. Arrested in 1942 and sentenced to death in 1944, Tomschik committed suicide the night before his execution.³⁸

Eugen Neutert had joined the KPD in 1926, was until 1933 an official of the Red Front/RFB, and had already been dismissed in 1928 because of his political activity by the Berlin Electricity Company. Part of the Uhrig circle, he carried out resistance actions together with around 30 KPD and SPD comrades until his arrest in September 1936. After his release in March 1939, he found work in the Berlin *Eternit* plant, producing asbestos. After the Gestapo had smashed the Uhrig circle, he joined the resistance around Hans and Hilde Coppi. It was Neutert who procured a typewriter and wax matrices to publish *Die Innere Front*. Sent by mail, it called on soldiers to lay down their weapons.³⁹ On 23 October 1942, Neutert was arrested again and hanged on 9 September 1943.

Then there was Ernst Knaack, a leading KPD militant in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin, arrested in 1935, detained for two years, he then became active in the Uhrig network and, arrested in March 1942, was executed; Paul Schulz-Liebisch, a KPD member, was a part of the Uhrig network and was a decorative painter but banned by the *Reichskulturkammer* from painting, a ban he ignored, he was drafted into the *Wehrmacht* in 1944 but managed to desert and was hidden by Dutch resistance fighters in Berlin.

Erwin Nöldner, born in 1913 to a working-class family, became a locksmith and toolmaker. In 1928 he became a member of and leader in the KJVD and the youth wing of the Red Front, and from 1933 worked with the KPD underground.⁴⁰ He was arrested in December 1935 and sentenced for "high treason". After detention centres and camps, he then worked, under police surveillance, in the company *Erwin Auert* in

³⁷ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erich_Kurz

³⁸ http://sozialistenfriedhof.de/grosse_gedenktafel.html

³⁹ Sandvoß, *Neukölln*, p.170

⁴⁰ <https://www.berlin.de/ba-lichtenberg/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/2010/pressemitteilung.302383.php>

Weißensee where he was in contact with Robert Uhrig. In early 1944 he was recruited for the KPD and the Free Germany Committee and established contacts with other antifascist groups in Berlin armaments factories. In 1944 he worked with Anton Saefkow to construct armed defensive groups but he was almost immediately arrested and murdered.

In 1941, the Gestapo had infiltrated the Uhrig Group and in February 1942, Uhrig and 200 other members of the Uhrig Group were arrested. Uhrig was sent to Sachsenhausen KZ and guillotined on 21 August 1944 at the Brandenburg-Görden Prison.

Bästlein group

The Bästlein group was only formed after the beginning of the war and was rooted largely in Hamburg, unlike the Uhrig group who were centred on Berlin. The Bästlein group and later the Bästlein-Jacob grouping provided a centralising and directional role in Hamburg, unusual for most of the local resistance groups.⁴¹

Bernhard Bästlein grew up in a working-class family of social democrats in Hamburg, became a precision mechanic, joined the Metal Workers Association and the SPD in 1912. After returning from World War I, Bästlein was elected onto a soldiers' council and was an active supporter of the USPD. He joined the KPD in 1920, emigrating to the Soviet Union after taking part in the communist "March Action" in Hamburg in 1921, then in 1923 returned to Germany, where he was an editor of various communist newspapers until 1931. Made political head of the KPD's central Rhine region in 1931, Bästlein was elected to the Prussian State Parliament in 1932 and won a seat in the *Reichstag* in the election of March 1933.



Bernhard Bästlein

He was arrested in May 1933 and charged with "conspiracy to commit high treason". Released on 12 February 1935, he was rearrested on March 8, 1935, placed in preventative detention and sent to various concentration camps. In Sachsenhausen, he was incarcerated with a number of people with whom he was later to organise underground: Robert Abshagen, Julius Leber (SPD), Jacob and Oskar Reincke, Gustav Bruhn, Harry Naujoks, Wilhelm Guddorf and Martin Weise.

Julius Leber is an intriguing and key social democratic figure. From Alsace, he joined the SPD, volunteered in 1914 but later helped to suppress the Kapp Putsch. A

⁴¹ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.248

member of the *Reichstag*, Leber was attacked by SA members immediately after the *Reichstag* fire. He was severely injured and one of the SA men stabbed. Leber was arrested but due to workers' protests, was set free and joined a demonstration against the Nazis with his head in bandages. Re-arrested in 1933, he was sent to Sachsenhausen till 1937. He later joined the Kreisau Circle and worked closely with Helmuth James, Count von Moltke, Peter Yorck von Wartenburg and Count von Stauffenberg. This broad coalition brought together leftist (including KPD), bourgeois and military circles who planned the overthrow of the regime. He was arrested on 5 July 1944, on a tip off from a Gestapo informer. He was sentenced to death by the People's Court on 20 October 1944, and executed in Berlin-Plötzensee on 5 January 1945.

In 1940, Bernhard Bästlein, Franz Jacob, Robert Abshagen and Gustav Bruhn were released. Bästlein, Jacob and Oskar Reincke started to build a resistance organisation. Abshagen joined them in December 1941. The group adopted the usual clandestine triangular structure of the three person cell. The leadership met secretly and spasmodically with the KPD and remnants of various resistance groups.⁴² They were also able to make contact with resistance groups in German ports, but also with Berlin through Wilhelm Guddorf.

Franz Jacob, born in Hamburg to a working-class family, joined the youth branch of the SPD, then the youth group of the KPD and the Red Front. In 1929, Jacob had worked as a correspondent for the KPD and briefly went to Kiel to help build a new antifascist organisation to replace the RFB. In 1931, he became Secretary for agitation and propaganda for the KPD's Hamburg waterfront district and, aged 26, in April 1932, became a member of the Hamburg City Parliament

Jacob was arrested in August 1933 for "preparation to commit high treason". In the camp, he was responsible for labour duties and used his role to try to protect fellow prisoners, especially those in particular danger. It seems he also built bridges with social democrat prisoners. Before the *Reichstag* fire and going somewhat against the Third Period KPD line, Jacob called on the social democrats to participate in a united front against the Nazis and for a 24 hour protest strike on 8 February 1933. The SPD rejected the proposal as a "stupid bluff." Jacob whose anti-Nazi commitment is suggested by his membership of the Red Front, had drafted a statement with Johann Westphal (SPD, died 1942) in which they protested against the "terror election of 5 March" and the "coup d'état" of the National Socialists. Within hours of the *Reichstag* fire, Franz Jacob was forced to go underground.⁴³

⁴² *Ibid*, p.245

⁴³ https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/franz-jacob/

Gustav Bruhn, born in 1889, was the son of a railway worker and trained as a carpenter. He joined the SPD in 1912, then the Spartacist League and later became a member of the KPD leadership in the Wasserkante region. Arrested several times in 1933, Bruhn was not released till 1939. He then joined Bästlein's network, was arrested in October 1942 but managed to go underground after the major air raid on Hamburg in July 1943. Denounced, he was killed in Neuengamme concentration camp on 14 February 1944.

Oskar Reincke joined the KPD in Hamburg in about 1929 and was arrested in March 1933. He subsequently joined Hamburg's resistance circles in 1939. Arrested in October 1942, he was executed in July 1944 .

Robert Abshagen, a construction worker, had joined the KPD in 1931 and was, from 1933, an official of the Red Front. Arrested in 1933, he was sentenced in 1934 to hard labour. He was subsequently transferred to Sachsenhausen, where he met Franz Jacob and Bernhard Bästlein with whom he remained in contact. Released in April 1939, he returned to Hamburg, where he again became active in the resistance.

Walter Bohne, a ship-builder, who had joined the KJVD in 1921 and shortly after the KPD, was arrested in 1934 and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. After his release, he sought out his former political friends and succeeded in gathering a circle of KPD workers' sport activists around him up to 1939. In 1941 Bohne joined the group around Bernhard Bästlein, heading workplace cells at the shipyards. Bohne resisted his arrest in October 1942 and was injured. He managed to go underground after the air raid on Hamburg at the end of July 1943. On 5 January 1944, three Gestapo officers tried to arrest Walter Bohne on the street. He put up resistance and was shot dead.⁴⁴

By December 1941, the Bästlein group was able to build an extensive conspiratorial network, with cells in about 30 Hamburg factories, Hamburg shipyards and wharves. They supported POWs and forced labourers, many of whom had been put to work in the shipyards. There was an established resistance group of about 100 in the *Blohm & Voss* shipyards who issued leaflets calling for a whispering campaign against the war and for slowing down work.⁴⁵ Robert Abshagen initially managed the illegal group in the *Vereinigte Deutsche Metallwerke* (United German Metalworks).⁴⁶

Concentrating on large Hamburg companies, the plan was to help promote the overthrow of the regime and end the war. The group aimed to combine agitating around work issues with anti-war propaganda and Marxist discussion.⁴⁷ Like other

⁴⁴ https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/walter-bohne/

⁴⁵ Fraenkel, *The Other Germany*.

⁴⁶ http://www.stolpersteine-hamburg.de/index.php?&MAIN_ID=7&p=1&BIO_ID=234

⁴⁷ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, pp.81-8

anti-Nazi groups, their goals were broad and open to different political positions. They wanted to maintain a network of anti-Nazi propaganda, educate and mobilise workers, give aid to fugitives from the Gestapo and to forced labourers and POWs, as well as organising sabotage, especially in weapons production.

The resistance group built a network of contacts with other resistance organisations in northern Germany and Berlin. Through Wilhelm Guddorf, a KPD journalist, whom Bästlein had met in Sachsenhausen, they had contacts with members of the Uhrig group in Berlin, the Red Orchestra in Berlin and with Hermann Bose and Leo Drabent, a communist resistance fighter in Bremen. Bästlein was also responsible for counter-espionage, intelligence gathering, and supplying weapons. It is also possible though unclear that they had intermittent contacts with the KPD émigré leadership.⁴⁸

In the middle of 1942, there was the only known instance of major leafleting, aimed at Hamburg construction workers who had been compulsorily conscripted in the spring of 1942 to the construction work of the *Organisation Todt*⁴⁹ in Norway and the Soviet Union. The leaflets linked demands for wages and severance pay with the call to commit acts of sabotage. It closed with the slogan, "Hitler's defeat is not our defeat, but our victory!"

Another group in Hamburg with which Bästlein had contact was led by machine master Carl Schultz and the metalworker Heinrich Schröder. This was cross-class as well as including forced labourers and POWs employed in Hamburg factories. Its goal was the elimination of the Nazis, though there is little known about this group. Towards the end of the war, air protection officers and members of the *Volkssturm*⁵⁰ were also recruited. They operated using clandestine methods in Hamburg Electricity Works and AEG (General Electric Company). They probably had a connection to the Leipzig resistance. From 1944, the group wanted to start collecting weapons, with an eye on the allies' arrival. Almost all the group were put to death in April 1945 in Neuengamme camp.

In October 1942, the activities of the Bästlein group were discovered by the Gestapo. In May 1942, two KPD representatives, who had flown from the USSR and parachuted into Germany, unwittingly led the Gestapo to the Hamburg group. More than 100 of its then roughly 200 members were arrested and 60 sentenced to death. Bästlein, Reincke and Abshagen were arrested. Jacob managed to go underground at

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pp.40-41&238

⁴⁹ *Organisation Todt* (OT) was a civil and military engineering organisation in Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945, named for its founder, Fritz Todt, an engineer and senior Nazi. The organisation was responsible for a huge range of engineering projects both in Nazi Germany and in occupied territories from France to the Soviet Union during World War II. It became notorious for using forced labour.

⁵⁰ *Volkssturm* were a last throw of the dice, a new military unit, established specifically by Hitler, in late 1944, which conscripted boys and old men.

the last minute and fled to Berlin where he again hid before being re-arrested.

In August 1943, Bästlein was moved to Plötzensee prison in Berlin but in January 1944, the prison was bombed during an air raid and Bästlein escaped. He was hidden by communists, and immediately began working with Jacob and Saefkow in what is sometimes referred to as the Saefkow-Jacob-Bästlein Organisation.

The Saefkow-Jacob-Bästlein Organisation⁵¹

Anton Saefkow was from a socialist working-class family and in 1920, while still an apprentice metalworker, joined the Young Communists (KJVD) and rapidly was elected onto its Central Committee. In 1927, he became secretary of the KPD in Berlin, then in Dresden and then a political leader in Hamburg. He formed close ties with the Comintern and was arrested immediately after the *Reichstag* fire.

In a reshuffling of comrades who were at that point free, Anthon Saefkow (freed in 1939), Bernhard Bästlein and Franz Jacob, who had already been in loose contact, formed the Saefkow-Jacob-Bästlein group in 1942. The group had a membership of about 500, and in 1943 and 1944, was probably the biggest and most active of the resistance groups.

Experienced comrades, they saw one of their main tasks as reuniting the fragments of remaining resistance groupings. The plan was to build a united front with antifascist circles, including social democrats. The group included not just workers, but doctors, teachers, engineers, artists. Doctors in particular could be vital, able to provide medical care for those unable to go legally to seek medical help. The group gained support from soldiers, POWs, forced labourers and escaped prisoners, such as Herbert Tschäpe.



Herbert Tschäpe, KJVD, then KPD functionary in Neukölln sub-district, was arrested in 1933; after release, the party sent him first to Prague, then to Spain in 1937. Put into French internment in 1939, in April 1941 he was extradited to Germany and immediately arrested by the Gestapo. Sent first to Sachsenhausen, then the satellite camp, Lichtenrade, in 1943, he was a forced labourer and carpenter, in

⁵¹ When no other source is given, this section is drawn from:

- Margain, Constance, "The Two Lives Of Anton Saefkow: Communist Resistance Fighters And Socialist Hero (1903-1944)". *International Newsletter of Communist Studies Online (INCS)*, pp.62-74.
- Coppi, Hans, 2012, *The Forgotten Resistance of the Workers. Trade Unionists, Communists, Social Democrats, Trotskyists, Anarchists and Forced Laborers*, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 2012
- *Berliner Arbeiterwiderstand - Die Saefkow-Jacob-Bästlein-Organisation* in Widerstand gegen der National Socialismus in Berlin, This contribution, presented at the Berlin History Workshop, was put together by Dr. Annette Neumann and Dr. Bärbel Schindler-Saefkow (daughter of Anton Saefkow), April 7th, 2014.

fact the foreman, responsible for 18 labourers, including French and Soviet workers who had become comrades. He escaped in April 1944 with the help of the KPD underground. Saefkow somehow got civilian clothes to Herbert via a laundry transport. Then a sympathetic civilian carpenter, Klewe, who worked at the site, pretended that Herbert's girl friend, Lisa, was his wife so she could pass the SS post. The planning meetings with Herbert then took place in a barracks of French prisoners, secured by Soviet comrades. Herbert got away from the external construction site unrecognised in civilian clothes. He then went underground with the Bästlein group. Arrested by the Gestapo in July 1944, he was murdered in Brandenburg-Görden on 27 November 1944.

About 30 of the group were involved in relief operations for Jews inside and outside the group, including procuring false papers. Unusually, about one-quarter of the members were women.

The network maintained loose contacts with employees of 30-70 major companies in Berlin such as *Siemens*, *Telefunken*, *Daimler-Benz*, AEG and armaments companies. They focused on disseminating information that they were able to glean from foreign newspapers and from radio broadcasts from Moscow. They published the illegal magazine, *Die Innere Front*. They also put out flyers, which were smuggled to Berlin by courier. Jacob was in charge of agitation and propaganda, producing flyers and other publications, some of which he wrote. The group even managed to transport a printing press, disassembled into individual parts by backpack to Schönow, north of Berlin, to then reassemble and to produce a leaflet *Workers of the Berliner Betriebe*, of which 2000 copies were distributed. They prioritised calling for the sabotage of the arms industry, as well as the collapse of the Nazi dictatorship to thus accelerate the end of the war.

Their emphasis was on Berlin munitions plants: they distributed leaflets calling on workers to form workplace groups, commit sabotage and impair arms production. Their other goals were to inform about political events, create a picture of a post-Nazi Germany, provide underground members with a new identity through forged papers, or forging or collecting food stamps to provide them with food. About 120 women also worked as couriers.

By the second phase of the resistance, many of the militants in the factories had been arrested and even if released, were circumspect. The organisers were guided about whom to approach by considering who had been unionised before 1933, who had belonged to the KPD, who was known from workers' sports clubs and occasionally by who were free floating socialists.

One of the largest factory resistance groups was at *Teves*, a machine and tool

manufacturer, with about 40 members out of roughly 2,400 employees. The group made a point of contacting foreign workers, both to build a broader base and to offer them aid. Because of the unevenness of anti-Nazi awareness, their aim was to construct cadre groups in the workplace to mobilise workers.

At the *Askania* works in Berlin, there were underground cells of about 50 men and women. *Askania* specialised in making precision instruments for the armaments industry, producing autopilots, optics for anti-aircraft guns and periscopes for submarine and control systems and rudders for the Messerschmitt Me 262 aircraft.

The *Askania* works had about 24,000 employees, of whom about 5,000 to 7,000 were forced labourers from Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Poland and later the Soviet Union. Contact or conversation with Soviet or French forced labourers was seriously punished. In the last year of the war, children of forced labourers starved to death there. After the war, those responsible were given long prison sentences and in one case the death penalty, though this is not mentioned in *Askania* publicity. From August 1944, up to 2,500 mostly German, Soviet, Polish and French female prisoners also arrived on several transports from Ravensbrück concentration camp to work in the shafts of salt mines, where the *Askania* work had been redirected, to safely produce munitions for the air force and autopilots, controls and steering gear for the Me 262 aircraft and the V1 and V2 rockets.

Members of the Saefkow-Jacob-Bästlein group with inside contacts distributed leaflets, encouraged sabotage of armaments production and tried to distribute food and clothing to forced labourers in the *Askania* Mariendorf and Weißensee plants. Twenty-six of the 50 inside contacts were arrested late 1944 and 7 men murdered.

Paul Hirsch, KPD, a toolmaker, was one of the central figures of the resistance in the *Askania* factory alongside Paul Junius. Together they recruited a few comrades for illegal work. They contacted the forced labourers, organised money collections and distributed illegal pamphlets. Getting the leaflets to the factory was hazardous but Emil Borchfeld used his haulage business as a cover.

Originally in contact with the Neukölln group around John Sieg and Herbert Grasse, though like so many others, Paul Junius had come up through Friends of Nature, he joined up with Jacob and Saefkow in the spring of 1943. He became a liaison with the illegal KPD operating cells in the *Askania* factory, organising sabotage in armaments production, distributing illegal pamphlets and collecting food stamps and money for illegal immigrants. He also maintained contact with other resistance groups in armaments companies in the south of Berlin. In July, 1944 Junius was arrested and then murdered.

Another member was Heinrich Werner. A high school teacher and a member of the NSDAP since 1933, he had front line experience, became increasingly critical of the war and the regime and repeatedly met up with Saefkow and Jacob, handing over materials from the propaganda office where he then worked.

The group also began to organise on behalf of the illegal KPD dominated *Movement for a Free Germany* in Berlin-Brandenburg and in a leaflet of 1 April 1944, declared "We, the Communists and the National Committee for a Free Germany" suggested the creation of a common front with Hitler's enemies and preparation for the takeover of power, a different emphasis from Bästlein's earlier position. In April 1944, two social democrats, Adolph Reichwein and Julius Leber, who were left-wing members of the Kreisau Circle, got in touch with Saefkow and Jacob to talk about cooperating across party lines to build for a post Nazi Germany. Saefkow, representing the new KPD position, now distinguished between a "bourgeois republic" and "fascist dictatorship".

They believed that the resistance of the military was limited, and that the resistance of the people was necessary.⁵² According to Bästlein's son, Jacob had shifted line by May/June 1944 from the official KPD position and was arguing that all communist forces ought to concentrate "on the development of a broad national combat front" consisting of "all groups in hostile opposition to fascism." Jacob saw the National Committee for a Free Germany as the first expression of a central, rather than splintered leadership.⁵³ Indeed, on 22 June 1944, Anton Saefkow and Franz Jacob met with the leading social democrats Julius Leber and Adolf Reichwein with the consent of Count von Stauffenberg who was about to stage an unsuccessful coup against Hitler. The communists guaranteed freedom and religious tolerance as well as the right to property. The inclusion of the Soviet system in Germany was not mentioned.

Following a betrayal in 1944, over 280 members of the organisation were arrested by the Gestapo. Of that number, 104 either perished in concentration camps or were executed by the Nazis. Franz Jacob went underground in Berlin and with Saefkow, established a new network of cells. But they were denounced by an informer and Bästlein, Jacob and Saefkow were arrested by the Gestapo on 30 May 1944, tortured and sent back to Sachsenhausen. Bästlein was sentenced to death on 5 September 1944 for the crimes of conspiracy to commit high treason, aiding the enemy and undermining military strength and was executed on 18 September 1944 at

⁵² <http://87.106.6.17/stolpersteine-hamburg.de/en.php?>

[&MAIN_ID=7&r_name=franz+jacob&r_strasse=&r_bezirk=&r_stteil=&recherche=recherche&r_sort=Nachname_AUF&submitter=search&LANGUAGE=EN&BIO_ID=1241](http://87.106.6.17/stolpersteine-hamburg.de/en.php?&MAIN_ID=7&r_name=franz+jacob&r_strasse=&r_bezirk=&r_stteil=&recherche=recherche&r_sort=Nachname_AUF&submitter=search&LANGUAGE=EN&BIO_ID=1241)

⁵³ http://www.stolpersteine-hamburg.de/en.php?&LANGUAGE=EN&MAIN_ID=7&p=69&BIO_ID=1241

Brandenburg-Gorden prison, as were Jacob and Saefkow.⁵⁴

Neubauer/ Poser group

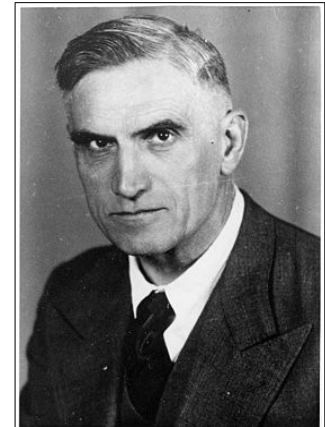
One example of a small group which only started to organise in early 1942 is the Theodor Neubauer, Magnus Poser group in Tabarz, Thuringia.

They managed not to be picked up by the police and the Bästlein/Saefkow grouping consequently contacted them in autumn 1943 to try to bring together the surviving resistance groups. Otherwise they were largely isolated from other resistance groupings, which may help explain why they had not been already caught.⁵⁵

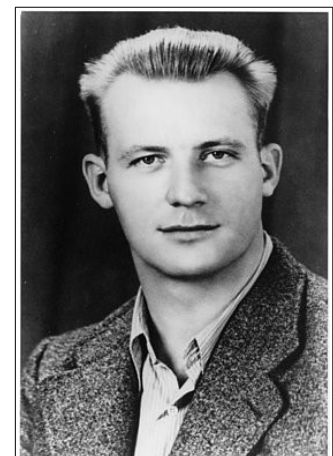
Both were experienced comrades. Theodor Neubauer had joined the USPD in 1919, was active against the Kapp Putsch, joined the KPD, was elected in 1921 for the KPD in the Thuringian parliament, in 1924, became editor of the Düsseldorf KPD newspaper *Freedom*, and became a member of the *Reichstag* in 1924. He was on the Central Committee of the Berlin KPD, participating in February 1933 in the secret Sports House meeting at Ziegenhals, near Berlin. After the *Reichstag* fire, the Nazis tried to bully him into giving evidence against Dimitrov. His refusal landed him in camps till 1939, despite much international protest.

Magnus Poser, born in Jena in 1907, grew up in a working-class family, became a carpenter, joined the Communist Youth Association in 1919 and the KPD in 1928. Still in his early twenties, he was involved in the Friends of Nature, a group which crops up in many of these comrades' CVs. There he got together with trade unionists, socialists, social democrats and supporters of other left-wing currents. In 1929 he joined the Freethinkers organisation. He then joined and became a committee member of the KPD Third Period version of the Freethinkers: the Proletarian Freethinkers. In 1930, he was imprisoned. He had joined an illegal resistance group immediately after Hitler became Chancellor. He was arrested again on 26 November 1933, for "preparation for high treason".⁵⁶ Upon release, he contacted Neubauer.

They worked with scrupulous attention to the rules of conspiracy in 3-5 people



Theodor Neubauer



Magnus Poser

⁵⁴ German Resistance Memorial Centre, <https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/topics/4-resistance-from-the-workers-movement/>

⁵⁵ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.279.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.280

cells. They had the advantage that one of their members ran a fire insurance office, so people entering were not immediately suspect. Another member ran a hostelry where their meetings were covered by the SA meeting in an adjacent room. They also made contact with Soviet, Polish and French foreign workers and issued some material in their languages. They even arranged classes in Marxist education.

They gradually acquired a number of typewriters and duplicating machines, which were hidden in different places. From autumn 1943, they produced up to 1500 copies of at least five different leaflets which focused on the Nazis crimes of violence in occupied Europe and the German genocide of European Jews. One, produced in September 1943, read: "Hitler's war is lost". They encouraged the Germans to distance themselves from the Nazi government. They had contacts in Berlin, Leipzig, the Ruhr and elsewhere, campaigned for a broad based antifascist resistance, and supported the political orientation of the National Committee for a Free Germany.

Neubauer was arrested on 14 July 1944, sentenced to death by the People's Court in Berlin on 8 January 1945, for "preparation for high treason" and beheaded on 5 February 1945.⁵⁷ Poser was arrested on 14 July 1944, seriously wounded in an attempted escape from Weimar prison and died on 21 July 1944 in the Buchenwald concentration camp.

The Lechleiter group

Another centre of resistance was in Mannheim. Its leader, Georg Lechleiter, a former KPD editor and member of the local parliament, after release from the camps, built up factory cells, made contacts with workers, workers' sports clubs and foreign labourers. They produced leaflets and a monthly paper, *Der Vorbote* which first appeared in October 1941. Members of the group were employed in 7 major Mannheim companies which provided material for the journal as well as the illicit foreign radio stations. This was written up, sent by letter to Heidelberg where wax tablets were made and brought back by courier to Mannheim where the paper was printed in a basement and distributed by Jakob Faulhaber to the members of the operating groups for further distribution.⁵⁸ The fifth and last issue of *Der Vorbote* read: "The true rulers of the Third Reich, the masters of coal and steel, along with their compliant swarm of middle and smaller exploiters, have made incredible profits from the workers' bones under Nazi rule." Its vision was of a



Georg Lechleiter

⁵⁷ https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/theodor-neubauer/

⁵⁸ <https://mannheim.vvn-bda.de/lechleiter-gruppe>

democratic, antifascist and socialist Germany.⁵⁹

But the group was betrayed. The Gestapo arrested about 60 people, 32 were put on trial, 19 members were hanged in September 1942 and February 1943 and a handful were sent to the 999 Penal Battalion. The group then collapsed. Across much of Germany, small resistance groups based in factories briefly emerged but lacking any sort of directional role, the people involved were often overwhelmed by a sense of loneliness, impotence and despair, even if they were not arrested.⁶⁰

Antifascist Workers' Group of Central Germany

Although there does not appear to be much information about them, there were a number of small factory resistance groups linked with the Antifascist Workers' Group of Central Germany (AAM), established in 1942. This group had been formed by a merger of the groups led by former KPD functionary, Robert Büchner and by Otto Gotsche, KPD, and included 70-80 KPD activists.⁶¹ It had contacts in the Mansfeld region of Saxony and some cities in the Rhine-Ruhr area, an area which produced synthetic petrol and rubber, and which had with a strong working class movement.

In the last years of the war, it was one of the best organised resistance organisations. Its aim was sabotage and it passed on information gained from illegally listening to the BBC. They did not have close relations with other KPD resistance groups and adopted the triangular cell structure, which contributed to the Gestapo's failure to infiltrate them and which makes its activities difficult to document.

Unusually still active in 1945, in March, the AAM called for the establishment of armed combat groups and, in early April, formed an illegal citizens committee of about 120 people, led by former members of the Red Front and *Reichsbanner* militia. As the American troops approached, Büchner and the AAM disarmed the police and took over the city hall.⁶² Initially employed by the US occupation administration in 1945 as a district administrator, Gotsche was soon dismissed for communist activities. He and Büchner then tried to build a Popular Front, recruiting about 10,000 local working people to include social democrats alongside communists, in preparation for an imminent "new revolutionary wave". First banned by the US administration, it was then rejected by the Soviet authorities.

⁵⁹ http://widerstandsausstellung.m-o-p.de/ausstellung/die_lechleiter-gruppe_jakob_faulhaber.htm

⁶⁰ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.246-8

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p.245-6

⁶² <http://www.harz-saale.de/eisleben-die-geschichte-um-das-ehemalige-lenindenkmal-am-plan-und-robert-buchner/>

The Baum Group

How far the Baum group represented some sort of synthesis between communist and Jewish resistance is still disputed. It is worth looking at them in detail, as this was one of the few groups to manage to exist and engage in active resistance from the beginning of the Nazi dictatorship up to May 1942. There is an unusual level of information, as well as disagreement, about this group and they organised one of the few significant acts of sabotage.

The persecution of Jews did not feature strongly in resistance orientation or literature, from communists to conservatives, with some notable exceptions such as the White Rose. Some commentators have claimed the Baum group as revealing a Jewish resistance, all the more significant as it would be the only organised sustained active Jewish resistance grouping in Germany.⁶³



Herbert Baum

Of course, thousands of individual historic Jews who did not define themselves primarily through their Jewishness were involved in the resistance and there were some tiny groups of a few friends who actively opposed the Nazi regime. Although more passive than active resistance, one such person who has received some publicity is Gad Beck. A gay Jewish Zionist, he helped Jews who dodged the Nazis in Berlin, providing them with food, clothes and money, helping them escape to Switzerland. Only three months before the Nazi surrender, he was betrayed by a Jewish man working for the Gestapo, arrested and held by the Gestapo.⁶⁴ Finally, he recalled, a Red Army soldier came to the place where the Gestapo had confined him and gave him a slip of paper which read: "*Is do eyner vos heaist Gad Beck*" Then he said: "*Brider, ir zaht fray.*" (Brother, you are free).⁶⁵

Though it is disputed how far Baum and his group defined themselves as Jewish, I go with the argument that Herbert Baum saw himself primarily as a communist and that his Jewishness was not his primary source of identity. Many young Jews regarded communism as the answer to the political crisis in Germany, and were antagonistic towards a collective Jewish identity, seeing the Jewish community as bourgeois.⁶⁶

From the age of twenty, Baum was the head of this Jewish German youth group,

⁶³ Rosenstock, Werner, "The Jewish Youth Movement" in *Leo Baeck Institute Year book* 19, 1974 pp97-105

⁶⁴ <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/idcard.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10006666>

⁶⁵ Beck, Gad, Frank Heibert, 1999, *An Underground Life. Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Nazi Berlin*, University of Wisconsin Press, p161

⁶⁶ Rosenstock, Werner, "The Jewish Youth Movement" in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 19, 1974, pp. 34, 35

which was run by Baum, Ansbach and Steinbrinck, who produced and distributed *Junge Garde sud-ost*, joining the Communist Youth Federation (KJVD) probably in 1931. Active in the KPD underground movement after 1933, the KPD encouraged Baum to ride both horses so as to draw people from the Jewish Youth organisations towards the KPD, which indeed he did. Non-zionist Jewish youth organisations were legal until 1936, so the KPD, which was banned, encouraged their Jewish comrades to campaign within these groups.

Although the distinction between zionist and non-zionist groups is not always completely clear, the zionist youth groups were not banned until 1939. The Nazis allowed the zionist youth groups to continue because they encouraged Jews to emigrate to Palestine. *Hechaluz*, a Jewish youth movement, trained young people for agricultural settlement in Palestine. But the Gestapo typically attended their meetings to check they were about Jewish studies, not Marxism.⁶⁷

Though their base was Berlin, they existed in a number of German cities. Many in the group were young. Alice Hirsch was eighteen, Hildegard Löwy was nineteen, and Charlotte Päch, aged thirty-two, was nicknamed "Grandma". The supporters included Walter Sack who had been brought up within a zionist household, became active in the Communist Youth in 1934 and then in various communist-associated underground circles, including the Baum group, but also organised a proletarian group within the Bund. He escaped to Sweden, finally returning to East Germany.⁶⁸

There were also a relatively high number of women members. The small inner circle around Herbert Baum had fourteen members, seven of them women, including Marianne Baum, Charlotte Holzer, Hanni Meyer, and Lotte Rotholz.⁶⁹ Almost all of these brave and unusual women were to be involved in the firebombing of the Soviet Paradise exhibition. One key figure was Marianne Baum. Most them had first been in some sort of Jewish organisation and in her case, the *Deutsch-Jüdische Jugendgemeinschaft*. She then progressed to the KJVD, in 1931. In 1940, she was forced to work in the Jewish department at the Siemens electric motors factory.



Marianne Baum

⁶⁷ Trotsky's writings on Germany were allowed as long as they were in Hebrew and were even included in their magazine.

⁶⁸ Cox, John, 2009, *Circle of Resistance: Jewish, leftist and youth dissidence in Nazi Germany*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp.131-134

Hildegard Jadamowitz joined the Communist Youth Federation (KJVD) as early as 1931 and was briefly arrested in 1936, but acquitted for lack of evidence. She made contact with a communist resistance group around Hans-Georg Vötter in Berlin-Britz, through which she joined the group around Herbert Baum, forging important links to other oppositional circles. Jadamowitz took part in the arson attack on the propaganda exhibition "The Soviet Paradise" in Berlin's Lustgarten on 18 May 1942. She was arrested a few days later, sentenced to death and murdered in Berlin-Plötzensee on 18 August 1942. She is one of the people it is not possible to place firmly in any one resistance group: she is most often talked of as being within the Baum circle but she also leafleted on behalf of the Joachim Franke and the Uhrig groups.



Hildegard Jadamowitz

Charlotte Holzer joined a communist cell in the Jewish hospital where, in 1940, she met Herbert Baum, who was a patient there. She joined his group, but was arrested on 8 October 1942. She was one of the few members of the Baum Group to survive and later testified about their activity.

During 1933, Baum, Marianne Cohn, Martin Kochmann and Sala Rosenbaum distributed illegal antifascist papers and pamphlets. In 1934, when Baum was leader of the underground KJVD group based in Neukölln, they leaflet-bombed Nazi events on a couple of occasions. Once, a can was placed in a crowded room at the state library and when the timer went off, it spat out leaflets. Another time, on 11 July 1934, eight cans were placed on top of a building; when the timer went off, the air was filled with leaflets reading "Today the millions march to celebrate the October revolution, and in Germany, the workers and peasants shall overcome fascism and rejoice". The leaflets included one entitled: "Hitler: Germany's Gravedigger". Others stated "Be a good citizen. Think for yourself", or "A good German is not afraid to say no". Between 1934 and 1938, they carried out an array of inventive propaganda activities, especially during air-raid drills in Berlin, under cover of darkness. But so many of the people involved were arrested, they decided such public leafleting was not worth it. But they continued to leaflet factories, warning against exploitation of workers by monopoly capital.⁷⁰

And there were a few happy coincidences and stratagems: one supporter worked in a bank and was able to obtain large quantities of mimeographed paper, another had a

⁷⁰ Brothers, drawing on letters sent to him by Herbert Ansbach in 1986, a KPD activist who appears regularly in this chapter, who miraculously survived and provided much valuable information. *Berlin Ghetto*, p.66

friend who was a boat captain who used his boat to take a few comrades, to meetings in Copenhagen. Herbert Ansbach formed a rental car company.

In 1935, Baum's sub-district alone had 30 members. It is significant that their main work was around seven sports clubs with other red sports clubs clustered around them. They also had five comrades in steel works and aeroplane assembly.⁷¹

But repression was increasing. *Kristallnacht* signalled quite how unsafe it was for anybody who was defined as Jewish to remain in Germany and encouraged a change of line: from then on, KPD comrades, especially if Jewish, were encouraged to flee.⁷² The frequent attitude that becoming an exile was deserting the struggle was not straight forward. I came across this touching memory from Ernst Feulner in 1981 about Baum: "I met Herbert Baum in the hiking group *Warschauer Ring*... [Later] Herbert refused when I suggested that he go abroad, saw himself as the head of the group... Nevertheless, I repeatedly met old friends [who told me] Baum advised them to go over to the enemy lines".

In addition, by now, there was an almost complete absence of contact with the KPD-in-exile. But a loose network continued firstly around Werner Schaumann, which included Werner Steinbrinck and Hilde Jadamowitz, a handful of young Jews as well as two or three non-Jews, mostly previous members of the KJVD. Baum also maintained his own close circle, which grew to encompass more than fifteen people. But as with the rest of the resistance, there was a significant reduction in activity after the early years.

The end of the Hitler-Stalin pact in June 1941 marked the beginning of the second phase when the resistance groups started to rebuild. The Baum group condemned the pact, another indication of its semi-autonomous position. By June 1941, Baum and others from his group became forced labourers at the Electric Motor Works division of Siemens, *Elmo-Werke*, where there were around 500 Jewish forced labourers. This was typical: in early 1941, 30,000 Jews were conscripted as forced labourers, about 20% of the remaining Jews in Germany. Then all Jews aged 15 to 65 were forced into labour, an additional 73,000 for war related industries.

One of the contradictions at the heart of the Nazi machine was that as late as 1941, Jews were greatly in demand for their labour. Baum became the forced labourer's representative, campaigning, remarkably, for improvements in working conditions and the minimum wage. Baum was an electrician which meant he had to work in different parts of the works, giving him access to different groups of workers. They collaborated with Dutch and French forced labourers in a resistance cell of about

⁷¹ Brothers, *Berlin Ghetto*, p.83

⁷² Sandvoß, H.R. 1999, *Resistance in Mitte and Tiergarten*, German Resistance Memorial Centre, p.170

fifteen, which aimed to commit sabotage.⁷³

One contact was the French *émigrée*, Suzanne Wesse, who helped develop contacts with Belgian and French forced labourers at the Siemens plant.⁷⁴ She translated for them, giving them news from outside Germany. Along with Baum she procured French, Belgium and Dutch ID cards for them and also fake work documents for members of Baum's group.⁷⁵ Wesse participated in the arson attack on the anti-Soviet propaganda exhibition "The Soviet Paradise" and was arrested on 23 May 1942 together with her husband. Found guilty and sentenced to death, she was executed on 18 August 1942.

Baum had met Heinz Birnbaum, a turner, in a Zionist youth movement before 1933, and persuaded him in 1934 to become a member of the KJVD. Together with Irene Walther, Birnbaum then created an illegal cell of the KJVD at the Butzke and Co. plant where he worked. Birnbaum, an experienced comrade of Baum's, was assigned to *Schubert-Werke*, an aircraft parts factory.⁷⁶ His invaluable tool-making skills meant he also was sent round the factory, thereby allowing him to make contacts. In a telling detail, he joked with one of the Nazi foremen who had been a KPD troop leader. Behind the masquerade, he organised sabotage, such as pouring sugar into a machine transmission to make it freeze up or changing the measurements of a job. Another comrade, Helmut Neumann who worked at *Kodak-Rohfilmfabrik*, apparently used the forklift truck he drove to destructive effect.

One KPD comrade linked to the Baum group, who followed the Trojan Horse KPD instructions of entering the Nazi trade unions, was Karl Kunger. From 1935-1938, Kunger had been getting comrades being sought by the Gestapo across the frontier into Czechoslovakia. In 1937, he joined a Nazi workers' group at his job at AEG in Treptow, where he also formed an antifascist cell. AEG manufactured radio equipment for bombers and U boats and navigational devices for V2 rockets. It used French forced labourers held at Rummelsburg prison, who Kunger also attempted to contact. In September 1942, he was arrested and beheaded.

The Baum group produced and distributed *Der Weg zum Sieg*, sub-titled Information Service of the KPD and signed apparently by the Central Committee of the KPD. It suggested divisions within the ruling Nazi elite and generally presented a broad brush ultra-optimistic approach rather than a substantive analysis and showed little recognition of how badly the German working class had been defeated after 1933. It vacillated between calls for a proletarian revolution and an antifascist

⁷³ Cox, *Circle of Resistance*, p.88
Brothers, *Berlin Ghetto*, pp.138-40.

⁷⁴ Brothers, *Berlin Ghetto*, p.139

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.139

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, pp.121-135

people's front.⁷⁷

The subsequent publication of *Der Ausweg*, produced in December 1941, was geared towards a larger readership than before and provided far more of an analysis of the worsening situation militarily and on the domestic front. It included several letters written by soldiers on the Eastern front. One man wrote that "I am ashamed to be a German". The paper emphasised the KPD slogan that "The best Germans are the deadly enemies of Hitler". There seems to have been a shift of line. They surreptitiously dropped leaflets around the city and scrawled anti-Hitler graffiti on walls. They also held semi-informal evenings where they discussed literature, Marxism and music.

By the end of 1941, the Baum group also worked with Hans Fruck, a metal worker and the leader of a resistance grouping at the Rabona machine factory who knew Baum through Jewish and left networks in Berlin. He joined their group in 1938 and distributed their material on his motorbike. Fruck, a member of the SAJ, the KJVD, then the KPD, worked for the Revolutionary Trade Union Opposition (RGO) and its youth organisation, as well as being a member of Jewish youth resistance groups. From 1936 to 1938, he fought in Spain. Returning to Germany, he was repeatedly arrested but survived.⁷⁸

The Baum group also collaborated with the Franke-Steinbrinck group, a small KPD band, led by Joachim Franke (KPD until 1928). Franke is a controversial figure, not trusted by many in the underground. He was suspected of being a Gestapo agent or at the very least a provocateur, partly because of his failure to take security precautions. In 1943, he was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison for treason, but he survived and joined the police in East Germany.

Franke worked as an engineer in a large Berlin armaments factory, AEG, where he formed a group, including workers and technical staff. Hilde Jadamowitz and Hans Mannaberg were also involved, working as technical experts. Mannaberg, a long-time member of the KPD and KJKD, worked in his father's printing business and designed, printed and distributed antifascist material for the groups. This included sticky notes with the slogans "Hitler leads us into the mass grave", "Hunger and distress, misery and death, how much longer?" and "Hitler is the mortal enemy of the youth forced to die." These were distributed at workplaces and stuck on phone booths, walls and fences.⁷⁹

These groups were tiny and fluid but from the end of 1941, their public activities increased as they became more active producing and distributing papers and leaflets.

⁷⁷ Cox, *Circle of Resistance*, pp.111-113,144.

⁷⁸ Brothers, *Berlin Ghetto*, p.1048

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, pp.137, 175,176

Everything was dangerous. Paper and envelopes had to be purchased in small quantities as the Gestapo monitored large amounts. Irene Walther and Suzanne Wessa of course did the typing. Different handwriting and post-boxes were used.

Their periodicals were titled: *The Way Out*, to be sent to soldiers in the field, *The Road to Socialism* and Information Service of the KPD. Here they argued that every class conscious worker should be a leader in the antifascist class struggle, that gossip is not a revolutionary activity, and that antifascist bases should be created in the factories. Everyone should duplicate the underground material they received and collect money.⁸⁰

The Baum group also collaborated with the Joachim Group, organised by Heinz Joachim (1919-1942). Joachim, who studied clarinet at Berlin's Jewish Holländer Music School, became a forced labourer in 1940 in the 133rd department of the Siemens electro-motor works in Berlin-Spandau, in the Jewish department made up of some 500 workers, where he met Herbert Baum: he and his circle of about fifteen, largely young men and women then joined Baum's group.⁸¹

The group started to develop a confidence and emphasis on intervention given the apparent shift in forces: the slowing of the German offensive in December 1941 as German troops became bogged down around Moscow, Hitler's December 11 declaration of war on the US, the glimmers of discontent on the home front, the increasing percentage of foreign labourers, plus the rising level of deportation of Jews from Berlin: thousands in October 1941, about 10,000 by January 1942. This all fed into an exaggerated belief that Germany would soon be defeated by the Red Army and an over-optimism of the spirit.

In February 1942, they produced a new pamphlet written by Baum: *Organise the Mass Revolutionary Struggle against fascism and imperialist war*, arguing that the underground was on the verge of creating a mass movement which would transform the imperialist into a civil war. The fascist military power would soon be defeated by the Red Army. The inevitable victory of the Red Army would make the revolutionary struggles in Europe more visible. The war was lost for German finance capital, of whom Hitler was a tool. It called on the German working class to rise up and destroy capitalism. But Baum was underestimating the likely length of the war, with tragic consequences.⁸²

In April 1942, ten people carried out mass graffiti, painting: "No to Hitler's suicidal policies", on many walls, a very risky activity but one that increased the morale of the

⁸⁰ Sandvoß, *Neukölln*, p.177

⁸¹ https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/heinz-guenther-joachim

⁸² Cox, *Circle of Resistance*, p.110-4
Brothers, *Berlin Ghetto*, p.149-159

underground. In May 1942, Baum and Steinbrinck wrote and sent an open letter to the centre, one of the few documents to survive. In it, they called for increased activity and to prepare for Hitler's defeat in the summer. Remember that the Battle of Stalingrad is usually dated 23 August 1942 to 2 February 1943 so this analysis is seriously premature.

Two of the pamphlets were produced in early 1942, one to the housewife, discussing rations, another addressed to about 470 German doctors encouraging them to join the resistance and "to fight for the liberation of the German people from the fascist yoke". Another graffiti campaign was successfully organised with the slogan: "No to Hitler's suicidal policies," and if there was not time, just "No, No No".

Then, in mid-May 1942, Steinbrinck, Baum and a few others attempted to get hold of the necessary financial means for producing leaflets by attempting to expropriate a rich Jewish family by confiscating their possessions. It is worth pausing briefly over Werner Steinbrinck because he, more than other figures in the KPD, was involved in or even instigated guerrilla style activity against the Nazi regime. Born in 1917, to a working class family, he joined the Communist Youth Federation and, after 1933, participated in numerous underground KJVD cells and informal dissident circles, editing an underground newspaper for the KPD District, Berlin Southeast, of which Herbert Baum was also a member.⁸³ Arrested in 1936, but acquitted due to lack of evidence, Steinbrinck was called up to the Reich Labour Service in 1937, drafted into the *Wehrmacht* in 1939 and sent to the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute as a chemical technician.

Steinbrinck was a "committed Marxist" as he would defiantly attest to Gestapo interrogators. He first joined the resistance group around Herbert Baum in 1940 and from early 1941 was a part of the Franke-Werner Steinbrinck group, where he was one of those involved in the production of leaflets, along with Hilde Jadamowitz and Hans Mannaberg.

In mid May 1942 he also made the detonating material for the arson attack on the anti-Soviet antisemitic propaganda exhibition "The Soviet Paradise" in Berlin's Lustgarten on 18 May 1942.

Soviet Paradise Exhibition

One of the best known acts of resistance employing violent means, other than the actual attempts to kill Hitler, was made possible by Steinbrinck.

The *Sowjetparadies* (Soviet paradise) was an exhibition organised by Goebbels in Lustgarten Square, that purported to show the poverty and degradation of the Soviet

⁸³ Cox, *Circle of Resistance*, p.90

Union under the "Judeo-Bolshevik" regime.

The Baum group was not alone in their hatred of this exhibit. Heinz Joachim, Joachim Franke and Werner Steinbrinck's groups, all of whom Baum had contacts with, were also determined to undermine Goebbels's propaganda. It probably will remain in dispute as to exactly who took the decision and why. One participant said: "I believed that the destruction of the exhibition could serve as a sign to the workers, and awaken a spirit of resistance among the German people against fascism".⁸⁴

On Sunday, 17 May, Steinbrinck brought the materials he had procured from his workplace and, with some assistance, constructed a few rudimentary explosive devices. Eleven members of the Baum and Franke groups made their way to the Soviet Paradise in groups of one or two on the 18 May. Marianne Baum and Hilde Jadamowitz arrived first, passing themselves off as visitors to the exhibition. Then came the communist veteran, Walter Bernecker, and Franke carrying a briefcase containing the explosives. Herbert Baum, Sala Kochmann, Irene Walter, Suzanne Wesse, Gerd Meyer and Heinz Joachim all proceeded to the exhibition, evidence of their inexperience. Steinbrinck handed Baum one of the explosive devices. Steinbrinck and Franke tossed one of the explosives into a shack that was part of the exhibition and then fled. The other device held by Steinbrinck in a briefcase, began to smoke so he tossed it away into a drain. Then Baum's firebomb also ignited. Despite these difficulties, they succeeded in placing one firebomb, which burned the shack and a small part of the exhibition before fire-fighters arrived. But the exhibit opened as usual the next day. Most of the group were arrested a few days later, sentenced to death and executed in Berlin-Plötzensee.

Werner Steinbrinck was among this first group to be executed, as were Marianne Baum, the twenty-three year old musician Heinz Joachim and his wife, Marianne, Sala Kochmann, at thirty, one of the older members, Gerd Meyer, twenty-three, Suzanne Wesse, Hans-Georg Mannaberg and Hilde Jadamowitz. The next group to face the executioner included Heinz Birnbaum, a twenty-two-year-old lathe operator; Hella Hirsch, aged twenty-one, Marianne Joachim, twenty-one, Hilde Loewy, twenty, Hanni Meyer, twenty-two, Helmut Neumann, twenty-one; Heinz Rotholz, also twenty-one, Siegbert Rotholz, twenty-three, and Lothar Salinger, twenty-three. Charlotte Paechóshe was arrested in October 1942 after trying to get out, tried for high treason, but survived. Martin Kochmann and two others were executed. Several other members of the Baum group were killed in prison or sent to Auschwitz. Thirty-two members and supporters of the Baum group were executed or otherwise murdered over the next year and a half, mostly charged with high treason.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Cox, *Circle of Resistance*, p.128

Richard Holzer was the only member of Herbert Baum's inner circle to survive. He fled to Hungary where he had citizenship, but was deported as a Jewish forced labourer to the Ukraine and ended up in a Soviet camp for POWs. After the war, he joined the Hungarian Communist Party and later went to live in East Germany. That we know so much about this episode is in part because a few members pulled out, seeing the action as adventurist, and survived to tell the tale. We know so much about the actual executions because Emilio Buge, a prisoner trustee in the political section of the camp, kept a secret diary in which he describes what happened.

Nevertheless, the impact of their attempt on the Nazi leadership was immense. They particularly hated the attack because it revealed Jews as defiant. Himmler, Goebbels, Eichmann and Hitler in different forms all proclaimed "Death to the Jews". *Reichsfuhrer* Himmler personally ordered the shooting of Jewish hostages. On 28 and 29 May, the SS at Sachsenhausen murdered 250 Jews, 96 of them already inmates, the other 155 selected from a group of 500 Berlin Jews who had been specially arrested as hostages by the Gestapo on the 27 May, half of whom were immediately shot by the SS in Sachsenhausen on 28 May 1942. The remaining 250 were later liquidated in the same camp or were transferred to Auschwitz.⁸⁶

A final brief return to the Red Front whose members the SA and later also the SS and Gestapo hunted with a unique ferocity. Friedrich Schauer, despite numerous arrests, was one of the few survivors of this group and reported that "it was not useless that we fought" because it kept the SS and Gestapo from persecuting others, it distinguished Germany from Nazism, any resistance, shortened the war and saved human lives.⁸⁷

Report on the Size and Composition of the Anti-Nazi Opposition

I close this chapter by looking at a report which was finally published in 1999 but which was based on material gathered between 1945 and 1947 in Germany. The originality of this early material is such that it deserves its own separate section.⁸⁸ The

⁸⁵ Hoss, Christiane, Martin Schönfeld: *Plaques in Berlin. Places of memory of the persecuted of National Socialism* (The Active Museum of Fascism and Resistance in Berlin eV Vol 9)

⁸⁶ Morsch, Gunter, 2005, *Nord und Massenmord im Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen 1936-1945*, Berlin: Metropol Verlag. The severity of the reprisals can be likened to the response to the assassination of Heydrich, the head of Reich security, on the 26 May. One of the 155 was a distant uncle of mine, Max Flatauer.

Fritz Suhrer who was the First Camp officer and responsible for the selection of prisoners was convicted for some of his numerous crimes and hanged in 1950, although the shooting of these Jewish hostages played no part in his trial. A further twist to this terrible tale is that a letter from the Reich Association of Jews in Germany, established post -Nazi victory, reveals that they were consulted as to how the reprisals should be made known.

⁸⁷ Sandvoß 1999, *Mitte and Tiergarten*, Volume 8, p.144

⁸⁸ Gabriel Almond's introduction to the joint article with Wolfgang Krauss, *The Size and Composition of the Anti-Nazi Opposition*, states that it was found among the reports of the US Strategic Bombing Survey of the US Air Force in the US National Archives. The finder was Karl Heinz Reuband, who was researching German attitudes during Nazism. Reuband sent Almond a copy. Almond then ran a team who gathered supplementary material soon after the war had ended. The original report/chapters became Chapter 2 and 3 in *The Struggle for Democracy in Germany* by Almond,

report was based on the interviews of people who had been in the resistance plus Nazi official reports. It is especially valuable as this sort of information on the actions of the resistance was only likely to be seen as a positive in that very short window between the end of the Second World War and the outbreak of the Cold War when resistance from the left started to be portrayed as being equally bad as the Nazis. I cannot imagine this report being written from 1948 onwards.

Firstly, the report brings out that the political offences of German workers and foreign workers were grouped together by the Gestapo and other repressive agencies, reinforcing our position that foreign workers have to be seen as a part of the working class in Germany. Secondly, as already noted, the accusation of treason stretched from making jokes about the regime to sabotage. Arrests for what the Gestapo labelled communist activity or treachery ranged apparently from 400-500 per month in the first half of 1944, far higher than treachery in any other political grouping, and was going up month by month. These figures were based on individual acts of treachery such as joking, and not organised oppositional activity, which would have been higher.⁸⁹

In Hamburg, a city with a strong left tradition, there were a large number of anti-Nazi groups. Although this report does not distinguish different stages in the resistance, in the last spasm of the war, an Antifascist German Committee was established, including 700 communists, and others, 200 of whom were organised into *Hundertschaften* (military units), which possessed stolen aircraft guns, machine guns, rifles and pistols. There were anti-Nazi cells in the *Deutsche Werke*, the largest shipyard on the continent throughout the war, where there was a nucleus of 36 KPD activists, with a larger group of sympathisers, In the *Blohm und Voss* shipyard, some 250-300 workers were organised into anti-Nazi groups. In *Menck und Hambrock*, manufacturers of construction implements, there was a nucleus of 12 activists and a larger group of sympathisers. In the *Hamburger Ölwerke*, in 1944, there was a consolidated group of about 25 KPD and SPD comrades.⁹⁰

In Bremen, a city which is not discussed elsewhere, the KPD had about 200 activists, the SAP about 30-40. Some 30 communists worked at the aircraft plant *Focke Wulf und Weser Flugzeug*, at the shipyard *DeSchiMAG* about 100 antifascists, which, in 1944, formed a group: *Kampf gegen Faschismus*.

The Lübeck KPD in 1939 had 25-30 comrades organised into groups of 3, with

published in 1948 of which the article is a reprint. Gabriel Almond was one of the most influential political scientists in the USA. With US entry into the war, Almond led the Enemy Information Section of the Office of War Information, analysing enemy propaganda. After the war, Almond worked for the US Strategic Bombing Survey in post-war Germany.

⁸⁹ Almonds & Krauss, *The Size and Composition of the Anti-Nazi Opposition*, p.563

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.564

cells in munition plants *Deutsche Waffen und Munitionsfabrik* and the *Massenverpackung für Munition*. Shortly before the end of the war, the KPD had an organised group of some 225 armed German and foreign workers. The plan was to seize central points in *Lübeck* but in March, a month before the end of the war, the leaders were discovered and 20 were arrested.

The main activity of the resistance was the spreading of propaganda. At the end of December 1943, the NKFD produced a leaflet which encouraged its readers not to misunderstand the Allied bombing, not to forget it was the Nazi war criminals who were guilty and that Germany under the Nazis would lose. It recommended *Langsam arbeiten* (slower working) to help bring the war to a quicker end, a frequent demand by oppositional activists.⁹¹

Sabotage however was infrequent, though there are some reports of sabotage of U-boats and other vessels by German communists in the Hamburg and Bremen shipyards.⁹² The Gestapo in Hannover discovered frequent cases of sabotage in armaments plants for which they claimed Russian workers were primarily responsible. Foremen in the *Deutsche Werft* in Hamburg deliberately wasted steel and slowed down U boat production by not quickly passing on information on changes in design.

In a number of cases, oppositional groups put pressure on the authorities to yield towns without fighting; in one or two areas (not specified), armed uprisings were planned. A Leipzig leaflet, issued in April 1945 (as the allies were on the door-step) exhorted Germans not to defend their town and called for the mobilisation of all antifascist forces. "No resistance to the English and Americans! Resistance means death and destruction! Resisting soldiers should be disarmed". Another leaflet held the authorities responsible from any death or destruction resulting from resistance to the Allies in Leipzig. "We demand surrender of our city without resistance!" The Leipzig opposition leaders (not specified) claimed that in the workers' areas, no resistance was offered to the American troops and that the *Volkssturm* (that last minute German army of boys and old men) refused to fight.

In Hamburg, the *Antifa* planned an internal revolt should *Gauleiter* Kaufmann resist. Soldiers were prepared to mutiny. Five thousand copies of a leaflet were distributed in *Blohm und Voss* urging workers not to defend their town. A unit of 250 partly armed men, with the possibility of others joining, was formed at the shipyard, with the purpose of seizing buildings from the Nazis and threatened the industrialists with violence if they colluded with the Nazis. Notices to surrender the town were torn down by the SS, although this was now in the very last weeks of Nazi rule. A similar

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p.567

⁹² *Ibid*, p.71

pattern occurred in Halle where, in addition, representatives of the *Anti-National-Sozialistische Bewegung*, went to meet the American forces on the outskirts of the city to prevent any attack and seized the police and Nazi Party HQs, preventing the destruction of records. All government departments were under strict orders to destroy all documents as the Allies neared. The report states that they found charred records in Gestapo HQs, though it seems the Americans then did their utmost to conceal the source of any Gestapo material they did retrieve.⁹³

In Lübeck, in March 1944, the KPD opposition had a group of 225 armed German and foreign workers. They claimed to have had 180 rifles, 300 pistols, as well as explosives and hand grenades, but the leaders were arrested in the last days of the war.

The final section of the report considers the effect of Allied bombing on the opposition to the Nazi regime. It states in an understated sort of way that the Allied bombing in working class areas created "difficult problems of explanation for the oppositional leadership everywhere". In Cologne, the severity of the bombing created especial hostility towards the Allies, although it had been a town where the Nazis had "their weakest foothold" although the left was not strong there either. But the opposition was as a consequence not able to maintain its activity. Hamburg on the other hand had an "aggressive left wing tradition" and according to their own testimony, were able to utilise the opportunities presented by the air-raids.

This is a rare and significant report. Any representation of active resistance groups is open to criticism. There are few if any minutes or written records and many of those who died were not killed officially. Memorialisation is not necessarily a reliable source of information. There is a far greater dependence than normal on undocumented or/and controversial sources. But all the more reason for us to try to document and remember where we can.

⁹³ *Ibid*, pp.566, 569

Chapter 10 - Instructions from Beyond and Above: The Role of Moscow

Introduction

This chapter considers the role of the Comintern, not so much in its formal relationship with the KPD, but its attempts to influence and direct resistance group activity on the ground. To discuss the role of the Comintern in Germany and its influence on the KPD is to enter into ideologically charged waters.

As early as November 1931, Trotsky warned that the Comintern had adopted "the policy of the ostrich towards events in Germany."¹ Writing in February 1933 after Hitler became Chancellor, Trotsky noted that at last the Comintern had called on the KPD leaders to form an anti-Nazi alliance, a "new zigzag, sharper than all that preceded it".² The Comintern's strategy of the Popular Front was arguably developed with the German situation in mind. Trotsky recognised the KPD's lack of commitment to this new line and lamented, in March 1933, that the German working class movement had, partly in consequence, become dangerously decapitated and demoralised.³

Though it took them some years after the end of the war before showing much interest, East German historiography, on the other hand, emphasised and praised how the Comintern had supported the heroic communist anti-Nazi resistance, though in later years, the bourgeois members of the Popular Front also got a mention, thereby legitimising East Germany.

West German research, at least until the late 1970s, predominantly presented communists and nazis as twin evils and the role of the Comintern as a menace to democracy rather than an attempt to restore it.⁴ It generally saw members of the resistance associated with the Comintern as spies and communist *apparatchiks* who, moreover, brought various members of the resistance to the attention of the Gestapo. As already mentioned, as late as the mid-1990s, there was a heated dispute over the inclusion of the communist resistance in the German Resistance Memorial Centre, in part because of its association with the USSR and East Germany. Even today, the resistance is sometimes, falsely, presented as the Soviet government's poodle.

It has also been argued that the Comintern's policy towards the KPD was in

¹ Trotsky, Leon, 1931, *Germany, The Key to the International Situation*.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1931/311126.htm>

² Trotsky, Leon, 1933, *Before the Decision*.

³ Trotsky, Leon, 1933, *The Tragedy of the German Proletariat*.

⁴ Kershaw, Ian, 2015 *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems And Perspectives Of Interpretation*, London: Bloomsbury, p.218

varying degrees an extension of the USSR's foreign policy.⁵ The Soviet government's concern by 1933 was not to help bring about revolution in Germany but to protect the USSR by destabilising the Nazi regime, not the same thing at all. Stalin's priority was a pact with Britain against Germany, and therefore to get rid of those who called on workers who would see war as a step towards revolution. Of course, the British establishment accepted the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, the *Anschluss* in Austria in 1938 and Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia later that year.

The call to cease anti-Nazi activities because of the Hitler-Stalin pact in August 1939 was, the Comintern claimed, because the war was between rival imperialisms. An alternative view is that it had more to do with the Red Army occupying Eastern Poland in September to provide a protective flank for Soviet borders. Its purpose was certainly not aiding anti-Nazis in Germany, a few of whom condemned the pact, while others left the party. The SPD's loathing of this pact reinvigorated the Comintern's claim that the SPD operated as agents of French and British imperialism. Walter Ulbricht, leading the KPD in exile in Moscow, in an extraordinary statement, declared that "The main enemy in Germany is not Hitler but the antifascist opponents of this pact".⁶

Where exactly the KPD Committees in exile were based and when is unclear. Nearby Saarland was the very first base, closed down after the annexation by Germany. The leaders of the internal leadership still at liberty first moved to Paris, where a large number of the KPD underground leadership had sought exile, then Prague, then Paris again and finally in 1935 to Moscow. But Paris is a long way from Berlin and Moscow is even further.⁷

By 1936, neither the KPD leadership in exile nor the Comintern were sufficiently aware of the level of terror, of the passive acceptance of the Nazis or that the KPD-led resistance within the working class in Germany had largely been broken, with activity only continued by very small handfuls of people. There had been a few, largely unsuccessful, attempts by the KPD in exile and the Comintern to maintain some sort of contact with the resistance early on but the necessity to hide made contact from outside precarious.

There were also mixed responses to the shift towards the Popular Front strategy, which the Comintern accurately saw the KPD leadership as pursuing without great enthusiasm.⁸ Despite the Brussels Conference change in strategy in 1935, the Popular Front line was subsequently not universally trusted amongst non-communist anti-

⁵ Abendroth, *A Short History of the European Working Class*.

⁶ Palmier, Jean-Michel, 2017, *Weimar in Exile, The Antifascist Emigration in Europe and America*, London: Verso, p.362

⁷ *Ibid*, p.200

⁸ *Ibid*, p.302

Nazis either. The aim of the Berne Conference, in January 1939, was to galvanise an anti-Nazi class alliance and mass activity in order to bring down Hitler and to coordinate the underground. Wilhelm Pieck, the acting Party Chairman, who had come from Moscow, called for joint anti-Nazi work with the social democrats to speed Hitler's overthrow. But this position was not taken seriously by other resistance groupings, crucially by *SoPaDe*, the SPD exile organisation.⁹

One example of a KPD member who attempted to establish such contact was Arthur Emmerlich (aka Herbert Wolf). He had been active in the Youth KPD and was elected to its Central Committee in October 1930. In 1934, Emmerlich fled to Paris via Saarland where he became the Western European secretary of the RGO (the Red Unions). In January 1935, he went to Moscow and worked for the Comintern in the press department and then was involved in the Berne Conference (see above) as Herbert Wolf. He was sent to Berlin from Denmark in August 1940, hiding with the teachers Marion and Hans Löffler.¹⁰ Emmerlich and 17 others were then arrested. Marion Löffler described how Emmerlich did not betray his comrades, including her husband, under torture. He was executed in May 1942 in Plötzensee.¹¹

It is in its second phase, after the end of the Hitler-Stalin pact, that the hand of the Comintern becomes more visible. Theirs was a twin strategy: to aid the building of resistance organisations in Germany and to build a top-down Popular Front. The Nazis' defeat at Stalingrad marks the point that it was understood by many who had collaborated with or even been a part of the Nazi machine, that Germany was losing the war and that therefore it might be time to change horses. It fell to them, they believed, to save Germany from the Nazis. In July 1943, the National Committee for a Free Germany was established in Moscow, a broad antifascist front, originally based on recruiting German POWs held in the USSR.¹²

In the last months of the war, as Soviet troops gave their lives fighting their way through Germany, the Comintern parachuted in German partisans, whose purpose was to establish the USSR's sphere of influence, which was not the perspective of the resistance on the ground.¹³

The Red Orchestra

One of the groups that supposedly acted on behalf of the Comintern were the so-

⁹ *Ibid*, p.351

¹⁰ Woermann, *Resistance in Charlottenburg*, 1999, <https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/offers/publications/widerstand-berlin-1933-1945/> pp 78, 79

¹¹ Weber, Hermann, Herbst, Andreas, 2008 eds: "German Communists". *Biographisches Handbuch 1918 bis 1945*, Berlin: Dietz,

¹² Palmier, *Weimar in Exile*, p.616

¹³ Biddiscombe, Perry, 2004, "Freies Deutschland: Guerrilla Warfare in East Prussia, 1944-1945: A Contribution to the History of the German Resistance", *German Studies Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Feb., 2004), 51-54

called Red Orchestra (*Die Rote Kapelle*), a name bestowed by the Gestapo and sometimes referred to as the Schulz-Boysen/Arvid Harnack group. Unlike the working class groupings discussed earlier, some historical attention has been given to this group, not least casting its members as spies and traitors.

In fact, it included a variety of groups from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and not all in Germany, who worked essentially independently of each other and not under a single leadership.¹⁴ The Red Orchestra included up to ten factions, of which only one was the Boysen-Harnack grouping.¹⁵ Their main claim to fame is that some of them gave information to the USSR, with whom they were in erratic radio contact, an activity which, whether one defines it as espionage or resistance, seems understandable as they wanted Germany to loose.¹⁶ Again, there are very different interpretations of this group's activities. In the 1970s, East German historiography presented the Schulze-Boysen / Harnack group as evidence of Moscow KPD's successful Popular Front policy but in West Germany they were seen through the prism of Nazi Germany versus Stalinist Russia.

But for all that, contact with the Soviet Union was only a part of their diverse activities. They printed illegal leaflets, produced anti-Nazi flyers, helped Jews and foreign forced labourers and documented the crimes of the Nazi regime. They also made plans for a post-Nazi Germany. In 1942, they produced an anonymous information sheet, revealing how disastrously Germany troops were doing and calling for a popular uprising to rid Germany of the Nazis and put in its place a socialist or social-democratic government. They also were the contact point for a couple of disastrous parachute attempts.¹⁷

The role of the "National Committee for a Free Germany (NKFD)

The Soviets spotted early the importance of trying to turn German POWs; this became more pressing after the German army had been defeated at Stalingrad resulting in almost 3 million German POWs, according to Soviet records. During the battle of Stalingrad, the Red Army encouraged the German soldiers to desert. Masses of leaflets and passports were dropped explaining how to desert and including the promise that every German soldier would receive a friendly welcome. They called for

¹⁴ Harro Schulze Boysen (1909-1942), a journalist, became a part of the broader resistance. He first tried to develop an independent oppositional German youth movement. Drawn to left ideas though disillusioned with Stalinism, in 1933, he expected Hitler to be brought down by a general strike. In April 1933, the SS occupied his editorial offices and deported the staff, including him. To survive, in May, he joined the air force reserves and appears to have given friends going to fight in Spain and later others useful information.

¹⁵ Coppi, Hans 1996, *Die Rote Kapelle im Spannungsfeld von Widerstand und Nachrichtendienstlicher Tätigkeit*. Der Trepper-Report,

¹⁶ https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/arvid-harnack/

¹⁷ One after another, the Gestapo discovered who everybody was, although how that happened is disputed. The first eleven death sentences for treason were carried out by hanging on butcher hooks on December 22, 1943 and about another 70 people were subsequently executed.

an armistice and the opening of negotiations to end the war. The Red Army presented the USSR as a far safer country, with more food, than Germany.

In July 1943, the NKFD was founded in the POW camp, Krasnogorsk. By 12 November the National Committee included about ten leading German communists and 28 *Wehrmacht* POWs, including a number of generals and officers, in particular Friedrich von Paulus, the German commandant at Stalingrad and a big catch, whose anti-Nazi position was a result of understanding that Hitler was leading Germany to defeat. In his first of many speeches on *Free Germany* radio, he stated "For Germany, the war is lost. This is the position in which the country has found itself as a result of Adolf Hitler's leadership. Germany must renounce Hitler."¹⁸ Altogether ten of the 24 captured German generals came to support the Russian side, including Hans-Adolf von Arenstorff, who put out an appeal for Germany to reject Hitler, Otto Korfes who also exhorted the German troops to overthrow Hitler and Walther von Seydlitz-Kurbach, an early Nazi, second in command at Stalingrad, who, after capture, became President of the League of German Officers and then also sat on the National Committee and was involved in the attempt to subvert captured officers and troops, but was subsequently convicted by the Russians of war crimes. Apart from expediency, the generals' decision was generally based on an understanding that Stalingrad revealed the incapability of Germany's leaders to defend Germany.

The President of the Free Germany committee was the exiled Erich Weinert; the leadership included Wilhelm Pieck (who in 1938 had become the General Secretary of the Communist International in Moscow and was to be the first President of East Germany) and Walter Ulbricht. Ulbricht, who lived in the Soviet Union from 1937 to 1945, was involved in translating propaganda material into German, preparing broadcasts directed at the German troops, and interrogating captured German officers. After the war, he had a pivotal position in East German politics. In February 1943, following the surrender of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad, Ulbricht, Weinert and Pieck conducted a communist political rally in the centre of Stalingrad which many German POW were forced to attend.

Erich Weinert (1890-1953), a KPD member, fled to Switzerland in early 1933, ended up in the Soviet Union and then joined the International Brigades. Subsequently, he was interned in 1939 in the camp Saint Cyprien in Southern France, where he became very ill. He somehow returned to Moscow where he joined the NKFD committee. He broadcast on Moscow radio and his poetry was dropped behind German lines. He returned to East Germany in 1946 and died in 1953.

¹⁸ https://www.rbth.com/arts/history/2017/08/28/why-was-nazi-field-Maréchal-paulus-on-the-soviet-payroll_829512
https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/walther-von-seydlitz/

Max Emendörfer, a less well known German soldier, joined the NKFD committee. A member of the KPD and then the resistance, he apparently escaped the recruitment attempts of the Gestapo by volunteering for the Wehrmacht. Stationed on the Eastern front, he deserted to the Red Army in January 1942, became a member and Vice-President of the NKFD and worked as a propagandist towards the German prisoners. In August 1945, Emendörfer returned to Berlin, where, under the pretext of being a V-man (undercover agent) of the Gestapo, he entered Sachsenhausen camp. From 1947, he was imprisoned in the Soviet Union and in 1952, was sentenced to ten years in exile to Siberia. He was released to the GDR in 1956.

According to Fraenkel, 28 soldiers of the 388th Infantry Brigade went over to the Soviet lines, bringing their officer with them. Eight men from the 268th Artillery Regiment went over to the Red Army.¹⁹ But these were not usual occurrences.

Von Seydlitz's trajectory reveals how the political winds were blowing. A distinguished German General, in the thick of the battle at Stalingrad, he told his subordinate officers that they were free to decide for themselves whether to surrender. Von Paulus immediately relieved him of command. He then abandoned the German army with a group of other officers under German fire to surrender to the Red Army.²⁰ He became the President of the Soviet League of German Officers and then a member of the National Committee and was sent to POW camps to recruit other German officers and was also involved in producing propaganda for German POWs, some dropped over German lines. His idea of creating an anti-Nazi force of some 40,000 German POWs to be airlifted into Germany was never seriously considered. Stalin, who was suspicious of all Germans, never allowed any military formations to be established from German POWs. Von Seydlitz apparently stated that communism was the best hope for post-war Europe. He had an eye on being the Chief Commander of the armed forces in a post-Nazi Germany. But he was suspected of really having changed sides and many of the captured German officers loathed him. But his Russian handlers also suspected him and after the war, he was convicted by the Soviet Union of war crimes. For German POWs, supporting the National Committee could be seen as betrayal.

At its inaugural event, Weinert appealed to the POWs' nationalism: Germany would be saved by the fall of Hitler. The hall was decorated with the black white and red flags of the German Empire, not even the Weimar Republic. The committee, or so they were told, were the true Germans, rather than the bad, fascist Germans. There was a need for pragmatism, not socialist idealism. The stated goal of the NKFD was for the opening of peace negotiations and the deposing and punishment of the Nazi

¹⁹ Fraenkel, Heinrich, 1941, *Help us Germans to beat the Nazis*, London, Victor Gollanz, pp.108-9

²⁰ Beevor, Antony, 2007 *Stalingrad*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 43, 399, 424-426

leadership. The NKFD presented their case in terms of German civilians and soldiers placing the interests of the German nation above those of their Nazi leaders. Indeed, its very name is revealing: Germany needs to be freed from Hitler, not transformed into a socialist society. No appeal here to the German working class to rise up and overthrow the German military. The emphasis was entirely on a Popular Front.

The NKFD members focused on propaganda: they translated propaganda material into German, produced their own newspaper, and sent leaflets to German soldiers at the front and POWs in the Soviet camps. They also distributed the "25 articles to put an end to the war", speeches and comments by Wilhelm Pieck, Erich Weinert, Heinz Kessler and General von Seydlitz. Heinz Kessler had been drafted into the *Wehrmacht* in 1940 and defected to the Red Army three weeks after the German invasion of the USSR in July 1941 when he was sent on a spying mission. He was to become East Germany's hard-line defence minister. They prepared broadcasts directed at the POWs, and on occasion interrogated captured German officers. They appealed to the German soldiers to desert. They published a manifesto, which proclaimed that German workers have suffered terrible hardships because of Hitler, called on German soldiers, under the leadership of their generals, to overthrow Hitler and establish a "strong", "independent" and "national" government and finally, that legally acquired property would be safeguarded. NKFD members were attached to frontline Soviet units to interrogate German POWs and for propaganda purposes. They drew in about 350 German POWs whom they put to work to persuade the other POWs.²¹

For German POWs, supporting the National Committee could be seen as betrayal. But transcripts from discussions in Soviet POW camp No 95 show that the German POWs were disenchanted with the Nazi leadership. In the camp, the POWs could express themselves with a freedom not accorded to them when they were part of the German army, though one must be aware that they now had every reason to appear anti-Nazi. Given their circumstances, whilst there was praise of the USSR, there appeared to be a widespread view amongst the hundreds of participants, including the captured officers, that Hitler's government was barbaric, needed to be overthrown and that Hitler was leading Germany to ignominious defeat.²²

After Stalingrad, the KPD exiles like Pieck assumed greater authority: they favoured increasing parachutists and partisan activity to raise popular German anti-Nazi consciousness rather than the courting of captured German generals.²³ Surely the down-trodden German masses just needed that sort of encouragement?

²¹ Veyrier, Marcel, 1970, *La Wehrmacht Rouge*, Paris: Julliard, pp. 48-51,131

²² *Ibid*, pp.83-88.

²³ Biddiscombe, *Guerrilla Warfare in East Prussia*, pp.54-56

Jumping to their Deaths

After many years when the resistance worked without much external direction, the NKVD, in part working through its contacts in the Red Orchestra, attempted to send in couriers from the air to inform the resistance of the line and to find out what was going on on the ground.²⁴ These desperately brave attempts led to terrible disasters. The attempt to parachute people in increased dramatically in the last year of the war.

From 1942 on, East Prussia's proximity to parts of the USSR not occupied by the Germans made it a good drop point, especially on its frontiers and in its forests. There were many sightings reported for example in Memelwalde, East Prussia, now Selenodolje in Russia, very close to the Lithuanian border, where submachine-gun fire was heard; 87 parachutists altogether were sighted in 1944 near Lotken, East Prussia. Though there is no way of knowing exact numbers, they were at least 200, and probably far more parachute partisans, according to the local *Einsatzkommando*, tasked with smoking out the guerrillas.²⁵

The groups were made up almost exclusively of German POWs. But one must beware of seeing this as POWs turned resistance fighters as there is a strong suspicion that they did not volunteer because they disliked the Nazis. At least one lieutenant parachuted into the Elchwald killed the other four members of his team and subsequently reported to the German authorities. And while the espoused aim of the NKFD in 1944 was to aid the popular struggle for a post-Nazi, free Germany, the activity of these parachutists in reality received little local popular support.²⁶

Although many of the parachutists were killed during their descent, not helped by the red flares they used so they could see where they were and therefore could be seen, some of the guerrillas did succeed in landing and there were a number of local battles between them and the local foresters in which the partisans usually were shot. In Memelwalde, in early October 1944, a team of seven men who had been dropped into the area in late July were killed by German forest rangers. In early November 1944, battles broke out near Frisching and Nordenburg with an *Einsatzkommando* patrol, where both sides lost men. But however courageous and honourable such activities were, there is no evidence that they encouraged local active resistance, never mind resistance from within the working class movement. It rather suggests how difficult it is to build resistance from afar.

In May 1942, Erwin Panndorf, Willi Börner and Heinrich Koenen, as well as two KPD members, Erna Eifler (1908-1944) and Wilhelm Fellendorf (1903-1942/43)

²⁴ Coppi Jr., Hans, 1996, Dietrich Bracher, Karl; Schwarz, Hans-Peter; Möller, Horst (eds.). *Die „Rote Kapelle“ im Spannungsfeld von Widerstand und nachrichtendienstlicher Tätigkeit. Der Trepper-Report vom Juni 1943, Quarterly Books for Contemporary History.*

²⁵ Biddiscombe, *Guerrilla Warfare in East Prussia*, pp.47-8

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp.40-44

parachuted in with the aim of contacting, amongst others, Harro Schulze-Boysen of the Red Orchestra. They jumped over a forest near Osterode, then in East Prussia, now in Poland, but things did not go according to plan and they had to leave behind their radio and therefore their connection to Moscow. They were helped by various KPD comrades, including Felix and Käthe Tucholla, who were arrested and murdered in 1943. They believed they had safe houses with Frida Wesolek, who had worked for the Comintern and knew about radios, Klara Schabbel and Else Imme. All three women were subsequently executed. The police were on to the parachutists. On 15 October 1942, the Gestapo began a wave of arrests. Two days later, they arrested Bästlein at work which led to the destruction of the Bästlein-Jacob group in Hamburg. More than 100 of their then roughly 200 members were arrested and 60 sentenced to death.²⁷

Erwin Panndorf (1904-1942). Born in 1904, a locksmith, Panndorf was already involved as an adolescent in demonstrations against World War 1 and in 1920, in the suppression of the Kapp Putsch. In 1920, he joined the Communist Youth Association and the KPD and was very involved in the hiking and sports movement, including their more agitational activities. In 1924, Panndorf joined and became involved in Red Front activities. In 1930, Panndorf received a two-year employment contract as a locksmith in Moscow, and then, in 1936 became a commander in the International Brigades. He later fled to France, where he was imprisoned. Due to his Soviet citizenship, he was returned to Moscow in April, 1939, rather than extradited to Germany.

Else Imme collected money for persecuted fellow citizens and listened to Radio Moscow. In 1938/39, her flat was used for illegal meetings by the Schulz-Boysen group. On 18 October 1942 Imme was arrested and she was killed on 5 August 1943.

Klara Schabbel was a founding member of the KPD and the KJVD. After 1933, she worked at AEG-Werk in Hennigsdorf and came into contact there with the resistance. She supported foreign forced labourers and arranged contacts with the Schulz-Boysen, Jacob and Bästlein resistance network. She was also executed.

Moscow does not seem to have understood either how effective the Gestapo had been by 1943 in breaking up resistance groups or how dangerous it was to send in their agents. They tried to parachute in Käthe Niederkirchner and Theo Winter in autumn 1943 but both were instantly arrested. In early January 1944, Hermann Kramer and one other were dropped into Germany but Kramer was shot as he descended. His comrade, Eugen Nesper, went to friends, the Schotterbeck brothers, but, in a story worthy of a spy movie, somebody whom the brothers knew from their

²⁷ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.255-6,

days in the KPD and whom they contacted, Friedrich Mussgay, who had unbeknownst to them joined the Nazis, met with Nesper and turned him in.²⁸

At the end of 1944, the British RAF dropped the last agents, Otto Bach and Siegfried Schmidt, over Germany but both were arrested within days by the Gestapo and disappeared.

In the final months of the war, when the Red Army had taken over the direction of the parachutists and as the Soviet army advanced over East Prussia, some of the parachutists who had survived their jumps were deployed against the *Wehrmacht*, many dying in the process; a few also attempted to infiltrate and subvert their ranks, though this seems tactically inconsistent. But they did not much help the Soviet advance.²⁹

Fighting for the other side

There is a belief that a few German soldiers volunteered to fight for the Red Army rather than POWs who were volunteered. Franz Gold is one of this rare band.

Franz Gold

After erratic membership of the KPD, Gold was drafted into the *Wehrmacht* in September 1940. In September 1941, at the time of the greatest success of the *Wehrmacht*, he somehow joined the Red Army as a private. He then worked as a propagandist in German POW camps. In 1943 he was co-founder of the NKFD and Front Representative on the Western and Lithuanian Front. He was trained as a partisan and participated in August / September 1944 in the Slovak uprising as commander of a partisan unit, reaching Moravia and Bohemia.³⁰

In 1945/46, Gold was a territorial secretary of the KPD in Fulnek. In 1946 he moved to Dresden, became a member of the SED and personnel manager of the Soviet News Office (SNB) in Saxony. From 1948 he worked as director of the German Institute for Socioeconomic Problems, a camouflage organisation of the SNB. In 1949 he became Director at *Berliner Rundfunk* in East Berlin. In February 1950, he was hired by the Ministry of State Security and rose to the rank of inspector. In 1959 he was appointed Major General and in 1972 promoted to lieutenant general, but in January 1974, he was dismissed from the service and retired.

Hans Kohoutek

Hans Kohoutek was a rare example of a communist who, having been conscripted

²⁸ Tyas, Stephen, 2017, *SS-Major Horst Kopkow: From the Gestapo to British Intelligence*, Fonthill Media, UK,.

²⁹ Biddiscombe, *Guerrilla Warfare in East Prussia*, pp.25, 26, 36

³⁰ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Gold

into the *Wehrmacht*, managed to voluntarily cross lines to the Red Army and then, probably, was on the committee of the National Committee in Moscow. He was one of the Berlin Three, who I interviewed and who was fortunately also interviewed by the *Berliner Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes - Bund der Antifaschisten* (VVN, Berlin Association of Victims of the Nazi Regime - Association of Anti-Fascists), thus providing a rare level of detailed information.³¹

Somewhere in the USSR with the *Wehrmacht*, Kohoutek and his friend had seen Russian leaflets inviting German soldiers to cross and then spotted Soviet soldiers some distance away in the snow. They shouted out and the Soviet soldiers bellowed, "Come here!" They had to raise their hands and were taken by the Soviet soldiers to a barn in a village where they found other German soldiers. Then they had a three day march without food or drink through a bleak landscape without people. Later they were sent to a POW camp in Kiel.

There, he discovered two former German soldiers who were wearing the uniform of a Soviet officer. The one German officer asked him who was to blame for the war. Hans apparently answered "social democracy" (a perspective he still held when I interviewed him about seventy years later). The usual answer apparently was Hitler. The officer then took him to see a major whom Hans told that he was a member of the KPD. The major asked him whether he would take up arms against Hitler. Hans said yes.

Hans was then sent, along with some other POWs, to an antifascist Front school of the First Ukrainian Front at Shitomir. They were taught by two German antifascists and Soviet officers about economics and the politics of the Third International. After two to three weeks, when the training was finished, they got a Soviet uniform, though without rankings. They were taken to the 192nd Rifle Division, which belonged to the 3rd Army, which in turn was a part of the 1st Ukrainian Front. In June 1944, they took part in the Soviet army advance towards Berlin.

Hans, and other German POWs, did propaganda work, such as writing leaflets which were then dropped by plane. The leaflets asked German soldiers to resist Hitler. The slogan, coined by the National Committee for a Free Germany was "Weapons against Hitler!" He also used a megaphone/public address system, standing on a cart drawn by a horse, to address the German front. He was more important than he stated in the interviews, having been head of the Antifa Front School of the 1st Ukrainian Front and also a member of the National Committee of Free Germany. He marched with the 197th Rifle Division of the 3rd Guards Army via Krakow and Wroclaw and arrived in early May 1945 at Radebeul. He was with the Soviet unit till

³¹ »Fragt uns, wir sind die Letzten. « Berliner VVN-BdA.

the war ended. For Hans, I suspect, the Comintern and the National Committee shared the perspectives and interests of the German resistance.

Fritz Schmenkel

Fritz Schmenkel was one of the couple of hundred Germans to join the enemy, though most of their names are lost. Schmenkel's father, Paul Krause, a Communist, was murdered by the SA in 1932, which led to Schmenkel joining the Young Communists. Conscripted into the *Wehrmacht*, he defected and was imprisoned. What happened next is not clear but sent to fight in the USSR, he again defected and successfully approached the Soviet partisan unit "Death to fascism" in Belarus, with whom he fought for a couple of years.³² He taught the partisans how to handle a German MG-42 machine gun and by adopting the uniform of a Wehrmacht general, led the local German military unit into the partisans' trap. This helped the partisans capture entire units of *Wehrmacht* soldiers, as well as ammunition and food. It was decided he should concentrate on sabotage and was made vice commander of the sabotage and intelligence unit "Field". In December 1943, however, Schmenkel was ambushed and captured by the Germans. Sentenced to death by a German military court on 15 February 1944, he was executed by firing squad a week later. Finally, in 1964, he was awarded the title "Hero of the Soviet Union".

National Committee branches in Germany

A few local branches of the National Committee (NKFD) were set up in Germany. For example, in early 1944, Leipzig communists, Georg Schumann and Herbert Kresse formed a Free Germany committee to produce propaganda and commit sabotage, with a membership of about 300-400. They worked closely with forced labourers. By 1943, there were 125 police reservists locally, ready to put themselves at the disposal of the resistance. But 53 of the leaders of the local committee were arrested and executed.

Schumann was an experienced political figure who had been in many faction fights but also seems to have had links with Moscow. In November 1918, Schumann had led the Spartacist League in Leipzig, in 1919 was elected Political Leader of the KPD in the Leipzig District, in 1921 Political Leader of the KPD Halle-Merseburg District and he was a member of the local Prussian Parliament. In 1923, the Party Congress chose him for a position on the Party's Central Committee. He emigrated in 1925 to Moscow returning a year later. In 1927, he was chosen to be on the Central

³² The multi-ethnic character of the Belarus population was reflected in the composition of the partisans: not just Russians, some of whom had been with the Red Army, but Poles and Belarusians, including Jews, not all of whom always agreed. Smilovitsky, Leonid :*Jews and Poles Among Belarusian Partisans*
<https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/belarus/bel129.html>

Committee again, and he became political leader in West Saxony and, in 1928, a Member of the *Reichstag*.³³

In Düsseldorf, a Committee to Struggle against Fascism was set up in May 1944, which had support mainly from foreign workers, who were gaining in confidence as it looked likely Germany was close to defeat and had made a few links with local resistance groups. Its programme was extraordinary: everything from sabotage, procuring weapons, creating partisan units to working with the resistance groups and the Allies. In Nuremberg, a Committee of the Red Flag was set up. There were also committees set up in Cologne and in Hamburg.

Kreisau Circle

There was a connection between the National Committee and the small Kreisau circle, led by Karl Heinz Schnibbe, with about twenty active members and twenty sympathisers, including clergy, economic experts, aristocrats and diplomats: not a working class group.³⁴

Helmuth von Moltke is a figure who reveals some of the contradictory allegiances possible during Nazism. After the outbreak of war, he worked at the International Law Department of the German Intelligence Service, where he hoped he could influence the *Wehrmacht* and on occasion fed information to the British. Von Moltke was arrested on 19 January 1944 in connection with the purges of resistance elements within the *Abwehr*, so before the attempt on Hitler's life. But he was sentenced to death in the trials following that attempt and was executed in the Plötzense prison in Berlin in January 1945. Although not playing such a leading role, less attention has been given to Countess Freya von Moltke, his wife, who, in her own right, hosted anti-Nazi pro-democratic gatherings at the family estate and survived.

In 1942 and 1943, the circle planned for a social democratic, humanist and European Germany after the end of the Third Reich. Carlo Mierendorff, a militant anti-Nazi social democrat and a member of the circle, proposed a broad-based popular movement, *Socialist Action*, to depose the Nazis to include social democrats, the military resistance, as well as the KPD.³⁵ Carlo Mierendorff (1897-1943) was elected to the Reichstag in 1930. Even before 1933 he was a bitter opponent of the Nazis. He was arrested in early 1933 and tortured in concentration camps. After his release, in 1938, he became very involved in the Kreisau Circle. He was killed in an allied bombing raid.

Ferdinand Thomas (1913-1944), a communist student, acted as an intermediary

³³ Veyrier, *La Wehrmacht Rouge*, pp.218-9

³⁴ https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helmuth_James_von_Moltke

³⁵ https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/carlo-mierendorff/

between the social democrats and members of the National Committee. A meeting took place on the 22 June 1944 including Adolf Reichwein and Julius Leber representing the SPD, and Anton Saeklow and Franz Jacob, representing the KPD; a small section of Germany's upper strata joined forces with the social democrats, when German defeat was certain, to secure their positions in a post-Nazi state.³⁶

But the third KPD member at the meeting, Ernst Rambow, was a Gestapo agent.³⁷ Rambow was a KPD activist and became employed as a party official at the Central Committee of the KPD in the intelligence section. Arrested in February 1933, he became a protected prisoner and was soon released. Rearrested, he was re-released in 1940 and returned to his job of shoemaker in a repair shop but he had been recruited by the Gestapo as a spy. Rambow is said to have betrayed 280 resistance fighters. After the end of the war, he was exposed as an informer of the Gestapo, arrested at the end of July 1945, sentenced to death by a Soviet military court and executed on 12 November 1945.

Members of the Circle were arrested following the attempt on Hitler's life on 20 July 1944 for high treason and killed on 20 November 1944.

Wilhelm Knöchel

Wilhelm Knöchel was one amongst those who worked tirelessly in the underground after 1933 but what distinguishes him were his more effective ties with Moscow, though these were not always harmonious. Knöchel, a pit mechanic, joined the SPD, then the KPD and became a key figure in the underground. Although he had fled to Amsterdam, where he was based in 1935, he and Willy Seng built up a loose network of some 33 contacts in the mines around the Saar, issuing a monthly paper, *Mineworkers' Information*, focusing on anti-Nazi propaganda but also on bread and butter issues. Soon after the Brussels Conference of 1935, he started to cooperate with social democratic trade unionists in the Mineworkers Union. He combined the function of being the joint leader of the German section of the International Mineworkers Union with being the KPD's sector leader for western Germany.

Because Knöchel and the others round him were aware of ordinary German concerns, their propaganda did not share the Party line, instead emphasising the importance of standing up for Germany at whatever cost.³⁸ Even in 1935, at the Brussels Conference, where he was elected to the Central Committee, he argued strongly that the Party leadership needed to abide by the new Popular Front line, rather than acting against it. In a report to Moscow in 1942, Knöchel stated that the

³⁶ Abendroth, *Ein Leben in der Arbeiterbewegung*, pp.125

³⁷ <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/wer-war-wer-in-der-ddr-#63;-1424.html?ID=4933>

³⁸ Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, p.251-2

German working class had become fragmented and had lost its habits of solidarity: most Germans preferred the Nazis to the Red Army; the Moscow line overestimated the extent of anti-Nazi opposition.³⁹

The Party leadership in Moscow instructed Knöchel to try to establish an operational leadership and group in Berlin. Knöchel had been sending in comrades to build contacts, including with Uhrig. In January 1942, he finally arrived in Berlin and set about carefully establishing contacts with existing groups and encouraging their activity. He also had a line of communication through comrades plus a Comintern agent in Amsterdam and thus to Moscow. His little group published the *Patriotic Stormtrooper* and *The Peacefighter* which claimed the war was all but lost and that it was time for the German workers to rise up, the Party leadership line.

On 30 January 1943, Knöchel and others were arrested by the Gestapo, delighted at such a big catch, a serious defeat for the development of a central KPD leadership in Germany. Since November 1942, the Gestapo had been gradually uncovering Knöchel's instructor network in the Ruhr and the Rhineland. What remained afterwards in Berlin were the autonomous groups; the communist resistance in Hamburg had also been seriously affected by the breaking of the Bästlein-Jacob group.⁴⁰ The one attempt to direct the setting up of a resistance group under the directions of the KPD leadership in Moscow failed. On 12 June 1944, Knöchel and many of his group were sentenced to death. Knöchel was executed on 24 July.

Conclusion

Unlike much of occupied Europe, in Germany in the last years of the war, the revolutionary/working class resistance movement was all but smashed, except for a very few brave individuals and groups who had little influence. There remains the question as to how far the Comintern contributed to Nazism's demise. Did the Comintern in their attempts to inform and activate different groups of Germans help shorten the existence of the Nazi state? Did they even contribute to maintaining an effective internal resistance within Germany? Were its activities more in support of or detrimental to the anti-Nazi resistance on the ground? Or was that never really their main concern? Was it a substitute for a resistance without a people? Or was it rather more concerned with pursuing the interests of the Russian state?

³⁹ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.164

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp.256-7

Chapter 11 - Foreign Forced Labourers, POWs and Prisoners

A significant minority of workers in Nazi Germany, particularly during the war, were not German born. The German imperialist advance eastwards (*Lebensraum*: space for living) provided the German economy with an abundant source of exploitable unfree labour, as well as causing the death and dislocation of millions of people.

The Nazis categorised forced foreign workers as "voluntary recruits". The official Nazi records for the late summer of 1944 listed 7.6 million foreign civilian workers and POWs in the Greater German Reich. Although a vast underestimate, this still represents roughly a quarter of all registered workers in the German Reich at that point. The number of concentration camp prisoners used for forced labour is inestimable. But in view of the high mortality rate of such workers, between 1939 and 1945, altogether 10 to 12 million non-German forced labourers, excluding concentration camp labour, from 26 countries, worked in Germany. The figure may be as high as 14 million, including 4 million POWs.¹ Depending on the source, between 25% and 40% of all German employees are understood to have been POWs or foreign workers: 46% of all agricultural workers, almost 40% in industry, including a third of the workers in mining, the metal, chemical and construction industries and about 50% in the specialised armament industry. In some individual companies, the percentage of unskilled labour was up to 80% to 90%.² Foreign workers had become an essential part of the German economy and a part of the German working class.³

Nazi policy towards the use of the *Untermensch* and foreign labour only developed in stages. Before the war, the Nazis had no plans to employ foreign civilian workers and POWs.⁴ Indeed, Hitler strongly opposed the use of foreign labour in strategic industries. Hitler and others did not want to employ "animals", especially not in their strategic industries. The deployment of Slavs was a violation of the racial principles of Nazism. The Nazis believed that they would win quickly and the need for foreign labour would soon be over. Instead, German troops became stalled at Stalingrad in 1942. From then, it was a war of attrition. More men needed to be conscripted and were killed, so the need for foreign labour increased. Economic need trumped ideology and foreign forced labour became the backbone of the German war

¹ Billstein, Reinhold; Karola Fings; Anita Kugler; Nicholas Levis, 2004, *Working for the Enemy. Ford, General Motors and Forced Labor in Germany during the Second World War*, Berghahn Books.

² Herbert, Ulrich, 1993, "Labour and Extermination: Economic Interest and the Primacy of Weltanschauung in National Socialism" in *Past and Present*, No 138 February, pp.80-81.

³ Herbert, Ulrich, 1997, *The Army of Millions of the Modern Slave State: Deported, used, forgotten: Who were the forced workers of the Third Reich, and what fate awaited them?*

https://web.archive.org/web/20110604024311/http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/genocide/slave_labour13.

⁴ Herbert, *Labour and Extermination*, pp.145-6.

economy.⁵

A key element of Hitler's policy of imperialist occupation became obtaining workers. Germany's march eastwards provided apparently endless free, unpaid labour, so it mattered not if they died of starvation and hard work. But as the German advance was stymied and then the Sixth Army was encircled at Stalingrad, so the availability of free labour declined. Himmler turned to slave labour from the camps.⁶

Where did the foreign workers come from?

In an early sign of what was to come, when Germany occupied first Austria, then Czechoslovakia, they were able to obtain enough workers, temporarily resolving their labour crisis. Then, when that was not enough, the Nazi government made agreements which resulted in roughly 37,000 Italians as well as Yugoslavs, Hungarians, Bulgarians and Dutch arriving to work in agriculture.

Voices were raised about the threat to the purity of German blood by "alien stock", although Austrians and Sudeten Germans fitted the bill for purity. A rift appeared between private industry and Himmler and the SS, even though much private industry depended on the state. The mining industry in the Ruhr, for example, needed foreign labour. Göring squirmed but agreed that it was permissible for sub-human Russians to dig dirt, as long as they got nowhere near the armaments industry. A change of strategy was called for.

Although much of the Party leadership was against the use of Eastern sub-human labour, Himmler resolved the tension between economic necessity and ideological imperative by not only removing the ban on the employment of Eastern prisoners and POWs, but also introducing highly repressive regulations. Even when supposedly volunteers, the workers were to receive less wages, work longer hours, kept separate from German workers and the German public, and had to wear a badge on their clothing. Any foreign workers guilty of "refusal to work" were to be placed in protective custody.⁷ Sexual contact with German women was to be punished by public execution.

After Germany occupied Polish territory, it was the turn of the Poles to labour in Germany, though it is impossible to determine the exact numbers. Up till May 1940, more than one million Polish workers, about half, young women, were brought to Germany largely through coercion and mostly put to work in agriculture. After occupation, Polish young unemployed workers were supposed to register and when that did not work well, measures of compulsion were increasingly introduced:

⁵ Herbert, *Labour and Extermination*, p. 180-188

⁶ *Ibid*, p.151; Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.420

⁷ Herbert, *The Army of Millions of the Modern Slave State*, pp.128-130

cinemas and schools were cordoned off, raids were organised in towns and there were reprisals against the inhabitants of villages where inhabitants liable to conscription had disappeared. The Poles occupied the lowest rung in a racialised class society and were signed as such: they had to wear a P on their clothing. Any contact with Germans was strictly forbidden, especially with women: apparently there were numerous executions of Polish workers accused of having sex with German women. But by May 1940 it had become apparent that the conscription of Poles could not satisfy the labour needs of the German economy.

In the summer of 1940, after the occupation of France, French workers were the next to be dragooned, although the French were never defined as sub-human unlike Eastern workers. French forced labourers were the only nationality to have been required to serve by the laws of their own state rather than by German orders. The *Service du travail obligatoire* (STO) presided over their forced enlistment and deportation: 600,000 to 650,000 French workers were sent to Germany between June 1942 and July 1944. France was the third largest forced labour provider, after the USSR and Poland, and provided the largest number of skilled workers.

In addition, about 1.2 million French POWs were brought to Germany as workers, mostly employed in agriculture rather than industry and categorised as civilian workers. The German government promised the Vichy government that for every three French workers sent, it would release one French POW.

As many as two million French deportees returned to France after the end of the war. Roughly half were POWs or forced labourers, the second largest group were the labour deportees, most of whom the Vichy government had drafted for the *Service du travail obligatoire* (STO) in Germany, and the final portion were those who had ended up in German camps either because of their Jewish ancestry or for suspected resistance activity.⁸

Often forgotten, are the Italians who worked in Germany. Although Italy is now understood to be part of Western Europe, for the Nazis, Italians were inferior beings, on the same level as Soviet workers. Between 1939 and 1945, a total of approximately 960,000 Italian civilian workers were employed in Germany.⁹ Just between December 1940 and January 1941, the number of Italian workers in Germany went up from about 50,000 to about 250,000. In March 1942, I.G. Farben concluded a contract directly with a consortium of 40 Italian firms from the National Fascist Federation of Building Contractors (*Federazione Nazionale Fascista dei Costruttori edili e imprenditori grandi*) to supply 8635 mainly skilled construction workers, theoretically not forced, for the construction of sites at I.G. Farben and

⁸ Quinn, James, 2007, *Shared Sacrifice and the Return of the French Deportees in 1945*, University of Kansas.

⁹ http://www.wollheim-memorial.de/en/italienische_fremdarbeiter_bei_ig_auschwitz

Auschwitz. They were however not allowed to leave Germany.

I.G. Farben was one of the conglomerates which fed money into the early Nazi machine and benefited from its contracts. The gas used for the T4 programme between 1940 and 1941 (killing 70,273 people) was especially designed and supplied by I.G. Farben, who also cooperated in carrying out medical experiments and the testing of new medicines on human beings. At the Bavarian Anstalt Günzburg, I.G. Farben established their own test laboratory. A branch of I.G. Farben notoriously was set up near Auschwitz to make use of their slave labour.

The rules in the work camps where these volunteers were forcibly kept were savage: in the case of disobedience, ruthless use of force was sanctioned, including firearms, corporal punishment or confinement for up to three days. If a worker attempted to flee, they were sent to a concentration camp. The death penalty was applied in the case of capital offences, political crimes or sexual relations with Germans. Conditions in the camps were horrific. The level of plant based casualties for people from the Soviet Union or Poland was more than twice that for German workers, although in an exception to this, German women were more severely punished than Eastern women.¹⁰

There were also 600,000 Italian POWs who had refused to fight for the Germans and who the Germans had picked up between early 1943 and May 1945. When the Nazis took over Italy, many were put to work in arms factories.¹¹

Soviet workers and POWs: destruction and death

The largest group of foreign workers in Germany were from the USSR: either supposed volunteers or Soviet POWs. The Nazis felt an especial hatred towards the Russians, especially the POWs but also for the workers: they were their historic enemy, Slavs, communists, and from 1942/43, the people who were vanquishing their army.

Altogether, there were about 5.7 million Soviet POWs in the camps during the war, of whom only about 1 million survived. About 3 million Soviet soldiers were captured after the June 1941 German attack of whom about 2 million were dead by the end of 1941, many of them executed. It is estimated that of the 5.7 million, 3.3 million died in captivity, a result of starvation, hard work and disease as well as deliberate killing in the camps.¹²

In August 1941, at Sachsenhausen, Theodor Eicke had announced the programme

¹⁰ Herbert, *The Army of Millions of the Modern Slave State*, p.135

¹¹ Herbert, *Labour and Extermination*, p.152

¹² Herbert, *The Army of Millions of the Modern Slave State*, p.143-4;
Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.259-61, 277

to murder Soviet POWs: Germany was the victim of this subhuman enemy; Hitler had approved. Thousands started to arrive at Sachsenhausen, where they were shot in small groups. Soon Soviet POWs were also being shot in Dachau and Flossenbürg. When there were local complaints about body parts being found, the SS switched to lethal injections. In Auschwitz, the first murders of about 2000 Soviet Commissars also occurred around August 1941, with the SS shooting its victims in the gravel pit outside block 11. Of the 10,000 Soviet POWs transported to Auschwitz in October 1941, only 945 were still alive by March 1942. The real figure for arrivals and deaths could well be higher as the SS were apt to shoot or gas Soviet POWs on arrival without recording the fact.¹³

But then, given the numbers who had to be dealt with, there was a switch in methods of murder: gas. The Soviet POWs were the first to have Zyklon B (previously used as an insecticide) tested on them in September 1941 in Mauthausen, as well as being gassed there in mobile gas vans. The Soviet POWs were also the first to be subject to large scale gassing in May 1942, about 5000 or more at Auschwitz. The mass extermination of Soviet POWs in 1941/42 turned hundreds of camp SS men into professional executioners.¹⁴

The contradiction between the employment of the Russians and their *Untermensch* status was manifested in their especially brutal treatment. Soviet POWs were on the one hand starved to the point they were not fit for work, but on the other hand expected to increase productivity. Soviet POW wages were roughly 20% of the wages for comparable German workers. Unsurprisingly, the average output was 37% of that of their German counterparts, making their employment frequently uneconomic, though there is evidence that as fewer and fewer German workers were available, conditions did slightly improve and so therefore did productivity. The Soviet camp inmates, at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, were the least cared for and tended to die. At the end of 1944, there were still some 600,000 Soviet camp prisoners, of whom 130,000 worked in construction under *Organisation Todt* and 230,000 in private industry.

Early in 1942, a decision was taken to employ Soviet civilian workers. As in Poland, there was forced recruitment from the USSR. Between 1942 and 1944, up to 3 million civilians were sent from the USSR to Germany: 50% female, 50% male. The average age was about 20, but many were therefore much younger. In 1942, entire villages were burned down as a reprisal if the ordered manpower was not made

¹³ Piper, Franciszek, "Auschwitz Concentration Camp, How it was used in the Nazi system of terror and genocide and in the economy of the Third Reich" in *The Holocaust and History. The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined*, eds Michael Berenbaum and Abraham Peck, Published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. Indiana University Press. pp.374-376.

¹⁴ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, pp.269-71

available.¹⁵

In an often forgotten detail, at least half of the near to 3 million civilian Soviet labourers were young women less than 20 years old on average, used especially in agriculture but also industry, particularly in armaments; the average forced labourer in Germany in 1943 was an 18 year-old woman from Kiev. Even though sections of the Nazi machine felt that German land should only be cultivated by the German people, in August 1944 there were almost 2 million foreign women employed, a third of all foreign workers, almost all from the East.¹⁶ The lower the status of the foreign labourers, the more women were employed but they also were seen as having the advantage of diverting the *Untermensch* from German women.¹⁷ But by the last year or so of the war, employing some German as well as foreign women became an economic necessity.

The contradictory policy towards the employment of Jews

Although much Jewish forced labour was German, many were from elsewhere; Nazi policy was divided towards the use of Jews during the war. Though Jews were not seen initially as a source of forced labour, labour shortages became so acute that this slowly started to take place, at first more from ghettos than the camps.

In early 1942, Jews still only made up fewer than 5000 of the 80,000 in the camps.¹⁸ In late March 1942, Heydrich, Eichmann and the SS were making successful preparations for the mass transportation of German Jews to the east. But Germany's defeats and the need for greater armament production were increasing and the need for more forced labour led to manhunts for Soviet workers, suspected partisans and those of "alien blood". Himmler, who was pushing for a doubling of forced labour, was diverting Jews into the camps to be put to work. Given so few Soviet POWs were now available, Himmler, who was by then in charge of the concentration camp system, decided Jewish labour from the camps would have to replace them.¹⁹

But Nazi policy was frequently fragmented, if not contradictory. At the same time, by the second half of 1942, Auschwitz and other camps were being turned into killing centres, largely now in the control of the SS. At this stage, it was still only Bergen-Belsen within Germany that held large numbers of Jewish prisoners. The SS targeted Jews, both women and men, regarded as fit to work, especially from Slovakia and

¹⁵ Herbert, *Labour and Extermination*, p.149-50

¹⁶ Herbert, Ulrich *A history of foreign labour in Germany 1880-1980*, trans Wiliam Templer, University of Michigan, US, 1990.

¹⁷ Herbert, Ulrich, 2000, *Forced Laborers in the "Third Reich": an overview*, <http://projekte.geschichte.uni-freiburg.de/herbert/uhpub/forcedlaborers.html>.

¹⁸ Wasserman *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.295. Wasserman's source here are SS statistics intercepted by British intelligence,.

¹⁹ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, pp.295, 420

France. Although not deliberately killed, few survived for long; terrible conditions, lethal but random violence and back breaking work finished them off. Of the 110,000 prisoners who arrived in the camps between June and November 1942, 80,000 were dead by November, about 9000 deliberately killed, the rest from illness exhaustion and injury.

Himmler now wished to speed up Jewish genocide and in July 1942, he recommended both the economic exploitation of Jewish KZ prisoners and their mass gassing.²⁰ The inconsistency towards Jews was in part resolved through the policy of annihilation through labour. Extermination and economics were two sides of the same coin.

German Industry's Exploitation of Foreign Labourers

The recruitment of millions of workers for forced labour was a cornerstone of the Nazi war economy. Yet the pattern of deployment in 1940 was very different from 1944. In 1940, while foreign civilian labour was in reality forced, it can nevertheless be seen as an extension of Weimar Germany's use of foreign seasonal labour. But without any significant resistance, for example from trade unions, Nazi labour practices became increasingly predicated on lethal, sharply hierarchical, racialised divisions.²¹

Millions of slave labourers were used by Thyssen, Krupp, I.G. Farben, Daimler Benz, Messerschmidt, Siemens, Volkswagen, Fordwerke (a subsidiary of Ford in the US) and Opel (a subsidiary of General Motors) amongst others, most of whose production was geared towards providing for the war economy.²²

Krupps started to use foreign labour, despite their racist objections, caught between the dwindling number of available German workers and increased demand for its products, in particular arms production after the invasion of the USSR. This made using labour from the East economically essential.²³ At the Krupp works in Essen in 1943, there were almost 3,700 Soviet POWs and 6,000 Soviet civilian workers, only exceeded by the numbers of French civilian workers. So desperate was the need for more labour that Lehmann, who was the deputy at Krupp, Essen, tried to get a transfer of all the French workers from French Krupp plants. In one of those random twists of fate, he finally ended up with 520 Jewish Hungarian women aged around 20, thus saving them from extermination.

Opel, manufacturing parts and engines for aircraft and Fordwerke, which also

²⁰ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, pp. 290,291,344

²¹ Herbert, *Forced Labourers in the "Third Reich"*, pp.190-1

²² Herbert, *The Army of Millions of the Modern Slave State*

²³ Herbert, *Labour and Extermination*, p.150-1

gained military contracts, both made extensive use of POWs. In 1943, about a third of the approximately 1000 workers at Ford were foreign, mostly POWs or Soviet civilians. Sabotage could and was punished by death. Many of the workers died anyway of maltreatment.²⁴

Daimler Benz, which had close ties with the Nazi regime and was one of the key armaments manufacturers, is one example of an industry which became increasingly dependent on foreign labour and where there was probably passive resistance, although ill-documented. In June 1942, there were 2500 Russian men and women workers, about 53% of the work force, rising to 67% in 1944. There were also about 500 mostly Western European POWs. From 1937, Daimler Benz increasingly produced and maintained items for war, such as aircraft engines, military components, the repair of military vehicles and trucks.²⁵

Messerschmitt was the major provider of fighter planes and, during the second half of the war, Messerschmitt relied heavily on slave labour to produce parts for the aircraft, which were assembled in an enormous underground tunnel system. The workers included prisoners at Gusen 1 and 2 and Mauthausen camps and 40,000 from Spain, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, France, Russia and Hungarian Jews.²⁶

So desperate were the employers for more labour, that in summer 1942, they put in an application for 400 Jews and later, in October 1944, they employed 1000 women from Ravensbrück concentration camp in the assembly hall, under the close supervision of the SS. The application to employ Jews was resisted by the SS, the decision makers, but management preferred the more productive Jewish labour to the Russians. They obtained their Jewish labour who were syphoned off from the rounding up process for the extermination camps but, in a horrible irony, they were released again once other workers had been trained up. Daimler Benz made quite different humanitarian claims after the war about their employment of Jews.²⁷

The DB605 engines that the Russian POWs were working on kept failing at the front, whether because the men were in such a terrible state that they were making mistakes or as a result of their deliberate action is unknown. Management, according to their internal records, used a carrot and stick approach to resistance, such as go-slows, through offering bonuses, which was apparently effective and getting rid of workers.²⁸

There were also problems with the Polish labourers. Earlier, in the summer of

²⁴ Billstein, Fings, Kugler, Levis, *Working for the Enemy*, p.145

²⁵ Gregor, Neil, 1998, *Daimler Benz in the Third Reich*, Yale University Press, NY, pp.120-3

²⁶ Buggeln, Marc, 2014, *Slave Labour in Nazi Concentration Camps*, Oxford: OUP

²⁷ Gregor, *Daimler Benz in the Third Reich*, pp.120-123, 218-222

²⁸ *Ibid*, pp.159-169, 46, 159-169.

1940, Jeckeln, a local head of the SS, met with representatives of the mining sector in the Ruhr district. The subject for discussion was the work performance of Poles employed in coal mining. They were showing a lack of interest, disinclination to work, lack of discipline and a tendency toward insubordination. Their performance tended to be as much as 35% less than that of German workers, whose performance was also progressively diminishing. Polish forced labourers were informed that anyone found to be negligent in work would be placed in forced detention camps and required to perform heavy labour in order to keep them focused on their anti-social behaviour. This had positive results for productivity.²⁹

Journalist, Ursula von Kardorff, an anti-Nazi and anti-communist, kept a diary, still seen as a telling account. She wrote in 1944 of how she estimated 12 million in armaments factories were foreigners, how they had become essential to the war economy and how well organised they were, supplied with arms and radios by the resistance.³⁰

The Demand for Camp Labour: Annihilation through Work

The Nazis did not put KZ inmates to work in the war economy in the first years of the war. The main purpose of the camps remained broadly political. As Nazi confidence in victory dwindled, so their resolve to stamp out any whiff of political opposition had grown. From 1942 onwards, Hitler became obsessed by the threat of internal collapse in Germany as he believed had happened in 1918. The concentration camps were, as Hitler saw it, his most powerful weapon against an uprising.³¹

Some of the first prisoners in Auschwitz, in 1940, were 8000 Poles, the great majority of whom were there because of suspected resistance activities, though more of a nationalist than left-wing kind. Auschwitz was used to break the Polish resistance, long before it became a death camp.³²

But there was a shift. At the beginning of 1942, after the army had suffered a setback in the USSR and war production was stagnating, Himmler wanted to turn those in the camps into a labour resource under the control of the SS in a semi-autonomous economic enterprise. He reorganised the administration of the concentration camps so they were linked to SS Business Administration. In September 1942, Hitler agreed that the SS should develop its own internal economy, including loaning KZ inmates to private industry: originally the camps themselves were going to be used as production sites. From then on, hundreds of subcamps of the

²⁹ Dr. Detlef Korte, "Erziehung" ins Massengrab - Die Geschichte des Arbeitserziehungslagers Nordmark", Kiel-Russee 1944-1945, translated by Alexander van Gorp, https://www.documentatiegroep40-45.nl/dwangarbeid_oud/korte-2.htm

³⁰ Von Kardorff, Ursula, 1966, *Diary of a Nightmare, 1942 to 1945*, John Day Co

³¹ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.415.

³² Piper, *Franciszek Auschwitz Concentration Camp*, p.378

KZs were established next to coal mines, munitions and aircraft parts factories. Dachau prisoners, for example, were used by BMW to make aircraft motors near Munich and Sachsenhausen prisoners were used at the Heinkel works to make parts for the biggest German bomber, the Heinkel He177. Auschwitz was used to accommodate and exploit 100,000, primarily Soviet, POWs.³³

By December 1942, in their pursuit of labour, Müller, the head of the Gestapo, known as "Gestapo Müller", ordered mass transfers into the camps from police jails, targeting Soviet workers and others of "alien blood", who had transgressed against labour discipline and who would largely become a part of the "annihilation through work" programme. The numbers in the camps soared to match the demand for labour, particularly to construct armaments. Of the approximately 20,000 people consequently transferred from the prisons to the camps, two thirds had been worked to death within four months.³⁴

The camps became the sites or provided labour for vital arms production, including anti-aircraft missiles. So great was the manpower shortage in 1941/42 that even Soviet prisoners were allowed to work in the armaments industry. The armaments industry, especially as it went into subterranean production, increasingly needed camp labour as other sources dried up. From late 1943/early 1944, much armaments production was moved to subterranean plants to protect it from bombings.³⁵

The production of armaments and aircraft employed more foreign labourers and camp prisoners than any other industry. At its height, one third of the workers in armaments were some kind of forced labourer. The production of armaments, which required tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands, of workers in three daily shifts, could only be carried out with concentration camp inmates, because only the SS retained work force reserves in such numbers. Death rates were phenomenally high.

Even Jews were so employed, including those held in concentration camps. The employment of Jews went against earlier Nazi decisions, but needs must. From October 1939, there was a requirement that German male Jews aged 14 to 60 work in specifically set-up forced labour camps. This was later extended to women. It was the duty of the Jewish councils to register and assign these workers. From then, there were about 20,000 male German Jewish forced labourers, used primarily for heavy unskilled labour: road construction, land improvement, canal building, dam construction and garbage dumps. By 1941, there were about 50,000 Jewish forced workers employed in armament factories, postponing their deportation. In the winter

³³ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, pp.392-409

³⁴ *Ibid*, pp.278-280, 420, 421

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp.445-452

of 1941/42, as part of the extermination through labour programme, Jewish forced labourers were taken to Auschwitz and to Lublin/Majdanek.³⁶

The Majdanek camp was started in October 1941 with the arrival of about 2,000 Soviet POWs. Virtually all were dead by February 1942. The SS then rounded up hundreds of Jewish forced labourers, many from Lublin, to finish construction of the camp. Later it was used as an extermination centre.

Then, in January 1943, the SS deported more than 57,000 Jews to Auschwitz to be used as labour, numbers not equalled till the murderous days of late 1944. Even in late 1944, just under 200,000 Jewish Hungarians were saved by being sent to work on large projects, including armaments.³⁷

Labour from the concentration camps became intrinsic to the continued functioning of the German war economy.

Resistance by forced labourers and POWs

The question of what comprises resistance becomes acute when considering foreign labourers who had almost no rights. Such was the level of tyranny, repression and brutality in the factories that go-slows or other forms of resistance at work were close to impossible. Shirking was usually as close as it got to collective resistance which is not the same as political resistance.³⁸ Absenteeism and lateness were seen as insubordination and severely punished, the culprit on occasions even sent to a camp if caught. The chances of collaboration between the German resistance and forced labourers was slight.

However, as the war progressed and the need for the foreign workers labour became ever more desperate, an informal sub-structure was sometimes able to develop amongst the foreign workers, often based, for the Eastern workers, around the need to get more food and, on occasion, to help others escape. There were occasional cases of go slows or refusing to work, sometimes with the collusion of German workers. This could take place on a mass scale and apparently was an issue for the bureaucracy which inevitably responded by mass punishment.³⁹

Workers from the West were more likely to be involved in obtaining documents in order to get home. These activities were almost all individual, rather than organised or a result of contact with any form of political resistance, but given the circumstances, this can be seen as an act of resistance.

³⁶ Herbert, *Labour and Extermination*, pp. 144-195

³⁷ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.456

³⁸ Herbert, *Labour and Extermination*, pp 330, 341

³⁹ Herbert, *Forced Laborers in the Third Reich*, pp.180-183

There are some small straws in the wind. Though one has to beware of generalising from one instance, minutes from the Phoenix works in Dortmund show that DAF warned the German employees that they were traitors if they supported the Russian workers. This suggests that such support existed or was seen as likely to exist. Not only did the Phoenix workers ignore this warning, but, in a situation of dire labour shortages, rations for the Russians were then improved.

Occasionally, workers escaped. As early as 1940/1941, Polish civilian conscripts in particular, but also a few Italian and French tried to escape and get home. The increasing number of escapes in the last two years of the war plus the individual acts, even if just of loafing at work, reveals the increasing inability of the Reich to maintain its authority in the camps and factories. Although only one indication of labour unrest amongst foreign workers, exhausted foreign workers tried to slow down the pace of production, always at the risk of punishment for idling or even sabotage. Because the source is frequently Gestapo records, it is not possible to know how far the accusation of sabotage is accurate.

Committing sabotage was a rare event and took phenomenal courage, especially by foreign workers and POWs. If the worker was discovered, it would mean being sent to a camp and probable death. But there were a few instances of sabotage, though as ever, remember these are Gestapo accounts: an Eastern lathe worker who welded together pipes incorrectly at a Severin camp, Soviet POWs cracking a plaster loader which shut down the plant for 2 weeks, and faulty tank production at Henschel and Meybach works, when the suspected workers were hanged from hooks in the place of work.⁴⁰

Yvon Thibaut, from Belgium, was drafted as forced labourer in Cologne. He was forced to sign up by the occupation authority in October 1942 or his brother or father would have been taken by force. He, other foreigner workers and the POWs committed sabotage in Fordwerke whenever possible, by, for example, throwing sand into the machines. He had a secret code about German soldiers going to France in letters to his father, who passed on this information to resistance groups. Thibaut attended secret meetings of French and Belgian Catholic activists. He was arrested in summer 1944, and sent to Buchenwald but survived.⁴¹

In Neumark, an employee hid essential parts of machinery, in Duisburg, the welding machine was short circuited, in Hamburg the dockers committed unspecified sabotage, in Düsseldorf, a tank was damaged and at the nearby Rheinmetall Works, a smelting furnace was wrecked. One French worker at Krupp refused a command to

⁴⁰ Herbert, *The Army of Millions of the Modern Slave State*, p.340

⁴¹ Ulrich, Axel, *Fight against Hitler. On political resistance against the Nazi regime in the Rhine-Main area*, <http://www.mainz1933-1945.de/fileadmin/Rhein Hessenportal/Teilnehmer/mainz, 1933-p.182-197, 208-210>

move some machinery because he was hungry and was reported to the Gestapo, a Polish worker was reported for unauthorised absence, another for working too slowly. As before, the issue is raised of what is meant by resistance and, as before, our emphasis is on group rather than individual activity, however brave that may have been.

The Gestapo resources were overwhelmingly directed towards disciplining foreign workers. Any form of indiscipline, including so-called slacking, was regarded as a political crime. The figures for Gestapo arrests because of foreigner non-cooperation at work are astonishing. Of the roughly 388,000 arrests by the Gestapo of foreigners for political offences in the first nine months of 1943, some 260,000, two-thirds of the total, was for breach of work, as defined by the Gestapo.⁴²

There was a very high percentage of arrests by the Gestapo in December 1941 for refusal to work by Germans and non-Germans. In Berlin, out of a total of 605 arrests, 345 were for refusal to work, of whom 158 were Germans, 81 Poles and 220 other, which presumably included Russians; in Breslau, out of a total of 635 arrests, 590 were arrested for refusal to work, of whom 473 were Poles; in Hamburg, where there were strong resistance groups, out of 448 arrests, 376 were arrested for refusal to work of whom 156 were German and 69 Poles; in Munich, out of 261 arrests, 244 were arrested for refusal to work, of whom 119 were Poles and 83 others.⁴³

One example of French POWs trying to support Russian POWs is given by Oskar Hippe. He witnessed French POWs managing to get a pail of food out of the canteen every day to feed the Russian POWs at Greifswald who were working on a pipeline to go under the sea.⁴⁴ In one instance, Czech foreign workers demanded better provisions.

The Nazi hierarchy seem to have been well aware of the danger of non-German anti-Nazi resistance and collaboration with German anti-Nazis. The greater the economic importance of the labour of the non-German workers, the greater was a rigid and repressive division enforced between German workers in positions of authority and non-German workers beneath. The German worker was encouraged to see himself as economically as well as racially superior.⁴⁵

Personal accounts suggest that German workers proposed to Italians that they work more slowly. Since many workers with social democratic or communist sympathies had been skilled, employers were rather more inclined to turn a blind eye to their politics and it was these workers who approached the Italians. DAF and the Gestapo

⁴² Herbert, *The Army of Millions of the Modern Slave State* p.336

⁴³ Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, p.129-135

⁴⁴ Hippe, *And Red is the Colour of my Flag*, p.181-2

⁴⁵ Herbert, *The Army of Millions of the Modern Slave State*, p.230

documents express alarm at this attitude of the employers.⁴⁶

Figures for arrests of Germans for contacts with Poles or POWs are not high, but one assumes they are the tip of the iceberg, that they are representative of a wider subterranean movement: Berlin: 4, Breslau: 14, Hamburg: 4, Munich 3. The highest numbers of arrests were in Karlsruhe: 32, and Weimar: 34, though it is impossible to know why or whether the people arrested were connected to the resistance.

As the Nazi state looked as if it might well be defeated from early 1944 onwards, so the foreign workers gained in confidence and made a few links with local resistance groups, usually under the umbrella of the National Committee, for example in Düsseldorf, and in Nuremberg, where a Committee of the Red Flag was set up. In Cologne, a Popular Front Committee, which drew in hundreds of foreign and German workers, was led by Englebert Brinker. They leafleted the Russian workers and POWs in Russian, thus informing them about the course of the war and also sheltered escaped forced labourers. At the Cologne *Klöckner-Humboldt-Deutz-Werke*, which had employed about 2000 foreign workers, sabotage was carried out in the engine plant and contact made with Russian forced labourers, whom they tried to get out. Brinker, along with his comrades, was killed by the Gestapo within months. At the same time, the police increased their assault on resistance activities by foreign workers: many tens of thousands were arrested in 1944 for breach of contract and often taken to concentration camps.

Can individual acts of a political nature represent a political resistance? In Krupps, a Dutch worker was reported for high treason for singing some communist songs, an Eastern woman worker was reported for painting the hammer and sickle on the side of a tank. On one or two occasions, workers raised the clenched fist.⁴⁷

The Soviet POWs Organise

The Gestapo especially feared resistance amongst the Eastern workers and the POWs. From late 1941, more than 600,000 Soviet POWs who survived imprisonment had become forced labourers, with approximately one third in armaments for firms such as Krupp. The stalemate and then defeats on the Eastern front in 1942/1943 opened the door a crack for the Soviet POW to consider the possibility of organising against the Nazis.

Based on Gestapo files, some Soviet antifascist POWs attempted to build genuine anti-Nazi resistance groups. The most important was the Fraternal Cooperation of Prisoners of War (*Brüderliche Zusammenarbeit der Kriegsgefangenen - BSW*),

⁴⁶ Bermani, Cesare, 1945, *At Work in Hitler's Germany: Stories and Memories of Italian Emigration*, New Culture.

⁴⁷ Herbert, *Labour and Extermination*. p.329

founded in early 1943, initially based in Munich, and made up of Soviet officers, trained in illegal methods of struggle. Starting from a small nucleus of captured Soviet officers, the BSW spread through many camps, especially in Southern Germany. They were joined by Josef Feldmann (real name Georg Fesenko), a Soviet officer, carrying secret Party assignments, who worked as an interpreter in the Schwarzseestrasse subcamp. They wished to draw in everybody, civilian and non-civilian, who worked in the camps and elsewhere. Although this is still at a point where the outcome of the war was not completely clear, their aims were: to arm all POWS and foreign workers, to commit sabotage, to have a mass uprising and have a violent overthrow of the Nazi regime from within, coupled with support for the Red Army and Western troops. By May 1943, they had established contacts in some other camps, and with some communists and antifascist resistance groups. While this indicates their awareness of the strategic importance of foreign labour as part of the German labour force, unfortunately, practice was not able to follow theory.⁴⁸

Although inevitably they were found out, they did help some prisoners escape, pressurised camp commandants to improve conditions in the camps, helped and carried out escapes, provided illegal papers, cared for the sick, organised food provisions, neutralised informers and as the war reached its chaotic end, were increasingly able to form links between the camps. And a mixture of escaped POWS and the transfer of POWs between camps meant similar committees came to be established in many camps, both drawing in Soviet POWs and Eastern workers. Between March and September 1944, there are reports of such groups from 38 cities, involving at least 2700 activists or arrested members. It even made links with Vienna, Innsbruck and Prague but especially in Munich.⁴⁹

Very few POWs or other forced labourers seem to have succeeded in making contact with the German resistance, but the Munich resistance group did. Led by metalworker Karl Zimmel, KPD, who was active from 1933 but, unusually, was not arrested, he was joined in 1942 by Georg Jahres and Hans Hutzemann, both KPD, in the formation of the Anti-Nazi German Peoples Front.⁵⁰ The group was aimed mainly at forced labourers and POWs, in particular with the Fraternal Cooperation of Prisoners of War. To counteract the charge of defeatism, punishable by the death sentence, they emphasised in one leaflet that even leading Nazis had doubts about Germany emerging victorious, and reminded readers of the crimes that the Nazi leadership would have to answer for. Many of its members



Karl Zimmel

⁴⁸ Herbert, *Labour and Extermination*, p.345-8

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 245,251; Herbert, *Forced Laborers in the "Third Reich"*, p.181-3

⁵⁰ https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/karl-zimmel/

have remained unknown to this day.

In autumn 1943, Gestapo informers led to the discovery of a total of 13 groups of the *Fraternal Cooperation of Prisoners of War* who had nearly 300 members in several forced labour camps. On 4 September 1944 alone, more than 90 members of the Fraternal Cooperation were executed in Dachau KZ by mass shooting. Hans Hutzelmann was sentenced to death and killed in Brandenburg-Görden on 15 January 1945.



Another group with contacts with Soviet POWs was the Leipzig group, led by Georg Schumann, a former KPD member of the *Reichstag*. Small cells were set up in 15 Leipzig factories. The communists and the Soviet forced labourers set up the International Antifascist Committee, but the Gestapo arrested about 100 of the leading figures. However, this sort of contact was unusual.⁵¹

One extraordinary Red Army soldier was Pavel Stenkin. In November 1942, he was one of the few Soviet POWs to escape from Auschwitz and survive. He rejoined the Red Army and marched with them into Berlin.⁵²

European Union

One group which is rarely heard of and which prioritised support for forced labourers and POWs was the *Europäische Union* (EU, European Union). Formed in 1939 in Berlin around Georg Groscurth and Robert Havemann, it had a membership at best of about fifty people, including forced labourers from Ukraine, Czechoslovakia and France. It embraced people of "high standing", some of whom had direct contact with high level Nazis: Georg Groscurth, who was close to the social democrats and a doctor, including to several leading Nazis, Paul Rentsch, a dentist, Herbert Richter, an architect with a sympathy for the KPD and Robert Havemann, a chemist. Robert Havemann, who had joined the KPD in 1932 and developed contacts with the Comintern, became a member of *Neu Beginnen* from 1933 to 1935.⁵³ Annaliese Groscurth (wife of Georg) was also a sympathiser and one of only two of the group to survive.⁵⁴

Their positions allowed them access to sometimes invaluable information and other services. The group's commitment was to a social democratic form of socialism. In 1943, they saw their priority to build for a new socialist unified Europe

⁵¹ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, p.281

⁵² PBS mini-series, 2005, *Auschwitz: Inside the Nazi State*.

⁵³ <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=5419419>

⁵⁴ European Union survivors were denied the reparations payments mandated by the 1949 German Restitution Laws and also had great difficulties receiving their pensions.

and saw its basis in the joint struggle with the forced labourers against the Nazi regime.

They were more concerned than many resistance groups with hiding and protecting Jews and others being hunted. They supplied them with false identification papers, food and information to save them from the camps. Walter Caro, categorised as Jewish, managed to escape transportation to the death camps by going underground. He worked with the Jewish passport forger and later Gestapo informer, Rolf Isaaksohn, selling forged passports to Georg Groscurth, who passed them on to Jews in hiding.⁵⁵

A doctor, Galina Romanowa, also met Groscurth. She had been deported to Germany on 1 July 1942, and made to work as a doctor in forced labour camps, firstly at Wildau, then Oranienburg from December 1942, where she built up contacts. Groscurth provided her with medicines and expert advice.⁵⁶ Under the pretence of medical consultations, Groscurth was her contact with the *Europäische Union*.



Galina Romanowa

Romanowa, born in the Ukraine, organised resistance amongst the Russian forced labourers and POWs. She and Groscurth used their contacts to help coordinate the resistance activities of French, Belgian, Czech and Ukrainian POWs.

The European Union wrote a number of leaflets, including calling for a united socialist Europe. For them socialism did not mean the eradication of the bourgeoisie but the elimination of private capitalist and imperialist interests. The high number of foreign workers to Germany had prepared the ground for a pan-European solution. They also tried to make contact with the Allies, but this attempt failed.



Georg Groscurth

Inevitably, the Gestapo found out about the European Union's activities. In particular, in 1942, they observed one of their members, Paul Hatschek, meeting two parachutists after they had landed. Arrested and tortured, he gave the Gestapo names, which led them onto their contacts with forced labourers. In 1943/44, after arrest, 15 were sentenced to death and 13 were executed, including Groscurth, Herbert Richter

⁵⁵ <https://www.stolpersteine-berlin.de/de/biografie/4418>

⁵⁶ https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/galina-fjodorowna-romanowa/; <https://www.ns-zwangsarbeit.de/en/forced-labour-in-the-daily-round/biographies/galina-romanowa/>

(also known as Richter-Luckian) and Rentsch. Galina Romanowa was arrested on 6 October 1943, sentenced to death on 27 April 1944 and killed on 3 November 1944 in Berlin-Plötzensee.

Havemann was eventually freed by the Red Army. After the war, he became head of administration in the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physical Chemistry and Electrochemistry in Berlin, but in 1948 he was dismissed from this position because of political pressure from the American authorities in West Berlin. He continued his scientific work in the institute until he was barred from his laboratory in January 1950.

He then became a professor of physical chemistry at the Humboldt University of Berlin. He became a member of the *Volkskammer* in 1950 and won one of the GDR's national prizes in 1959.

In 1963 he was expelled from the SED and dismissed from the University. He continued his work as a socialist critic and was placed under house arrest in 1976, at his home in the village of Grünheide until his death in 1982.



Robert Havemann

Chapter 12 - Resistance within the Camps¹

KPD prisoners and members of resistance groups usually provided the leadership of clandestine resistance groups formed in concentration camps. Though it is difficult to assess, such groups were rare and only affected a small number of prisoners. What is meant by resistance in such circumstances has to be very broad but any action took much courage: from keeping fellow prisoners alive to efforts to commit sabotage.

There is, unsurprisingly, a relative absence of first-hand testimonials as the knowledge of any attempts will usually have died with the resisters, but there is the occasional letter that was smuggled out, usually through the clandestine KPD organisation, but on very rare occasions, carried out by people who escaped.² A few later accounts by former prisoners exist, such as that by Hermann Langbein, but there is the danger of exaggeration, for example over the level solidarity in the camps.³

The underground organisation performed many everyday functions, including putting pressure on the guards and SS to improve rations and conditions, protecting each other, including at times, sharing scarce food, trying to maintain morale, staffing the infirmary and, in exceptional, circumstances, facilitating escape. They also tried to put pressure on informers. Doctors who killed thousands by injection would occasionally help the political prisoners. Since it was impossible to save most of the inmates, choices had to be made as to whom to try to rescue. This became extreme in the death camps. Belonging to the KPD could provide, at times, life saving, or at least life lengthening, support.

In such terrible circumstances, national differences could rapidly become lethal. But one side effect of KPD organisation in the camps is that though many of the other nationalities held there had good reason to hate the Germans, resistance activities by Germans to some extent broke down national animosities, although apparently the Russian POWs retained some hostility to the German prisoners. In Sachsenhausen, but also at times elsewhere, the lives of non-German prisoners were saved by members of the KPD underground.

The early camps were less savagely supervised than later camps and it is in these early camps, that German KPD members were especially active. After the outbreak of war, KPD prisoners provided the resistance core in Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen

¹ We are particularly grateful to Mike Jones for his extensive correspondence which has helped enlarge this chapter and clarify some issues.

² Langbein, Hermann, 1994, *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration camps 1938-1945. Against all hope*, Constable, London, Langbein makes the point, already made elsewhere here, that the East German later glorification of some KPD camp prisoners has to be treated with care.

³ *Ibid*, pp.71,75

and Dachau.⁴ Many KPD prisoners had developed toughness in street fights, had worked conspiratorially underground, understood comradeship and, of course, organisation and discipline. Bruno Heilig estimated that three quarters of the positions in Dachau were filled by communists and these "red" prisoners successfully took on the criminal, "green", prisoners. At Dora, some commandants actively preferred the reds who were more likely to possess useful skills or at least be able to easily develop them.⁵ Camps which had political prisoners in positions of authority were generally less abusive, better organised, encouraged a more positive attitude amongst prisoners and discouraged a pecking order based on nationality. At the same time, some KPD *kapos* were often thoroughly disliked and in a more difficult position to organise resistance illicitly.

A well-known example of resistance is from Buchenwald which, with about 250,000 inmates, had from early 1933 mainly been used for German political prisoners. This helped to create some sort of solidarity amongst the prisoners. There was an especially large contingent of KPD members: five to ten times as many as members of the SPD; the proportion of Jewish left wing prisoners was also disproportionately high. Ernst Thälmann, chair of the KPD, was killed here in August 1944.⁶ Also held here were Jehovah Witnesses, Roma, German military deserters and the so-called work-shy, categorised as "asocials", as well as, later, French, Polish and Czech POWs and foreign forced labourers. The camp and its sub-camps became a significant source of forced labour, mostly in armaments, construction and stone quarries.

Werner Scholem was a political prisoner in Buchenwald. From 1924 until 1928, he was a member of the *Reichstag*, where he was the constant target of antisemitic attacks. As a leading member of the Fischer-Maslow faction in the KPD, from which he was expelled in 1926. He then helped form the *Leninbund* but he soon left again. From early on, he argued for the importance of a united anti-right alliance, seeing the Nazis as a continuation of the counter-revolution of 1918/19. He remained unaffiliated while sympathising with Trotsky and the Left Opposition. He was shot in July 1940.⁷

After 1939, some of the political prisoners from the KPD and SPD, after a struggle, took over the different positions of *kapos* from the criminals. The early contest with the green prisoners resulted in many fatalities. The position and influence of the left

⁴ Ibid, p.77

⁵ Ibid, pp.27, 76

⁶ Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, 2004, ed, *Buchenwald Concentration Camp 1937-1945 - A Guide to the Permanent Historical Exhibition*, Wallstein Verlag, 66

⁷ Hoffrogge, Ralf and Norman Laporte, 2017, *Weimar Communism as a mass movement, 1918-1933*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp.101,156;

in Buchenwald was unusual, partly because so many leading members of the KPD were held here, partly because they emphasised their politics above their nationality. They used their position as *kapos* to develop a network, divided into national sections. This position gave them access to the work schedules, the infirmary, where they hid or swapped inmates, as well as work as guards. They also saw their task as to influence sympathisers in the struggle against the SS, to stop prisoners who exploited their positions, to help the sick and to ensure a fair distribution of food.⁸ For example, Herbert Weidlich, in charge of labour records, was ordered by the SS to list 2000 inmates for earthwork duties but managed to protect his comrades, as well as Jehovah Witnesses, by claiming them to be skilled. He had been an active anti-Nazi in Berlin, who fled to Czechoslovakia in 1933 where, in 1938/39, he was instructed by the KPD leadership with organising the evacuation of about 480 Germans who had fled there. Caught by the Gestapo, he ended up in Buchenwald. Because of his technical education, he was appointed deputy Kapo under Willi Seifert at the same time as being in a leadership role in the camp resistance. His especial concern was that Jewish prisoners were sent to better work. He survived.

The KPD cell imposed a party line, which was certainly not to everybody's advantage. Some prisoners, for example, did not want to work as *kapos* but could not break party discipline. Although a comparatively tiny number, some prisoners, especially if Soviet POWs or Jews, were hidden, otherwise disappeared or given extra rations. They also provided new identities for KPD members about to be executed.

One of the underground's special concerns were the children, hundreds of whose lives were saved, some of whom became well-known, such as Imre Kertesz, Stefan Jerzy Zweig and Elie Wiesel. One KPD kapo, Robert Siewert, had been a Spartacist and member of the KPD's Central Committee, then expelled, after which he became a leader of the KPDO. He became a leader of the clandestine organisation in Buchenwald, and convinced the SS to allow Polish children to be trained as much-needed bricklayers, thus saving them from death. They also changed prisoners' identities, for example, by substituting the old and terminally ill with the young and fit who were due to be sent to Auschwitz.⁹

The underground also used their administrative position to infiltrate the notorious Dora Mittelbau camp, a sub-camp of Buchenwald, established in the summer of 1943, where modern space technology was born and about 30,000 people died. The labour office was staffed by reds, who persuaded the SS to transfer Christian Beham

⁸ Langbein. *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration camps*, p85

⁹ Private correspondence from Mike Jones. Siewert was expelled from the KPD because of his opposition to the KPD's ultra-left line from 1929

and Jupp Gamisch there.¹⁰

Christian Beham, KPD, and Dresden KPD management team, was involved in the production and distribution of a number of KPD newspapers. In January 1933, he and others painted meter-high KPD slogans on the walls of houses, illegally and distributed leaflets. First arrested in 1933, he was released in 1934 and continued to be active in the resistance. Arrested again in 1937, in 1942, he was deported to Buchenwald where he was used by the SS as a camp elder at the same time as actively participating in the resistance. From there, he was sent to the Dora Mittelbau branch camp, where, from 1944, he was "part of the management of the illegal work of disrupting war production". Other comrades had refused the position. He was executed by the SS on 4 April 1945.

Albert Kuntz, who had also been sent into Dora in September 1943, was head of the underground KPD organisation there and placed in charge of camp construction. He built a resistance organisation which committed sabotage on the vital V-weapons produced and hidden there. A member of the USPD, then KPD, he became a KPD functionary, city councillor, chairperson of the local workers' gymnastics movement and a member of the KPD Central Committee which sent him to the International Lenin School in Moscow. In 1933, he was arrested and never released, ending up in Buchenwald. Here he set up an illegal KPD cell. He died during an interrogation in January 1945.¹¹

The inmates at Buchenwald concealed letters in medicines that were sent to Dora and those employed in the Dora infirmary concealed their messages under the bandages wrapped around corpses.¹² Many Russian or Polish slave labourers as well as mainly political prisoners from other European countries were sent to work in the terrible tunnels, dug by hand into the Hartz mountains where they were kept night and day.¹³ Between May 1944 and March 1945, there were the greatest number of executions here, of whom Russians were by far the greatest victims.¹⁴ The number of deaths of the 60,000 prisoners was very high. On 1 January 1944, the first three rockets were delivered, all of which suffered from serious production defects, a problem which continued but gradually reduced. Those discovered committing sabotage, about 200, were hanged on hooks in the underground galleries. In the two

¹⁰ Langbein, *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p27

¹¹ Sellier suggests he may well have been picked on because of his political links to foreign prisoners.

Sellier, Andre, 2003, *History of the Dora Camp: The Untold Story of the Nazi Slave Labor Camp That Secretly Manufactured V-2 Rockets* Published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Ivan Dee, pp.125, 126, 435, 436

¹² Langbein, *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.84

¹³ Sellier, *History of the Dora Camp*, pp.125, 126, 435, 436

¹⁴ Langbein, *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p., 67

last months of the war, the rate of hanging rose dramatically: to 30-50 a day.¹⁵

In July 1943, members of the KPD in Buchenwald established The International Camp Committee, held secretly in the infirmary, which planned for an armed insurrection, drawn from most of the nations represented there. Then in 1944, members from the SPD, the Christian Democrats and the KPD built a Popular Front Committee, led by Hermann Brill. Its leadership consisted of four Germans, of whom two were SPD, one was KPD and one Catholic.¹⁶

Hermann Brill, USPD, then SPD, a committed anti-Nazi, left the SPD in May 1933, scandalised by the party executive's passive attitude towards the Nazis. In 1934, he founded the *Deutsche Volksfront*, a resistance group, in Berlin and wrote a number of essays and leaflets. Arrested several times by the Gestapo, he ended up in Buchenwald in 1943 but survived.

The KPD organisation in the camp unusually established contact with KPD groups operating in Berlin, made possible through prisoners working outside. In February 1944, they organised the escape of several communists, including Herbert Tscape, a German veteran of the Spanish civil war, who seems to have survived.¹⁷ The purpose of the escape, according to the SS report, which has to be treated critically, was for the escapees to obtain and pass on details of the arms factory at Heinkel which employed inmates.¹⁸

In August 1944, the Gestapo delivered 37 French, Belgium and Canadian officers, mostly active in the French resistance, many of whom were almost immediately shot. The French approached the underground who stated they could not help because they had smuggled arms into the camp after the Gustloff works had been bombed and were already being investigated by the SS. Thus it was this new group who managed to save three of their group by isolating them in the typhus section with, it seems, the collaboration of the SS doctor. The choice of who the three should be was excruciating. Eugen, Kogon was catholic opponent of Nazism, who was arrested by the Gestapo in 1936, 1937 and again in 1938 when he was deported to Buchenwald, There he worked as a clerk for a camp doctor and was thus able to save the lives of many prisoners by exchanging their names for those of prisoners who had died of typhus. The camp doctor saved Kogon's life at the end of the war by arranging to hide him in a crate, then smuggling him out of Buchenwald.¹⁹

¹⁵ Many of the engineers and scientists, who had worked there, including von Braun, were later hired by the US government (and a few by the Soviet government). Thus Tom Lehrer's song: 'Werner von Braun'. Very few were charged in connection with their role in the camp.

¹⁶ German Resistance Memorial Centre

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.61

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp.65,66

¹⁹ Langbein, *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.207, quoting Kogon, Eugen, 1946, *Der SS Staat*.

It is easy to forget that some Jews (so defined by the Nazis) were unsure about left-wing resistance groupings but Wiesel emphasises that the camp underground made a point of not abandoning the Jews.²⁰ On the evening of 4 April 1945, Jewish prisoners were ordered to come forward and, having already removed the yellow star, were body searched by the SS. Though the details are not clear, the Camp Defence enabled many of them to break through the chain of guards.²¹

Year	Arrivals	Deceased
1937	2912	48
1938	20122	771
1939	9553	1235
1940	2525	1772
1941	5890	1522
1942	14111	2898
1943	42177	3516
1944	97866	8644
1945	43823	13056
Total	238980	33462

Buchenwald statistics

From November, 1944, members of the Wehrmacht condemned by the military courts for desertion etc were also sent here.

When the children at Buchenwald were being herded, starving, to evacuate the camp as the American troops approached, the resistance suddenly appeared, shooting and hurling grenades. A battle ensued, the SS fled and the resistance took charge of the camp.

The chance of survival if one was a member of the KPD was higher than average. When I was doing interviews for a different project, what emerged was that the KPD prisoners gave each other support. Members of the KPD would take positions of responsibility, for example in a dispensary, enabling the illicit transfer of medical supplies and also enabling a few prisoners to in effect be hidden there. This also occurred in Auschwitz. Other comrades got jobs as clerks which could give them access to information or became workers in the stores, giving them a limited and very risky access to food and supplies.

Sometimes, the prisoners were used as forced labour which provided a limited opportunity for communication. What Crome also emphasised was the importance of education and cultural classes for the young (about 100, aged 14-18), not so much to teach them as to provide solidarity. On one occasion, there was an attempted break-out which amazingly the comrades survived. In addition, the Communist functionaries regularly protected the Jews, many young, incarcerated there after the November 1938 pogrom.²²

It was in Sachenhausen that Bernhard Bästlein, Franz Jacob, Abshagen and Gustav Bruhn, whom we have already encountered organising the resistance, met up. Anton

²⁰ Wiesel, Elie, 1985, *Night*, Penguin, p.114

²¹ Langbein, *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps*, pp. 349, 350. This version of events is disputed. It seems a contingent of old Jews may have been offered up and were shot, but many were saved.

²² Paucker, 1979, "Problems of Jewish Resistance Historiography", in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book XXIV*, London, 37-57.

Saefkow, Franz Jacob, Bernhard Bästlein and Georg Schumann were also involved in the forging of papers in the camp. The Fuhlsbüttel KZ, built in 1933 near Hamburg, initially under the control of the SS (from 1936, under the Gestapo), held a large number of anti-Nazis. About 8,500 KPD members were arrested and imprisoned in Hamburg in 1933 and 1935, about 570 men and women from Altona and Hamburg were accused of having continued the banned organisation of the KPD, distributing flyers and other illegal printed matter, organising illegal meetings and forming resistance cells.²³ There was a tightly controlled KPD underground in the camp who were in contact with the outside world through farm workers until 1936. Surprisingly, Saeklow with other comrades organised regular open political discussions and tobacco for comrades in isolation. According to one source, some of the guards had been members of the SPD (and occasionally the KPD) and the prisoners could hold the threat of betraying them to the Gestapo to get them to look the other way. But the network was discovered.

Auschwitz is today associated with being a death camp and we forget it was first used as an ordinary KZ, primarily for anti-Nazi Polish prisoners who became the first leaders of the resistance in the camps. They gained positions in the infirmary and administrative offices and in November 1942 were therefore able to make contact with the Polish underground. They badly needed medical supplies which the underground tried, without too much success, to then smuggle in. The resistance in Poland was far more organised and effective, compared to Germany, in making contacts with resistance in the camps, especially when, as in Auschwitz, the link was Pole to Pole. In one extraordinary story, Lieutenant Witold Pilecki let himself be arrested in order to join the prisoner underground.²⁴

Much later, at Auschwitz/Birkenau, there was an underground network of Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners, including nineteen Soviet POWs who had been transferred from Majdanek and who encouraged members of the *Sonderkommando*²⁵ to revolt. We know about how extensive the resistance network was partly because Salmen Lewental, one of the *Sonderkommando* leaders and a Pole, kept a detailed written record in a small notebook which was buried in a jar under the earth, found in 1962. About 60% had decomposed. He survived to give an account and find his records.²⁶

The *Sonderkommando* resistance leaders made contact with some Jewish young women who worked in the munitions factory *Weichsel - Union Metallwerke*, which was attached to Auschwitz. Ella Gartner then stole some explosive materials and

²³ <http://www.stolpersteine-hamburg.de/translated> by Peter Hubschmid

²⁴ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.529.

²⁵ The *Sonderkommando* or Special Command Units were prisoners who were forced to work in the death camps, for example burning corpses.

²⁶ <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/revolt/sonderevolt.html>

passed this on to Roza Robota, a fellow prisoner, who passed the explosives, hidden in a false bottom of a food tray, on to a member of the *Sonderkommando*.

On 7 October 1944, the camp underground leaders sent an urgent warning to the resistance cadre at the crematoria that the SS were going to liquidate the *Sonderkommando*. As the war reached its conclusion, the SS became ever more trigger happy. Chaim Neuhof, a Jewish member of the *Sonderkommando* since 1942, approached SS Staff Sergeant Busch and yelled the password "Hurrah" and struck him with a hammer. Then members of the *Sonderkommando* at crematorium 4 attacked the SS with hammers and axes which they had somehow collected and threw one man into the furnace and blew up one of the four crematoria. Three were killed and twelve SS men were wounded. Many prisoners got away but they were all found and shot and another 250 prisoners were killed. The three young women and one other were hanged three weeks before the Soviet army freed the camp. A second uprising broke out at crematorium 2, with up to 100 prisoners managing to escape during the mayhem. But they were all caught. The uprising was doomed and did not interrupt the mass extermination of the Jews at Birkenau.²⁷

In a separate episode, on 23 October 1943, a Jewish prisoner wrestled a gun from the SS and shot at the guards. There were very few escapes, the best-known occurred on 7 April 1944 when, with the help of the camp underground, Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler managed to get away. They climbed inside a hollowed-out hiding place in a wood pile outside Birkenau's barbed-wire inner perimeter, but inside an external perimeter. The other prisoners placed boards around the hollowed-out area to hide the men, then sprinkled the surrounding area with a strong smelling Russian tobacco that was soaked in petrol to keep the guard dogs away, a trick they had learned from a Russian POW. They were the first people to give first-hand evidence of the horrors of Auschwitz. Towards the very end of the war, as less secure satellite camps mushroomed, a few other prisoners managed to escape.²⁸

Vrba and Wetzler compiled a full report which they turned over to the Slovakian Jewish Council, which included the request for the Allies to bomb the vital sections of the relevant rail-lines. Later Vrba lamented that their report was not taken sufficiently seriously, including by the Zionist establishment whom the Nazis were assiduously wooing. Vrba joined the Czechoslovak partisan units in September 1944 and fought as a machine-gunner, receiving many commendations. He later emigrated to Britain.

There was also a camp committee: "*Kampfgruppe Auschwitz*" led by Jozef Cyrankiewicz, Stanislaw Klodzinski and the Austrian Hermann Langhein, which

²⁷ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.539

²⁸ *Ibid*, pp.532, 537

smuggled reports out of the camp.²⁹ They provided invaluable information but whether that influenced the Allies' decisions making is another matter.

Cyrankiewicz, an officer of the Polish Socialist Party, had been active in the Polish resistance, was captured by the Gestapo in the spring of 1941, and was sent to Auschwitz where he tried to organise a resistance movement amongst imprisoned socialists, communists and international prisoners, successfully arguing for both international and party collaboration.³⁰ He survived.

Kłodziński, a trainee doctor, had acted as a liaison between the Polish Red Cross and the camp, providing food parcels and publicising illegal reports for the Polish resistance. Arrested on 18 June 1940 by the Gestapo, in Auschwitz, he became a prisoner-doctor and somehow retained contact with the Polish resistance. He became an active campaigner around the after-effects of being a KZ prisoner.

Such was the near impossibility of resistance that the attempted suicide in 15 September 1944, by two of the prisoners at Auschwitz, Edek Galinski and Mala Zimetbaum, was seen as defiance by prisoners and SS alike. At Flossenbürg satellite camp whose inmates worked on fighter plane engines and lived in the same factory in appalling conditions, some of the prisoners set fire to their straw mattresses. The SS locked the men inside where they burned to death. There were hundreds of Soviet prisoners held there, some of whom survived, whom the SS then executed.

Five thousand condemned POWs, mainly Soviet prisoners, who had earlier escaped and been recaptured were sent to Mauthausen, in Austria, to be worked to death in the 'extermination through labour' programme or just killed. By late January 1945, only 600 to 700 were still alive, who then again tried to escape. Several conspirators strangled the senior Kapo. Armed with nothing more than rocks, wooden shoes, pieces of soap and a fire extinguisher, the men attacked the SS, capturing a machine gun. Using wet blankets, 400 men climbed over the wall; most were captured and shot.³¹

One attempted uprising, organised by Russian POWs, which we only about from a fighter pilot's staff meeting held at the Reich Ministry on 2 May 1944, was of prisoners assigned to work at *Erla Maschinenwerk*, at Mülsen St. Micheln, a subsidiary camp of Flossenbürg. "They piled up their pallets and set them on fire... 100-300 pairs of airplane wings were destroyed." The reprisals were terrible; 200 shot, 30 hanged and 80 wounded. Nobody lived to tell the tale.³²

One aspect of defiance, if not resistance, was the use of song, more often used by

²⁹ Piper, *Franciszek Auschwitz Concentration Camp*.

³⁰ Langbein, *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.117

³¹ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, 569-70

³² Langbein, *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps*, 70

women than men and more often in the early years of the camps. The women in Gotteszell sang "Thoughts Are Free" ("*Die Gedanken sind frei*"). One survivor wrote: "It was our song and we sang it especially when bad news from outside dampened our spirits. It almost always helped to turn disheartenment into courage." On Mayday 1943, Lotte Weidenbach leapt onto the table, lifted her skirt to reveal her petticoat, and shouted: "*This is our red flag.*"³³

The importance of song as a solidifying act is also shown, in 1937, when Bastlein was among the authors of the "Sachsenhausen song" (*Sachsenhausenlied*). Ironically, the SS camp commandant, Weisenborn, an especially violent Nazi, had given orders for a camp song to be written, but the enthusiasm of the prisoners was so great as well as giving them the opportunity to share an antifascist spirit that it was banned. Again, in the autumn of 1940, Rudi Arndt, a member of the Baum group, though earlier in an anarcho-communist youth group, and a leader of the underground resistance at Buchenwald, was killed in the camp, after encouraging his fellow prisoners to write poems and songs and to assemble a string quartet.

Lilli Segal writes about her experiences in Auschwitz/ Birkenau and how singing the Marseillaise, the *Moorsoldaten* and other songs drew other women towards the political inmates and generally increased solidarity. She also described the solidarity, even if limited, of a few of the German women and later a group of voluntary Italian workers in the same factory as them who secretly gave them a some food. But, she wrote, she would never forget the Soviet prisoners who took the clothes off themselves to give the emaciated women.³⁴



Lilli Segal

Ravensbrück was a camp for women, more than 80% political prisoners, from Germany but also Poland, France and the USSR, some of whom were also Jewish. Early on in 1940, many Communists and captured French resistance fighters formed a resistance organisation which took on systematic education on Stalin, Lenin and Kautsky, the books were cut up into tiny pieces and never discovered.³⁵ Though there were exceptions, the KPD groups generally did not tolerate those they saw as dissidents, such as Margarete Buber-Neumann. Later, this gave rise to much

³³ Holocaust Oral History Programme, San Francisco ,1992, <https://collections.ushmm.org/>

³⁴ Segal, Lilli, *From Protest to Resistance*, Dog Ear Publishing, USA, 2012, p.181, 200-205

³⁵ Langbein, *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.118

bitterness and dissension, especially in the GDR.³⁶

The following is drawn from an interview by Anne Rieger of Gertrud Müller in 1992.³⁷ Born in 1915 in Stuttgart to a working-class family, Müller belonged to the KPD youth association and was arrested for the first time in 1933. In 1942, she attempted to secretly deliver food to Russian forced labourers. Sent to Ravensbrück, she became a block senior and survived because of the camp's underground network. She used her position to improve the appalling lives of mostly Jewish Hungarians.³⁸

In Sachsenhausen, where members of the KPD and SPD at times worked closely together, the underground successfully approached the camp administration about the distribution of the negligible food rations. When the Gestapo heard this, the organisers were shot.³⁹

Also, a rare occurrence, in the Klinker and the Heinkel Works to which Sachsenhausen prisoners were sent, civilian workers helped the inmates, for which some paid dearly. In one wonderful but rare story, a non-political cleaning woman, Annie Noack, working in the Berlin Security office, walked off with the office's official stamp so prisoners could obtain false papers. Wunderlich wrote that it was 'the plainest people' who helped bravely.⁴⁰

As the war was coming to an end, the resistance in some of the camps utilised the chaos. Prisoners were saved by switching numbers and identities. Infirmaries and hospitals were where this could take place; alive for dead. In Buchenwald, they started a *totenreserve*; a corpse bank, where exchanges in identity were organised. For example, Erich Hoffmann, a veteran of the Spanish civil war, from Hamburg, was thus saved. Sadly, although the level of murder by the ss in the last weeks of war rose dramatically, prisoners were often too weak or demoralised to use the escape routes organised by the underground.⁴¹

Breaking out of isolation, just hearing the news, helped improve morale. In most camps, a few prisoners heard the radio and told others, but such misdemeanours were usually discovered. In Mauthausen, Istvan Balogh, a Hungarian veteran of the Spanish Civil war, built a radio set in 1941, and there were others. Gustl Gattinger, from Munich, repaired an 'unrepairable' set from a shot-down Allied aircraft in late 1943. In Dora, the inmates listened to news in the infirmary on a radio provided, in

³⁶ Fischer, Henning: *Survivors as Actors. The Women of the Lagergemeinschaften Ravensbrück: Biographical Experience and Political Action, 1945 to 1989*. Universitätsverlag Konstanz, <https://www.neues-deutschland.de/artikel/1087751.es-war-auch-traumabewaeltigung.html>.

³⁷ www.vvn.telebus.de/anachric/2007/03/03c.htm

³⁸ She did not just survive: later, she became an activist in the peace movement and campaigned for compensation for former forced labourers denied by the Federal Government.

³⁹ Langbein, *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.202

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.238. quoting R. Wunderlich *Clandestine work in Sachsenhausen*.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp.204-206

return for gold teeth, by the SS squad leader. In Buchenwald, members of the KPD plus a Polish radio engineer built short wave radios. Eugen Kogon used the phone of the SS camp doctor in Buchenwald, telling the operator he was the doctor.⁴²

The prisoners also wanted to both inform the world of what was happening and to leave a record for the future. Documents were hidden in a variety of extraordinary places eg in a wall, buried in earth or into a newly cemented floor. In Birkenau, a woman being released sewed a description of what was happening in Auschwitz into her garter. With a terrible poignancy, Salmen Gradowski buried information on the Auschwitz gas chambers under the ashes in the crematorium, expecting the Allies to look there.⁴³

On 4 August 1942, five inmates, dressed in SS uniforms, obtained by a 'green' prisoner, escaped from Natzweiler in an SS car, procured by the Austrian Larl Haas, who was working in the SS garage. Haas succeeded in reaching England with the help of the French resistance.

Though very rare, there were other escapes, though generally not in Germany. The most likely group of escapees were Poles from Auschwitz, whom the local resistance supported.⁴⁴

Russian POWs who were singled out for deadly tasks were more likely to attempt escape, although the chances of being killed were very high. For example, there was many attempted breakouts from Birkenau in the winter of 1941/42, from Auschwitz in March 1942, from a Flossenbürg sub-camp in May 1944, from Mauthausen in January 1945.

In early 1945, the French resistance movement in Auschwitz facilitated the escape of Jules Frank in order that he establish contact with a resistance group of French POWs and forced labourers.⁴⁵

Josel Warszaski and Jankiel Handelsman, both Poles, had fled to France, joined the French resistance, been arrested by the Gestapo and sent to Auschwitz. They made contact with the external resistance movement and with Russian POWs in the camp. They procured explosives from the Union factory which Jewish women had smuggled into the camp. Following news of another death convoy, the prisoners rushed the guards with hammers, axes and stones, set the crematorium on fire and cut the fence. Other inmates hearing of this killed their SS guards. The Russians threw the chief *Kapo*, Karl Konvoent, a 'green' prisoner, plus a member of the SS into the

⁴² *Ibid*, pp.244-253

⁴³ *Ibid*, pp.254,255

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.263

⁴⁵ Olga Wormset, *Tragédie de la déportation, 1940-1945*, cited in, Langbein, *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps*.

fire. The inmates were massacred in especially appalling fashion. The women who had helped them were also brutally killed.⁴⁶

Another rebellion was planned at Treblinka, after Meir Berliner, a Jewish Pole, killed an SS man in September 1942. Somehow, the conspirators had acquired and now made use of grenades, Molotov cocktails and other munitions during the brief and chaotic uprising. Some of the gas chambers were burnt down, an unknown number of camp commanders (German and Ukrainian) and guards were killed, and some hundreds escaped.⁴⁷

One group who offered resistance must be mentioned: in October, 1943, Jewish Poles who were being taken to the Auschwitz gas chambers, attacked the SS officers, cut the electric wires, killed one of the officers, followed by a 'shoot-out'. The insurgents were subsequently killed individually with small bore rifles⁴⁸

Some German and Austrian Communists in Sachsenhausen, all of whom had work 'outside', made contact with the local resistance, for example Franz Primus, who had fought in the Spanish Civil war, Herbert Tschäpe, a German veteran of that war and Fritz Reuter, who all escaped in April 1944. Generally, Communists did not try to escape unless told to. For example, the local KPD instructed Tschäpe to strengthen the party organisation in Berlin.⁴⁹

But of every hundred attempts to escape, only one would succeed. The retributions were terrible.

Acts of Sabotage

As opposed to many camps such as Buchenwald which initially were primarily for political prisoners, from 1942, and especially after Stalingrad the camps became increasingly a source of forced labour, especially because of the need for more labour for arms production. There were profound problems organising or committing sabotage. Firstly, it at least appeared that performing such work provided some sort of protection from being killed. Secondly, most prisoners by then were not political. Thirdly, it was not always obvious whether the assigned work was crucial to the war. And being caught meant death.

We will never find out how often the prisoners tried to sabotage production but we do know of some instances. Halle KZ, which took many French political prisoners from Buchenwald, provided labour mainly from France, Poland and the USSR,

⁴⁶ Langbeim, *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps* pp.285-288, based largely on Salmen Lewental's buried description

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 291-294

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 280

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 267

organised by the SS, to the Siebel-Flugzeugwerke GmbH in July 1944. The prisoners manufactured parts for military aircraft and saw this as an opportunity to ensure the aircraft would blow up.

Despite some hesitancy by managers of industry about working with the SS, I.G. Farben, Heinkel, BMW, VW and others all used forced labour provided by the SS. Himmler aimed for the production of rifles at Buchenwald, which only got going in 1943, working with the Wilhelm Gustloff company, producing handguns in Neuengamme at the Carl Walter Co, anti-aircraft guns in Auschwitz with Krupp, which never got off the ground, and transmitters at Ravensbrück with Siemens. Himmler did a deal with I.G. Farben in 1941, offering them forced labour for the construction of a plant to manufacture synthetic oil. In exchange I.G. Farben agreed to extend Auschwitz.⁵⁰ The Heinkel works in Oranienburg KZ became a model for cooperation between the SS and industry, producing parts for the biggest German bomber, the Heinkel He 177, a long-range heavy bomber which had many design and production problems and where it seems, forced labourers increasingly attempted sabotage.

In Flossenbürg and Dachau KZs, the construction of fighter planes began in 1943, supervised by the SS. Thousands of KZ prisoners were also used to defuse unexploded allied bombs and clear war damage.⁵¹

In Sachsenhausen, inmates, usually Russians working in a munitions factory, buried steel plates intended for tanks. According to an East German report, the International Camp Committee, focusing particularly on the Heinkel aircraft factory, successfully instructed prisoners, mostly Russians, to damage equipment and machinery, cause the machines to break down, remove small valves from the planes and generally produce substandard articles. In March 1944, the SS found leaflets calling on civilian workers to offer passive resistance and commit sabotage.⁵²

In Dora, experts, especially electrical engineers, were given work assignments by KPD *Kapos* where they could effectively sabotage the work. In Dachau, the construction of fighter planes began in 1943, supervised by the SS. Heribert Kreuzmann, an Austrian veteran of the Spanish civil war in charge of giving out parts, misplaced parts.⁵³ Oskar Müller, KPD, encouraged sabotage of the production of automatic rifles at the workshops. In Natzweiler, prisoners from Luxemburg, Holland and Norway destroyed parts for plane motors.

In Auschwitz, the German Armaments Works production declined by 50% due to

⁵⁰ Cesarani, David, 2017, *Final Solution. The Fate of the Jews, 1933-1949*, Pan Books, 521

⁵¹ Wachsmann, *History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, pp.406-409

⁵² Langbein, *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps*, pp.307, 308

⁵³ Kreuzmann survived and was interviewed by the author.

sabotage organised by the Auschwitz Combat Group. Go slows occurred at I.G. Farben at Auschwitz- Monowitz KZ. According to the leadership of a resistance group of German and Austrian Communists, at Jawiszowice coal mine, rocks were placed in the wagons amongst the coal, steel parts disappeared, conveyor belts broke down, fuel for locomotives was poured away and timber disappeared.⁵⁴

In the Messerschmidt works, "comrades [from Mauthausen] devised a method of mass-producing unusable parts". The Streyr [Arms] Works, near Gusen, was infected by sabotage by the Mauthausen inmates. The Italians sabotaged the production of machine guns, the Spanish shut down the factory several times, the Polish setters set devices incorrectly, others threw vital parts onto the junk heap.⁵⁵

There were go-slows at the Mittelbau Buna works, initially a subsidiary of Buchenwald KZ, the largest underground industrial complex in Europe, where parts for the V1, V2, other military planes and surface to air missiles were manufactured from August 1943.⁵⁶ Halle KZ, which took many French political prisoners from Buchenwald, provided labour, organised by the SS, to the Siebel-Flugzeugwerke GmbH in July 1944. The prisoners manufactured parts for military aircraft and saw this as an opportunity to ensure the aircraft would blow up.

Although nothing to do with arms production, Karl Wagner, KPD, a mason and responsible for a group of prisoners, tried to delay the construction of a new crematorium in Dachau in early 1943. The cement did not bond properly, the foundation was too weak and the mortar crumbled away.

It is impossible to calculate the effectiveness of sabotage on arms production. Some problems may have had little to do with sabotage. Over 13 months, only 6000 of the V2s were assembled rather than the planned for 12,000.⁵⁷ At least one half of the V2s that were produced basically did not work and some calculate the failure rate as being as high as 80%. It cost the resistance dear: there were mass executions and hangings from mid 1944 till the end of the war.⁵⁸ Some Londoners will have owed their lives to these acts of bravery.

Conclusion

The KPD resistance in the camps made use of every ambiguity. In Buchenwald, the administration was persuaded to set up a Camp Defence, as they supposed as an

⁵⁴ Jawiszowice was a sub camp of Auschwitz. from August 1942. The jobs of the prisoners was to load carts with coal, transport them and make repairs, Langbein, from Andrzej Strzelecki, 1975, pp.304-307

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp.307-314

⁵⁶ Wachsmann, *History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, pp.109-111

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp.109-111, 406-409;

Crome, *Resistance and Survival in the Concentration Camps*, p.111

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp.314,315

extension of the SS, in practice protected the prisoners and to a limited degree, clipped the SS's wings. The Camp Defence committee then assumed responsibility for overseeing new arrivals and the distribution of food. While they helped the camp not descend into disorder, most of the prisoners distrusted them. Indeed, in Dora, the Camp committee became far too close to the SS. In Dachau, the defence committee collaborated with the SS. Margarete Buber-Neumann reported that at Ravenbruck, a German Communist on such a committee, became indistinguishable from the staff.

In the last six months of the war, the SS even tried to recruit German inmates as soldiers and were especially keen on political prisoners: an opportunity to fight for National Socialism. This offer was generally turned down but the idea of being under the *Wehrmacht*, not the SS, provided too strong an appeal for some. But the Russians were approaching from the East and, for some camps, the other Allies from the West and this created a further dilemma: should the committees organise uprisings?

Buchenwald exemplifies a general pattern in the last days of the war. The antifascists had created a military organisation and military groups, obtaining their weapons from the bombed out Gustloff Works. Although they partook in military training in small arms, they remained beneath the SS radar. Soviet POWs, French resistance fighters, Red Spaniards, Yugoslav partisans, German and Austrian veterans of the Spanish Civil war and former Czech and Polish soldiers gave practical instructions. At the same time, frantic efforts were made to contact British and American troops. As the first US troops arrived, the command took out and distributed arms. Over 100 SS men were immediately arrested.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Langbein, *Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps*, pp.347-371. In Dachau, an SS man gave Jewish inmates two machine guns with ammunition. The Americans became the greater enemy.

Chapter 13 - Resistance within the Armed Forces

Though literature on this is scarce and estimated numbers vary, what emerges is the breadth of reasons of those in the armed forces who in one way or another joined the other side.¹

Rudolph Jacobs, who was drafted in 1939 and rose to the rank of captain, joined the Italian Garibaldi partisans and in 1944 was killed. Heinz Riedt was also able to escape the *Wehrmacht*, moved to Padua and, in 1943, joined the *Giustizia e Libertà* partisan group around Otello Pighinan.² Ludwig Baumann, a bricklayer from Hamburg, was conscripted and, transferred to France, became friends with some French dockers and, after stealing some weapons, defected. He was then helped by French resistance fighters and distributed illegal papers to German troops.

A handful of German soldiers found their way to the USSR, to be distinguished from the communist cadre who had fled to the USSR. We do know of Rudolph Richter, Alfred Lislow and Wilhelm Schutz, all German soldiers who attempted to warn the Soviet Government of Nazi war plans and were ignored.³

Strafdivision 999⁴

Though almost unheard of, from 2 October 1942, men who had previously been considered unworthy of the army, war criminals, active deserters or who had committed sabotage or tried to desert, were recruited for service, not in the *Wehrmacht* proper, but in the *Strafdivision 999* (Criminal Division 999) or death battalion. The initiative for its establishment was the military stalemate from the winter of 1941 which led the Nazi high command to decide that as the war was likely to last longer than expected, they needed to recruit more men. Altogether over thirty 999 battalions were established. Between September 1942 and September 1944, about 28,000 were drafted. The 999s were stationed in France, Italy, Belgium, Albania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Tunisia and the USSR but disproportionately in Greece. Their purpose included high-casualty operations, such as clearance of minefields.

¹ Peterson, Lars, 2013, *Hitler's Deserters*, Fonthill, UK. For further examples, see the section on 'Joining the other side', which looks at soldiers who crossed over to the USSR for explicitly political reasons.

² An aside about traitors in Austria. It was only in 2009 that the Austrian Parliament in 2009 agreed that the approximately 20,000 soldiers criminalised by the Nazis for desertion, such as Richard Wadani who had joined a Czech military unit, were not traitors and should be rehabilitated.

³ Veyrier, *La Wehrmacht Rouge*, p.9

⁴ Unless otherwise stated, the material for this section and the quotes come from Blee, Christian, *Die Soldaten mit dem blauen Schein - "Wehrunwürdige" in der Strafdivision 999*, DEUTSCHLANDFUNK, 26.May.2009, 19.15 – 20.00 Transcript:

<http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/die-soldaten-mit-dem-blauen-schein-txt-dokument.media.306728e1caa1cac7c486a0f34be82afa.txt>. My thanks to Steve Cushion for his help with this section.

Wolfgang Abendroth, who was in a 999 division first in Yugoslavia, then Greece, states that two-thirds of the 999s were political prisoners, with a third being criminals recruited to keep the politicals under control and who hoped thereby to make it into the *Wehrmacht*, get promotion and a few holidays. The necessity for having criminals keeping an eye on the politicals was established after so many of the 999s melted away during the African campaign, when there were no other internal coercive force.⁵

The term "politicals" covered the entire spectrum of German resistance: anarchists who fought in the Spanish Civil War against the Franco forces, members of the labour movement, especially communists, but also social democrats. Jehovah's Witnesses were also recruited, defined as being politically subversive.⁶ In Greece, there were around 17,000 in 999 battalions, known locally as the Battalions of the Unwanted. Four to five hundred of these soldiers joined the Greek Resistance.

Those 999 battalions that had been sent to Tunisia were subsequently despatched to Greece following the defeat of the *Afrika Korps* in August 1943 and stationed on the mainland, in the Peloponnese, as well as on the Aegean and Ionian islands, to protect railways, airfields and other strategically important military assets. A KPD member sent to Tunis with the 999 battalions was Walter Kresse.⁷ Kresse was arrested in 1933 and sentenced to three years in prison and, after release, began couriering hunted German comrades across the Czech border. In 1942/43 he was with the 999s in Tunis where he fell into American hands and remained interned in North Africa, then Alabama until 1946.

The recent German radio programme contained interviews with surviving veterans of *Strafdivision 999*. About a third were communists, for example, Kurt Neukircher, who had distributed anti-Nazi leaflets in the Zwickau region. Neukircher survived, it seems, because he disappeared in Tunisia into English captivity, and later bore witness to what had happened. He describes how two bible students had been shot for refusing to wear a uniform or carry a weapon. He also had to witness firing-squads in the Heuberg camp: the execution of soldiers who were sentenced to death for their conduct or for political reasons.

Another former political prisoner, Erwin Schulz, explained that the political prisoners and resistance fighters tried to stick together. He decided to escape in 1943 and survived. He is quoted as saying "Yes, yes, tomorrow is the First of May, we're not going to become captives just yet - we want to see the May 1st as free people between the front-lines." And then, the next day, they headed on to the Allied lines

⁵ Abendroth, *Ein Leben in der Arbeiterbewegung*. pp.184-189.

⁶ By far the largest religious group who were arrested were the Jehovah's Witnesses. They proved especially difficult to manage as they were unwilling to do anything remotely connected with the war.

⁷ see Chapter 9

where they were captured by Moroccans. The unit was saved from being sent in its entirety to Russia for fear that the men would just melt away into the Soviet army. The surviving politicals from the Eastern Front were sent on to Greece, according to Hans Peter Klausch. They had seized a loudspeaker from the Red Army and used it to publicise their grievances. "And indeed, the very next day four 999ers disarmed their sergeant and deserted over the ice to the Russians. Of course, all the alarm bells rang out. The commanders then decided to disarm all the political people in this battalion immediately".

After this event, in all of the 999 battalions stationed on the Eastern Front, many politicals were disarmed, imprisoned and then sent back to Germany where they were court-martialled. However, it could not be proved that more than a few of the more than 400 soldiers from the 999s were actually involved in the desertions. As a result, the army command assembled all the politicals in a newly formed battalion and dispatched them to a front-line mission in Greece. Once there, the 999s immediately began to organise political resistance on the ground.

Abendroth states that it was clear to the comrades that their job was to do anything possible to destroy the Third Reich. This was not possible in Yugoslavia where he was based very briefly but it was more possible in Greece, especially after they were moved to the island of Lemnos, where they were stationed for about a year. Abendroth tried, initially unsuccessfully, to get in contact with the partisans. They soon worked out that he and another SAP comrade were 999ers and sent some local students to talk to them. Although Abendroth did not speak Greek, he spoke French and English and so was able to converse with the students.

It appears that Abendroth was then put into the central office of the Nazi Commander of the island because of his facility with languages and therefore started to learn about what was going on. He does not provide an explanation of his position there apart from suggesting that the Commander was more of a bureaucrat than a Nazi.⁸ Asked what were the consequences of his work with the partisans, Abendroth's answer is oblique but he gives an example of when he had an accident, the partisans sent *their* doctor and surgeon to look after him in Lazerett hospital which was under Nazi control. Abendroth gives a second example of how members of the partisans protected a 999er by turning off his radio, when they passed by his window, which was tuned to the British Jerusalem station, enough to get him arrested and maybe even shot. Abendroth paints a picture of close contact between a handful of the comrades and the Greek resistance. There was a local well regarded, well rooted, illegal, Communist Party branch, the largest party in Lemnos, which included some local intellectuals, led by a dentist.

⁸ Abendroth, *Ein Leben in der Arbeiterbewegung*, pp.186-7

Abendroth's position in the office of the Commandant made him privy to privileged knowledge: he was aware of an anti-communist opposition, whose intention was to take back state power. And he found out early that the German troops were going to be withdrawing, using a scorched earth policy as they did so, and bringing down the electricity system as they left. Somehow, an Austrian comrade engineer managed to stop this.

After the 999s were forced into the mountains, they embarked for Lesbos. In Lesbos, Abendroth succeeded in slipping away and joining ELAS, who at that point were still working with the British. But by the end of 1944, the distrust between the British and ELAS was growing, with the British indicating that it was they who wanted to be in control.

Though the exact date is unclear, when the British arrived on the island, they demanded of the Greek resistance that Abendroth be given to them as a POW. Although they did not want to, the Greeks handed him over because they wanted to avoid falling out with the British.

The overall picture Abendroth gives of a close collaboration between members of the German and Greek resistance is borne out by others. Hans-Peter Klausch also stated that wherever the opponents of Hitler's Germany came into contact with the 999s, as in Greece, they became acquainted with the other Germany: the Germany of resistance. In Greece, the graves of the 999s who were executed were decorated with flowers and wreaths by Greeks. And when it came to the Greek victory parades after the departure of the Germans in November 1944, there were always 999s in German uniform supporting the demonstrations. The reputation of the 999s acted as a corrective to many Greek people's view of Germans, even today.

Abendroth's time in the 999 is paralleled by Ludwig Gehm, an active member of the ISK (International Socialist Combat League). From Buchenwald, Gehm was sent to the 999s and then to Greece in 1944, where he deserted and fought with the Greek Resistance (ELAS). He too was captured by British soldiers and taken to North Africa.

Another socialist who ended up in the 999s was Kurt Otto Burghardt. A founding member of the Heidenau Association of Worker Photographers of Germany, a group closely associated with the KPD, from spring 1936 to mid-1938, he was active in the local resistance group led by Rudolf Gebauer, undertaking courier rides on his motorbike.⁹ Burghardt was taken into protective custody on 24 January 1939,

⁹ Being a photographer could be dangerous under the Nazis. Kurt Beck, a member of the "Union of German Working-Class Photographers", and from 1923, active in the KJVD, photographed small impoverished farmers in the Erzgebirge region of Germany. Accused of having made "preparations for high treason," Beck was condemned in 1934 to two years and three months in custody.

sentenced on 14 December 1939 to 15 months imprisonment for high treason, and was drafted on 7 June 1943 to the 999s and sent to the Aegean islands. After the surrender, Burghardt ended up in Egypt in English captivity.¹⁰

Although the details are not clear, it appears that the KPD Central Committee in 1944 encouraged the formation of an Antifascist Committee for a Free Germany in Greece, based on the model of the National Committee. They did not want their supporters joining ELAS, but to coordinate with ELAS within their Antifascist units, a very different position from that held by Abendroth.

Falk Harnack with Gerhard Reinhardt deserted the 999s, and Harnack became head of the Antifascist Committee of a Free Germany, fought with ELAS and published newspapers in German for their fellow conscripts. Harnack was an influential figure in the Munich/Berlin resistance, partly through his brother Arvid, executed in 1942 as a member of Red Orchestra and his cousins, the Bonhoeffers, who also knew the Kreisau Circle group and the Scholls of the White Rose. But the Gestapo were on to them. On 19 April 1943, Harnack was arrested and transferred to the 999s, sent to Greece and survived.

Gerhard Reinhardt organised and worked with 30 ex-999s around Thessalonika. Since any German fighting with the ELAS partisans was to be shot immediately upon capture by the *Wehrmacht*, the ELAS leadership kept the Germans out of direct combat with the *Wehrmacht*. But almost 200 of these German soldiers were arrested and most of them executed.¹¹

Heinz Steyer (1909-1944), KPD, a printer, a footballer in a workers' sports club who then worked for the Combat Unit for Red Sports after the Nazis seized power, worked in the resistance group Dresden-Kaditz and distributed the illegal papers *Depesche* and *The Red Star*. He was arrested many times and then transported to the Peloponnese with Battalion IV of the 999s, where he worked as a radio operator. He made contacts with Greek partisans and used his job in the office to warn the partisans about planned pacification actions, supplied them with medicines, weapons and also German ID cards. Steyer was arrested on 3 July 1944 and sentenced to death for treason.¹²

In mid September 1944, the 999 battalions in Greece were dissolved. The Nazis considered the continued use of these unreliable soldiers too risky. The Antifascist Committee wound up in December 1944 after the Nazis were defeated. Some of the

¹⁰ Burghardt hid about 130 negatives and prints under the planks of the floor where he lived in Dohna, where they were found in November 2010.

¹¹ Schneider, Valentin. *Greece under the Nazis: The German soldiers perspective*, with interviews by Marinos Tzotzis, <http://www.greeknewsagenda.gr/index.php/topics/culture-society/6405>.

¹² Andreas Peschel, Saxon State Archives, <http://www.isgv.de/saebi/>.

999s who fought in December 1944/January 1945 with ELAS against the Greek government aided by the British were then declared to be war criminals. Those who surrendered to the British were regularly not returned to Germany because of the British fear that they would propagate socialist or communist ideas upon their return.

How many 999ers survived World War II remains unclear. Kurt Neukircher and some other 999ers who had deserted to the Allies ended up, having been shipped across the Atlantic, in a prisoner-of-war camp in Alabama. Neukircher spoke of the animosity of the Nazi prisoners there who wanted to destroy them. On only the fourth day of their internment, the fascists set fire to one of the barracks at night. Luckily, there was a comrade who could not sleep at night. He was outside and noticed the fire, but he was not able to raise the alarm before the hut was on fire. The senior German officer in the camp could not understand how Germans could fight against other Germans. The 999ers denied this, saying that they had not fought their own people but Nazi criminals. That took a long time to sink in, but eventually the officer understood and allowed the 999ers to move into a warehouse on the other side of the camp where they were allowed to set up an antifascist encampment.

Desertion from the Army: a Form of Resistance?

I suspect desertion was far more common than is appreciated or documented but the precise numbers are unknown and unknowable. Willner, a reliable source, calculates there were between 300,000 and 500,000 deserters altogether by the end of 1944 out of a total of about 12 million conscripts.¹³ About 15,000 were executed for desertion. From mid-1944, when desertions rose, especially in the last months of the war, the collection of statistics in the *Wehrmacht* began to break down, so the real figure will be higher.

The reasons for desertion are broad. Some deserters were merely attempting to avoid fighting, and quite possibly dying, especially once it looked likely that the Nazis were losing. Even early in the war, Fraenkel quotes from soldiers' letters home revealing despair about the chance of Germany winning, a perspective which will have encouraged desertions, though most evidence suggests this was not typical. Others were active deserters, who positively did not wish to fight for Nazi Germany.¹⁴ In the random conversations I have had with people when I have visited Germany, from cab-drivers to professors, I am struck by how everybody knows of one member of their family, quite often a close relation, who deserted in one fashion or another, especially in the last year or so of war.

¹³ Willner in Messerschmidt, Manfred, 1991, *Germany and the Second World War*, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt. Messerschmidt was the long-term research director at the German Military History Research Office, so is unlikely to exaggerate desertions.

¹⁴ Fraenkel, Heinrich, *Help us Germans to beat the Nazis*, London, Victor Gollanz 1941. pp.108-9

While the July 1944 plotters were commemorated for their military resistance after 1945, the ordinary military resisters, even those who the *Wehrmacht* had shot, were not rehabilitated and their relatives not compensated. Deserters continued to be seen as weaklings, shirkers, back-stabbers and traitors to the fatherland until the late 1970s. Only as the historical paradigms shifted and the left grew stronger in Germany did the subject finally cease to be taboo.¹⁵

¹⁵ Dräger, Marco, *Monuments for Deserters?! The Changing Image of Wehrmacht Deserters in Germany and Their Gradual Entry into Germany's Memory Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp.31-36

Chapter 14 - Historically Jewish Germans in the Working Class Resistance

There has been prolonged debate over the role of Jews and historical Jews against the Nazis. Whilst this book does not focus on the Jewish origins of those in the resistance or whether there was a distinct Jewish resistance, it is important to recognise that there was a significant Jewish contribution to the working class based resistance, especially by the young, partly but often not particularly because of antisemitism. Moreover from 1938, the members of the resistance who were historically Jewish and who stayed in Germany faced the separate threat of escalating antisemitic persecution. It was not for nothing Baum encouraged his Jewish supporters after *Kristallnacht* to get out of Germany, even if he did not heed his own advice.

Ironically, the Nazis' antisemitic policies encouraged a renewed emphasis on Jewish ways and beliefs. Although Jews were banned from participating in mainstream institutions and activities, the Nazis appeared to encourage Jewish theatre, Jewish schools, Jewish youth clubs and even tolerated the Jewish press. Zionist youth clubs were not banned till 1939. People started to flock into the synagogues. But there have been diverse interpretations of whether this return to Jewish institutions can be understood as returning to a Jewish culture. Or was it a form of passive resistance, given that the Jewish community was in no position to offer any form of effective resistance, especially as its leading figures had been tamed? It is also worth stressing that only 5% of people in the first camps were of Jewish heritage. Even by 1937, there were still only hundreds of Jews, almost all male, in the camps.

A sober estimate puts at least 3000 Jewish Germans as actively and deeply involved in the illegal German workers' and youth movement, at least in the first phase of the resistance.¹ They were generally not from a Zionist background, where the emphasis was on emigration to Palestine and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere. Paucker also suggests that the number of early Jewish political prisoners was disproportionately high, not so much because they were picked up because they were Jews, though that will not have helped, but because of their high level of underground activity: for them, the struggle against Nazism was also a struggle against antisemitism.² Many were released after some years as long as they agreed to go into exile, but too many paid with their lives.

Many historical Jews active in the different resistance groups were not organising

¹ Paucker, *German Jews in the Resistance*, pp.37–57.

² *Ibid*, p.20

primarily as Jews but as members of banned working class organisations.³ They were often already politically active and had become remote from Jewish life.⁴ In general, they adhered loyally to the politics of their respective movements and organisations. The importance of Jewishness for working class activists, as opposed to the whole Jewish community, was generally overridden by a political commitment to resistance work. Schisms on the left separated Jewish comrades just as it did everybody else on the left: Jewishness did not provide an alternative form of collective identification.⁵

The youth in the Baum Group and in the antifascist resistance saw themselves as part of the working class struggle and generally did not see themselves in national Jewish terms. Even those who saw themselves as Jewish became increasingly disengaged from their historic cultural and religious beliefs as they became submerged into the politics of the resistance. They were moreover convinced in a way that we forget that the defeat of fascism would be followed by the birth of some sort of socialist society, which in its turn would solve what was known as "The Jewish Question".

The vast majority of German Jews rejected the need for a fundamental transformation of the existing social order. The stages towards Jewish annihilation were gradual so that many, if not most Jewish people, in the first years of Nazi rule, when the resistance was still well organised, thought of the Nazis as not committing anything more terrible than the usual pogrom which they hoped to survive and therefore did not perceive resistance as especially relevant to them. In the 1932 Presidential election, Hitler's programme did not even refer to Jews. So the attitude of Jews has to be understood in the context of a gradual escalation in antisemitism. It still appeared the policy was one of ghettoisation, deportation or *Judenfrei*, rather than systematic annihilation. Most German Jews saw themselves as first and foremost Germans and assimilated Germans at that. Paucker estimates that about 95% of German Jews did not sympathise with the resistance.

By 1938 and 1939, the concern of many German Jews was individualistic: to find a way to get themselves or at least their loved ones out of danger. The majority of Jews (broadly defined) escaped Germany between 1933, when there were just over 500,000 (less than 1% of the population), and 1939 when only 200,000 remained, an exodus which increased significantly after *Kristallnacht* in 1938.⁶ One needs to beware of generalisations about how antisemitic the Germans were under the Nazis.

³ Helmut Eschwege, 1970, "Resistance of German Jews against the Nazi Regime", in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book XV*, London, p.143

⁴ Paucker, *German Jews in the Resistance*, p.150

⁵ Paucker, 1979, "Problems of Jewish Resistance Historiography", in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book XXIV*, London pp. 3-17, 159

⁶ *Ibid*, p.16

Steven Lowenstein's study is of three rural fairly isolated Jewish communities, largely traders and shopkeepers, between 1933 and 1938, in the Nazi stronghold of Protestant Central Franconia. Most of the locals continued to do business with their Jewish neighbours until 1938.

About 30,000, mostly politically or culturally active Jews, fled from Germany within weeks of the *Reichstag* fire, and 60,000 by the end of 1933, mostly people under the age of forty. By the start of the war, over half of German Jews, about 304,000 out of around 520,000, had fled. Those who remained were generally less likely to be active, they were the older, the sicker or the less well resourced, being a refugee costs lots of money. Some did not recognise the necessity of organising a way out till far too late, in a world shutting tight its doors against Jewish refugees.⁷

The Jewish establishment was active against the Nazis up to 1933. The *Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens* (The Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith; a liberal organisation) had led a vigorous propaganda campaign against the Nazis, which neither the KPD nor the SPD were doing, though the association worked with social democratic organisations. Once the Nazis were in power, however, no established Jewish organisation challenged them in a significant way.

The official representatives of the Jewish community were emphatically opposed to Jewish involvement in underground work or political actions against the state.⁸ The *Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden* (Reich Representation of German Jews) which was established in September 1933 and existed till 1943, was established to coordinate and represent the activities of Jewish political and religious groups under the Nazis. It organised Jewish emigration and supported Jewish cultural organisations. They should not be completely written off: they secured the release from the camps of many political prisoners, whose relationship to Judaism was marginal, by helping them to emigrate. However, it warned Jews not to engage in irresponsible acts when forced labourers as it would put the Jewish community at risk. They wanted to prevent anti-war propaganda and sabotage. They appealed to the Baum group to refrain from all acts of sabotage, as these would put the entire Jewish community at risk, a position which intensified young antifascists' disdain and defiance towards them.

But there were small anti-Nazi Jewish groups in Leipzig, Ruhrgebiet and Berlin. In Berlin, the *Gemeinschaft für Frieden und Aufbau* (The Community for Peace and Construction), a group of 30 Jews and non-Jews from various backgrounds, spread anti-war propaganda from 1943, encouraging people to engage in both passive and

⁷ Eschwege, *Resistance of German Jews against the Nazi Regime*, p.145

⁸ *Ibid*, p.143

active forms of resistance. Betrayed, most of its members were arrested in June 1944 and killed, some saved by the rapid advance of the Red Army.

There was also, let us not forget, a small number of right-wing Jewish groups. For example, within weeks of the Nazis gaining power, a small group of anti-zionist Jewish university students, who idealised the Nazis for producing cultural renewal, founded the German nationalist *Deutscher Vortrupp, Gefolgschaft Deutscher Juden* (German Vanguard, German Jewish Follower) championing a non-antisemitic brand of Nazism and German identity.⁹

Although focus of this study is not on the Nazis' antisemitic practices and the Holocaust, one explanation for the relative quiescence of the Jewish community was that antisemitic actions worsened gradually. A distinction must be drawn between the Nazi leadership's antisemitic tirades and their deeds.¹⁰ While antisemitic beliefs were a pre-requisite for violence against Jews, it was the wider political and military situation that determined Jewish people's fate. The growing armaments sector encouraged the despoliation of Jewish property. *Kristallnacht* was a by-product of the bellicose mood generated by the Sudeten crisis. When war began, despite the rhetoric, Jews were used as forced labour. The triggers for annihilation were the defeats at the hands of the USSR, understood as the actions of the "Jewish-Bolsheviks", and the entry of the USA into the war which led Hitler to approve the Holocaust as a punishment for US Jews. Further, the Red Army's entry into East Prussia, 60 kilometres from Berlin, in mid-January 1945, combined with the uncontrolled antisemitism of the camp guards, helps explain those last terrible months of killing.¹¹

A different issue is that the disproportionate numbers and leading roles of historically Jewish people in the resistance was largely ignored until the 1970s. Little concern was expressed about the thousands of Jewish resisters killed as a result of their anti-Nazi activities. There are reasons for this. Because the resistance was dominated by Communists, historians influenced by the Cold War ideology turned away from the significance of the anti-Nazi movement in general. A very bourgeois German Jewish historiography up till the 1970s had strong reservations about, and so largely ignored, Jews belonging to the illegal antifascist resistance.¹² And, in East

⁹ https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206254.pdf

¹⁰ Cesarani, David, 2017, *Final Solution, The Fate of the Jews, 1933-1949*, Pan Books, p.792

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.792-794

¹² Paucker, *Problems of Jewish Resistance* Historiography, p.8-9 As against the lambs to the slaughter approach, the theses of resistance of the Jewish community after the Nazi seizure of power is presented in Marjorie Lamberti, *Jewish Defence in Germany after the Nazi Seizure of Power*, and Francis R. Nicosia, *Resistance and Self-Defence. Zionism and Antisemitism in Inter-War Germany*. Both contributions appeared in Leo Baeck Institute Year Book XLII, London 1997. pp. 123– 134 and 135–147.

The first longer study within established German-Jewish historiography on the Jewish resistance was by Konrad Kwiet and Helmut Eschwege which considers all forms of Jewish defiance against the Nazi dictatorship: Helmut Eschwege,

Germany, resistance fighters were not defined through their ethnicity but their contribution to overthrowing Nazism. In addition, Jewish historians were not in general concerned with resistance of a left-wing and illegal form. A more bourgeois liberal resistance, Jewish or otherwise, could be seen as more worthy of attention, not the working class movement or the role of Jews within it. While the members of the White Rose, some Jewish, deserve all the attention they get, it is still a case in point. Both German Jewish historiography and the British based Leo Baeck Institute had previously largely ignored political resistance to the Nazi regime by antifascists who were only loosely connected to the established Jewish community.¹³

Another factor in the lack of early emphasis given to the persecution of Jews as a whole within the USA is explained in terms of Jews being in a minority in the concentration camps that the American soldiers liberated: just under a fifth in Buchenwald and just over a fifth in Dachau.¹⁴ It was the camps in the East which the Soviets reached first, where the majority of Jewish inmates were found.

The resistance itself did not focus on the ethnicity of its members, nor on antisemitism as such. With the exception of the White Rose, underground groups did not emphasise the antisemitic character of Nazism. Some writers have emphasised how unsympathetic the resistance was to issues around antisemitism. But the resistance, including Jewish comrades, saw the overthrow of fascism as the key: after fascism came a socialist society. And, though there is debate about how far the KPD understood antisemitism as a significant separate factor, the KPD underground expressed its full solidarity with the oppressed Jewish population after *Kristallnacht*, and KPD rank and file members deserve respect for how they behaved towards their Jewish comrades and Jews more generally, including in the camps. After *Kristallnacht*, at Sachsenhausen, KPD functionaries showed solidarity with Jewish prisoners who were treated even more abominably than other prisoners, made to do the heaviest work and regularly not given food. From exile, Arnold Zweig writes of the bonds that existed between Jewish anti-Nazi intellectuals and the German underground workers' movement from the SPD, the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei*, the Trotskyists, the KPD, the Communist Opposition (KPO) to the *Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund*. This comradeship was not mentioned in most standard works.¹⁵

"Resistance of German Jews against the Nazi Regime", in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book XV*, London 1970, 143–180.

¹³ Paucker, *Problems of Jewish Resistance Historiography*, p.9

¹⁴ Novick, Peter, 2000, *The Holocaust in American Life*, Mariner Books,

¹⁵ Paucker, *Problems of Jewish Resistance Historiography*, pp.45, 51-55

But the issue of Jewish resistance is no longer neglected. Helmut Eschwege's work, published in 1970 is seen as the first serious academic analysis.¹⁶ Cox's study, published in 2009, stressed the Jewish character of the resistance: Erwin Ackerknecht, from the Trotskyist Left Opposition, though later expelled, Max Laufer (Left Opposition), Hans and Hilde Berger (Left Opposition), Kurt Landau (Left Opposition, Richard Löwenthal (*Neu Beginnen*), Fritz Erler (*Neu Beginnen*) amongst many others.¹⁷ Eric Brothers, concerned himself with the role of Jewish antifascists in the Baum group, interviewing surviving Jewish members for his 2012 book.

Resistance is now sometimes equated with self-assertion or resoluteness, which could be understood as encompassing almost the whole Jewish community but also making resistance almost meaningless. This tendency to claim that most Jews did in some ways resist has even been reduced to the acts both of surviving and of suicide.

Jewish Youth

From 1933 till 1939, the *Hashomer Hatzair* (Young Guard), the major leftist zionist movement and many other zionist youth groups continued to be legal and able to maintain public or semi-public existences, as opposed to non-zionist Jewish youth groups, banned in 1936.¹⁸ Their aim was to fight Nazism alongside other workers and to fight for Israel/Palestine to be a socialist state. Some members were also active in socialist organisations.

The Nazi government tried to facilitate Jewish emigration until the beginning of the war and therefore did not ban zionist organisations until 1939. The policy the Nazis at that time of expelling Jews chimed with the zionist youth groups encouraging their members to leave for Palestine. Nevertheless, while the groups might still have been legal, the Gestapo frequently banned and then attended the meetings and molested and arrested their members.

There were a large number of Jewish youth groups along a spectrum from zionist to revolutionary. Like many of the youth groups at the time, the *Junge Jüdischer Wanderbund* (JJWB) a Jewish hiking youth group, was established in 1922, stood against the routine character of Western bourgeois Jewish culture and rejected participation in the existing zionist youth movement. Many of the Jewish youth groups such as the JJWB split between communists and the majority socialist zionists, with their emphasis on going to Palestine to set up socialist kibbutzim. The

¹⁶ Eschwege, Helmut: "Resistance of German Jews against the Nazi Regime", in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book XV*, London 1970, 143–180.

¹⁷ Hilde Berger first joined a zionist youth organisation, then the Left Opposition and was active in the underground after 1933. She was arrested in early 1936 and held until May 1939, then deported to Poland where she ended up working in Schindler's Krakow armaments factory. She survived, moved to the US and married Trotsky's former bodyguard.

¹⁸ Cox, *Circle of Resistance*, p.87

main Zionist youth hiking group was the *Blau-Weiss*, which seems to have largely had boys as members and only existed from 1912-1926. It emphasised both its Jewishness and its Germanness and its goal was a Zionist state. The largest non-Zionist Jewish youth group was the *Kameraden*, founded in 1916, who glorified nature. But the ideological divisions became deep. Although different sources suggest different factions, the *Kameraden* split into the Zionist *Werkleute*, who emphasised the importance of going to Palestine, the non-Zionist *Der Kreis* and the Communist factions who joined the resistance. The socialist Zionist groups did on occasion become involved in the resistance. One socialist Zionist group, *Borochov-Jugend*, in 1935, put out a polemical underground paper, the *Anti-Stürmer*, directed against Julius Streicher's notorious *Stürmer*, a weekly propaganda paper, to convince German workers that antisemitism was no solution.

In Breslau and in Hamburg, one faction of the *Kameraden*, the *Breslauer Freie Deutsch-Jüdische Jugend*, joined the KPO in 1933, and were involved in their illegal activities till the Gestapo crushed them in 1937.¹⁹ Helga Beyer, a Breslau member of the KPO, previously active in the Jewish *Wanderbund* served as a courier in the underground between the ages of thirteen and seventeen. Arrested at a border-crossing in 1937, she died in Ravensbrück in 1942.

The most militant of the anti-Zionist youth groups in the *Kameraden* was the *Schwarzer Haufen* (Black Block) who campaigned for revolution and emphasised cooperative living and vegetarianism, who had been excluded from the *Bund*, other Jewish organisations and from the KPD in 1927. They too split: the smaller socialist wing with 100 to 200 members; the opposing faction of about 400, the Ring, emphasised patriotism. Many of its socialist members later joined the KPD, the ISK, Trotskyists or the KPO and were subsequently murdered: Gerhard Holzer executed in 1937 at Plötzensee, Rudi Arndt in Buchenwald in 1940, and Lotbar Cohn shot in Sachsenhausen. Others fought with the International Brigades and later in the French Maquis. Of those who fled to the Soviet Union, some fell victim to the Stalinist purges.²⁰

Left Jewish youth activities included the clandestine celebration of the October Revolution, Mayday and Marx. Members of the *Borochow-Jugend* in Munich prepared handwritten posters, which they pasted over Nazi posters on house walls and hoardings from 1940.²¹

Rudi Arndt (1909-1940) provides a useful example of how left wing Jewish youth groups fed into militant anti-Nazism. He had joined the *Schwarzer Haufen* (Black

¹⁹ Paucker, drawn from a letter from a former member, Kurt Wolfgang van der Walde, to the author in 1994.

²⁰ Paucker, *Problems of Jewish Resistance Historiography*. p.26

²¹ Eschwege, *Resistance of German Jews against the Nazi Regime*, p.147

Block) and became its Berlin head. In 1927, he joined the Red Youth Front and in 1928 the KJVD (the youth KPD) and he quickly became a member of the district leadership of the Berlin-Brandenburg KJVD. In 1931 he completed his apprenticeship as a typesetter and in April 1931, Arndt was first arrested and sentenced for his political activities but after release, he again became a member of the Central Committee of the KJVD. On 12 October 1933, he was re-arrested and was sent from one camp to another, ending up in Buchenwald as a "political Jew". After a denunciation by criminal inmates, he was "shot while trying to escape" by the SS.

Peter Blachstein provides another example: he first belonged to the German-Jewish Youth Community, a non-zionist group, which saw itself as combining Germanness and Jewishness, then to the *Kameraden*, then joined a socialist Jewish youth group. After the SAP split from the SPD, he became an active member of the SAP's youth organisation and became head of illegal work in Dresden. In May 1933, he was arrested with 90 other SAP members and imprisoned until August 1934. Then he escaped to Spain where he supported the POUM and later *Neuer Weg*.

In one of those historical ironies, because the left parties and their youth organisations were banned, many young people who would have preferred belonging to left rather than Jewish organisations now joined the Jewish groups, at least till they were banned. The KPD, which was already banned, encouraged their Jewish comrades to campaign within these groups. Young Jewish communists followed the Party's orders and joined, or tried to join, Jewish youth organisations. A number of Jewish youth groups and sports associations were infiltrated in this way: the non-zionist *Ring-Bund Deutsch-Jüdischer Jugend*, founded in December 1933, the *Schwarzer Haufen*, the *Werkleute*, *Hashomer Hatzair*, *Habonim*, the *Makkabi* and *Bar Kochba*. Joining Jewish organisations served two purposes: it provided cover and it facilitated the recruitment of young Jews for antifascist propaganda work, expedited by the close ties that still existed between former members of the *Kameraden* and communists.²²

In his autobiographical article about growing up in Berlin in the 1930s, Henry Kellerman discusses how far non-zionist Jewish youth groups started to draw in people from all walks of life who would previously not have attended, from the unemployed to young workers to upper class youth, many of whom had never defined themselves through Jewishness but were now excluded from their youth groups because they were so defined.²³

²² Paucker, *Problems of Jewish Resistance Historiography*. p.24

²³ Kellerman, Henry, 1994, "From Imperial to National Socialist Germany. Recollections of a German Jewish Youth Leader" in the *Leo Baeck Year book 1994*, Secker and Warburg, pp.322-5

A Berlin Jewish antifascist girls' group which had originated from the *Bund Deutsch-Jüdischer Jugend* but not joined the Baum group because of its KPD leanings, remarkably distributed antifascist propaganda, including from 1939-1941, when their members were forced labourers. In 1934, Eva Mamlok, aged thirteen, crawled on to the roof of the largest department store in Berlin and painted "Down with Hitler". She was arrested. Later she became the group's leader and was caught distributing antifascist propaganda. She also tried to organise sabotage as a forced labourer at Siemens. From 1939 to 1941, the group's members, mainly from a middle-class background, now working as forced labour in Berlin, concentrated their efforts on anti-war propaganda. But, in September 1941, the girls were denounced; Inge Gerson-Berner was the sole survivor. Because Jewish women were more likely to work as forced labourers in factories, this gave them a potentially key position in the underground.²⁴

Young Jewish women were instrumental in helping to build several communist-led resistance circles in Berlin, for example a group led principally by Lisa Attenberger, one of a handful of women who were independently active in the resistance. In the early 1930s, Attenberger was active in a communist-led agit-prop group and became a KPD loyalist and activist. She put together a small group of about a dozen people, including sales clerks with whom she worked. Attenberger met Hildegard Tegener, another young female clerk, through a sporting club they both belonged to; Tegener in turn met Hertha Meyer through their mutual membership in the communist-associated *Fichte* sporting club. Attenberger was also a friend of Hilde Jadamowitz. The Attenberger circle received guidance from the KPD through a man known as Decknam and it is thought it was through him that they accepted assignments, such as distributing periodicals and writing anti-Nazi graffiti. Attenberger, along with others from her circle collaborated, with Baum in distributing leaflets, mainly in subway stations and cinemas.

Attenberger and seven of her colleagues were arrested in October 1936, charged with high treason and sentenced to two-and-a half years imprisonment. Upon release, she continued to a limited degree to carry out assignments for the KPD underground. She survived the war.

Although this chapter does not aim to give a full picture and although the Jewish establishment's hostility towards the resistance was probably reasonably representative of the larger Jewish community, let us remember and honour the significant contribution of historical Jews to the resistance.

²⁴ Paucker, *German Jews in the Resistance*, p.37

Chapter 15 - Cologne

Cologne had a significant resistance movement from within the working class. Again, the resistance fell largely into two separate phases, the first up till about 1936, the second only in the last years of the war. Resistance in both phases was largely led by the KPD. What was atypical was the importance of the Catholic workers' movement which had contacts with the July 1944 group. Also well documented in Cologne is the importance of forced foreign labourers, both in terms of their contribution to the local economy and to the local resistance.¹

It has been calculated that the resistance network in Cologne was made up loosely of about 10,000 people out of a population of approximately 750,000 during the 1930s. However, there were only about 3000 who can be understood as active resisters from the working class movement in Cologne, a figure still proportionately greater than in Berlin. Resistance in Cologne groups small and rarely met with much support. About 1,850 people from Cologne who were charged with high treason were killed between 1933 and 1945. In addition, there were a few thousand more people who were arrested because of their opposition, passive or active against the Nazis, but who survived.²

A number of resistance groups in Cologne developed in the first years after 1933, dominated by members of the KPD, but also involving supporters of the SPD, the Catholic Church, the Friends of Nature and youth groups. According to Gestapo records, there were 24 resistance groups, including the young and very young, deserters, foreign labourers and POWs.

Even in the final stage of the war, the *Wehrmacht* blocked the Allies' advance on Cologne, resulting in the unleashing of a terrible Allied bombardment and the death or disappearance of a significant percentage of the civilian population: about 767,000 in December 1939, 453,000 in December 1945. British bombers savagely and repeatedly attacked Cologne in 262 raids overall, dropping a cumulative 13,199 tons of bombs.³

¹ I chose to focus on Cologne partly because of their excellent 'National Socialism Documentation Centre', their corresponding book *Cologne during National Socialism* by NS Documentation Centre of the City of Cologne, 2011 and the corresponding web-site: <https://museenkoeln.de/ns-dokumentationszentrum/default.aspx?s=764>, and partly because, on a couple of other websites, there are rare 'primary' interviews with two of the people who were in the resistance at the time. In an eloquent introduction to her chapter on Forced Labour in Cologne (in Billstein, 135), Karola Fings quotes how people who were in positions of authority, even if not Nazis, could not remember anything bad about the Nazi years and therefore brings out the importance of rare verbal testimony, despite its limitations, years after the event. I also had the good fortune to visit the museum and be advised by one of their exceedingly well informed guides. Cologne is unusual in that in the 1980s, a grass-roots based research initiative was started. I also want to thank Dr Ulrich Eumann for discussing his work on Cologne with me.

² Ulrich Eumann in private conversation

³ Billstein, Fings, Kugler, Levis, *Working for the Enemy*, p84

One feature of Cologne which helps explain both the intense persecution of the left and subsequently the heavy Allied bombing was that many Cologne factories, scattered around Cologne, were producing armaments. Such large scale industry created a mass working class.⁴

KPD Resistance

The resistance locally was largely led by the KPD, with up to 200 members, which fairly quickly became essentially isolated from the KPD leadership. Unusually, very few were killed: six in 1933, one in 1937, 100 went to fight fascism and 20 died with the International Brigades in Spain where they thought they could still make a difference.⁵

In the first month or two of 1933, the KPD leadership in Cologne expected to work openly, to raise funds and distribute leaflets. As elsewhere, the resistance had not learned the rules of underground work, were continuing to use the old structures and were easy prey to informers, who had belonged to the labour movement and who were accepted as work-mates. Only in 1934, does the official emphasis change to building illegal mass organisations but, by then, there was no mass to organise.

Following 28 February 1933, the mass arrests in the Cologne region were mainly directed at members of the KPD and its sub-organisations: Communist Youth, the Red Labour Union Opposition, Red Help, the Fighting League against Fascism, members of workers' sports clubs and representatives of cultural organisations, all held in protective custody.⁶ Between 1934 and 1938, 113 of the 142 legal proceedings against the Cologne resistance involved KPD members; almost 2000 people were charged.⁷ Hundreds of Cologne communists fled the country. The Gestapo repeatedly succeeded in destroying the organisations that the KPD comrades tried to re-establish.

By 1935, members of the KPD network stopped meeting each other, although the Youth KPD attempted to keep in touch and, at the end of 1935, were still distributing up to 500 copies of Red Flag and 10,000 copies of Young Guard.

More and more people were being arrested, detained and sentenced to long sentences for treasonable membership of the KPD and the illegal distribution of leaflets and newspapers. The rate of arrest for members of the KPD for treason or high treason was 10 times or even 20 times greater than for the SPD.⁸ After 1936, there was little resistance till 1943/44, yet despite all the KPD's mistakes, the KPD

⁴ Billstein, Fings, Kugler, Levis, *Working for the Enemy*, p.264

⁵ Ulrich Eumann in private conversation.

⁶ *Cologne during National Socialism*, published by NS Documentation Centre of the City of Cologne, 2011. p.170

⁷ *Cologne during National Socialism. A short guide through the EL-DE House*
<https://www.emons-verlag.de/programm/cologne-during-national-socialism>

remained the driving force of whatever resistance there was.

In a rare and valuable interview, Reinhold Heps, a member of the Cologne KPD, provides a picture of the days immediately following Hitler becoming Chancellor and then after 28 February: "After the announcement [that Hitler had become Chancellor] ...that same night, the first people were arrested. There was a wave of arrests in the neighbourhood a few times.... There was still leafleting... but it was difficult... We published leaflets, I can also remember a poster with a [man wearing a] SA uniform, which read: Who chooses Hitler, chooses war".⁹

Heps explained that after the *Reichstag* fire, the SA picked up lists of political opponents. Then after the 5 March election, the police, who had already become the arm of the Nazi government, arrested 46 comrades. The KPD underground cell continued to distribute brochures and leaflets as well as to raise money needed for the maintenance of the illegal KPD apparatus and to support the arrested and their families, all of which would and did cause comrades to be arrested for treason. He continued: "There was some activity in the early years - but also carelessness amongst us...Party functions were held outdoors, if it was possible...In late 1933 our chairman, Brackenier, got 4 years protective custody. After Brackenier was imprisoned, it became far harder to organise".

There was a cell structure based on three or four people at most. But Heps said he used to leave the Red Flag in the breakfast room of the factory and that way he could distinguish KPD from SPD supporters. But one had to be very careful. There were Gestapo spies amongst his workmates. Amazingly, despite wave upon wave of arrests, none of the comrades opted out and they continued to try to operate a triangular cell structure. Somehow one of the comrades put together a radio and they listened to the illegal Moscow broadcast. The news then spread round the factory in moments.

Heps also brought out that there was a limited resistance, partly a consequence of the increasing disaffection with the Nazi regime (although he emphasises this is not the same as active resistance). There was even a picture of Goebbels covered up by a picture of Rosa Luxemburg. And a fire broke out in the factory but Heps was not clear how it started.

While any recounting of another's life is open to questions of veracity, especially when told years after the event, Herbert and Hans Rimmel recounted what they had

⁸ Geerling, Wayne and Gary Magee, 2017, *Quantifying Resistance: Political Crime and the Peoples Court in Nazi Germany*, USA: Springer.

⁹ Reinhold Heps s8707f0f6b1eab88a.jimcontent.com/.../GWM_reinhold-heps.pdf. The text was compiled from an interview with Reinhold Heps in 1973 by Walter Kuchta and Wilfried Viebahn. Archive Walter Kuchta, VVN-BdA Cologne.

found out about what happened to their uncle Willi Remmel. Willi Remmel was associated with the Cologne KPD and, in the 1920s and 1930s, had participated in the Communist Youth Association (KJVD), worked as a shop steward in a building trade union, and from 1930, worked in a KPD associated Agitprop troupe. After the Nazis came to power, he was responsible for local agitation and propaganda and stuck up posters against the Nazis distributed forbidden literature, and helped the persecuted. In 1935, he was arrested by the Gestapo for high treason. Somehow, on New Year's Eve 1936, he fled to Amsterdam and went to Spain. He survived to write "Notes to my Life".¹⁰

From 28 February 1933, the largest number of prisoners in the local KZs were functionaries and supporters of the KPD and, to a lesser extent, of other left-wing oppositional groups. One early camp, the Wuppertal-Barmen KZ (or Kemna camp) was established at the beginning of July 1933, about fifty kilometres from the centre of Cologne, to detain political opponents, especially the members of the workers' parties. The police and SA questioned the prisoners about hidden weapons and to extract the names of other KPD members. Unlike later concentration camps, the prisoners and the guards at Kemna were from the same cities and in some cases had been political enemies since 1918/19. Many prisoners had been involved in street fights in the preceding years with the very SA men who were now guarding them.¹¹ Prisoners helped each other after torture, shared food, or gave each other moral support. Ludwig Jacobsen, a functionary of the KPO, grew into the role of "camp elder", giving newly arrived prisoners support and assistance in standing up to the terror.¹²

The Popular Front

By 1943, the resistance was disorganised. But, although there is some debate as to the extent of resistance in Cologne, from then, the combination of increasing economic and social chaos, the decreasing ability of the Gestapo to maintain tight control and the near inevitability of Allied victory encouraged a growing disaffection with the Nazis and more clandestine activity by youth groups, deserters, escaped forced labourers and POWs. Factional differences at this point ceased to seem so

¹⁰ Arbeiterwiderstand in Mülheim – Versuch einer Zusammenfassung, s8707f0f6b1eab88a.jimcontent.com/.../GWM_Arbeiterwiderstand. This is an extraordinary source which draws on interviews of people who lived through this period in Cologne or whose relatives did: Heinrich Schultz (junior); Martha Mense (1910-1998) and Reinhold Heps (1903-1993). It also draws on Walter Kuchta / VVN-BdA Cologne (Association of Antifascists) and Horst Matzerath, *Köln in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus 1933–1945, (Cologne in the time of National Socialism) 1933-1945*, Greven, Cologne 2009.

¹¹ After the war, the Kemna Trial became the first major German trial regarding a concentration camp. Nonetheless, the camp was afterwards largely forgotten, with no research into its past. In 1983, a monument honouring the prisoners who suffered there was installed across the street from the former concentration camp: the builders of the monument were forbidden by the owner of the property from erecting any memorial on the site itself.

¹² https://www.ushmm.org/online/camps-ghettos-download/EncyclopediaVol-I_PartA.pdf.

important and the groups started to work together.

The KPD remained in the leadership and provided some sort of link between the scattered remnants of former communist cells, although now in a minority. As living conditions in Cologne became more and more chaotic, opportunities to hide out and make contacts in Cologne's bombed out infrastructure increased. In 1944, according to Gestapo records, there were 24 local resistance groups, made up of deserters, youth, foreign workers and POWs, often linked in with the KPD.

In the second half of 1943, after the National Committee for a Free Germany was founded in the Soviet Union, the Cologne KPD established a local branch, which in March 1944, renamed itself the "People's Front Committee Free Germany". Towards the end of 1944, this group attracted about 200 people.

The organisation was led by Karl Bieber with Engelbert Brinker, Otto Richter, Wilhelm Tollmann, Jakob Zorn and Johannes Kerp, all KPD functionaries who had already been through the camps.¹³

Jacob Zorn, an unemployed worker and a member of the KPD, had been active in the Cologne underground from the beginning and was first arrested and sent to prison in 1934. He was called up after he became involved in the People's Front, deserted but was again arrested by the Gestapo. He did not survive.¹⁴

It was a broad coalition, a popular front, dominated by the KPD but more than half of the members were non-communists. It gathered together scattered remnants of former KPD and other anti-Nazi groups: social democrats, christians, doctors, former factory directors and even ex-Nazis, including a doctor who was arrested in November 1944, sent to Sigbud prison, but never brought to court because of the typhus epidemic.¹⁵ The group included the physician Jakob Ahles, the Bible researcher Kurt Stahl from Bensberg, the social democrats Franz Bott and Max Neugebauer, Bosbach, who was a government inspector from the Cologne employment office and Becker, the director of the lignite syndicate, who had been a Nazi party member.

The Cologne People's Front set up a network of resistance groups in various companies, such as in the *Klöckner-Humbolt-Deutz-Werke*, the engineering factory which is still unrepentant about its use of forced labour, the *Felten & Guillaume Carlswerk AG* in Mülheim and at the freight yard *Gremberghoven*. There were individual connections to the *Ford Werke*, where both Thibaut and Thielen worked,

¹³ www.abteibrauweiler.lvr.de/de/gedenkstaette_brauweiler/gedenkbuch/haeftlingsgruppen/nationalkomitee_freies_deutschland/nationalkomitee_freies_deutschland.html

¹⁴ More on Jacob Zorn in Chapter 9

¹⁵ My thanks to Ulrich Eumann for this and other details in private conversation

Opel where Rietig worked, *Mercedes* and the Cologne cotton bleaching plant.

The group distributed leaflets made with a child's print box in which people called for desertion from the *Wehrmacht* and the sabotage of war production: "Workers and soldiers! No hour for the war! Do not go to the front, fight with us for peace, for freedom, for the Popular Front, against the Nazis".¹⁶

SPD

During second week of March 1933, a few prominent Cologne social democrats were arrested, including the former Cologne police chief, Otto Bauknecht. Wilhelm Sollmann, an SPD member of the *Reichstag*, was arrested on March 9, taken into protective custody and tortured. He fled on release first to Saarland, then to Britain, and finally to the USA. Hugo Efferoth, the editor of the social democratic newspaper *Rheinische Zeitung*, had his editorial office attacked by a SA squadron on March 9, was placed into protective custody and tortured. After his release, Efferoth went underground and finally escaped to Prague where he continued to publish in the underground press, especially for the exile newspaper: *New Forward*. He finally fled to Bolivia. After the SPD was banned in April 1933, a few other members were also arrested.

Because of Cologne's location near the border, it became the link town between the SPD in Germany and the social democratic party organisation in exile (Sopade) in Belgium. A group around Franz Bott, Hein Hamacher and Willi Schirmmacher took charge of this task. Schirmmacher was from 1923 to 1925 youth leader of the Socialist Workers Youth. He became a member of the SPD in 1925. From 1926 to 1933, he was a member of the workers' sports group in Cologne. From 1933 to 1935, Schirmmacher was active illegally and in 1936 was condemned to prison. He smuggled camouflaged leaflets and brochures published abroad back to Germany and distributed them in Cologne, as well as providing political status reports to the Border Secretariat in Belgium.

Other groups in the Cologne resistance

The Socialist Workers Party (SAP) and the KPO (Communist Party Opposition) urged that an antifascist united front should be formed both before and after 1933. Although they had few members, both were important in Cologne as they demonstrated resistance against the regime and established links between the groups which, however, were not always harmonious.

Erich Sander (1903-1944) was the head of the SAP Cologne underground. He was

¹⁶ <https://koeln.vvn-bda.de/2014/11/05/die-koelner-gruppe-des-nationalkomitees-freies-deutschland-busfahrt-nach-brauweiler/> (Association of Antifascists)

a German photographer, who joined the KJVD and then the KPD. In 1928, he was close to the right wing of the KPD and in December 1929 was expelled.¹⁷ Sander had become a leading member of the KPO but then, with other comrades, joined to the SAP and became its director. The Cologne SAP smuggled in literature and leaflets and held training courses. Sander was arrested in September 1933 for high treason with 17 others and given a sentence of 10 years in prison where he died in March 1944.

Ludwig Jacobson, Hans Löwendahl, Hans Mayer, all members of the KPO, distributed illegal leaflets. Hans Mayer was born in an upper-class Jewish family, joined the SPD, then the SAP, which expelled him because of his sympathy for the KPO. He fled in August 1933 to France, where he worked for a short time as the chief editor of the *Die Neue Welt*, the daily newspaper of the Alsatian KPO. After the war, he returned to Germany. Jacobson fled to France and then joined the International Brigades. Later he was interned in France and then extradited to Germany.

A small group of members of the anarcho-syndicalist union had gathered around the Saballas. This couple kept contact with other groups in the Rhineland and distributed resistance publications produced in Amsterdam. In February 1938, Hans Saballa was sentenced to four years in prison. He died from the consequences of his imprisonment.

The Cologne ISK group (International Socialist Militant League) only had between ten and fifteen members in 1933; for a few years they managed to distribute flyers and circular letters and maintain contacts abroad. Their networks were destroyed by the Gestapo, their members arrested, deported and killed.

The Catholic Church, Catholic Workers' Movement and Protestant Groups

What distinguished Cologne from similar towns was the role of the Catholic resistance. The Catholic Church was bought off with the Concordat with Pope Pius XII in 1933 but one or two bishops on an individual basis and a few ordinary members took part in the anti-Nazi resistance, for example in the White Rose.

A few Catholics, mostly individual priests and lay officials of the Catholic workers movement, put up active resistance.

Nikolaus Groß had been a trade union secretarial worker who became assistant editor and later editor of the *Westdeutsche Arbeiterzeitung* in Essen, a paper which was consistently anti-Nazi.¹⁸ The paper was banned from 1933 but Groß published an

¹⁷ NS Documentation Centre of the City of Cologne (ed)

¹⁸ https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/nikolaus-gross/

underground edition. From the mid-1930s onwards, secret meetings took place with trade unionists and other anti-Nazis in the Cologne Circle, whose participants were in close contact with the resistance group that prepared the assassination attempt on Hitler on 20 July 1944. Groß himself was arrested and murdered. Bernhard Letterhaus similarly was active as a trade unionist and in the Catholic Workers' Movement and became involved in the Cologne group and, like Groß, was executed. Despite the anticlericalism of the SS, very few Catholics or Protestants were arrested nationally, probably because civil society expressed disquiet at such persecution (though not if they were anti-Nazis).

The Nazi regime tried and largely succeeded in enlisting the Protestant groups. The Protestant National churches, with a few honourable exceptions, swiftly adapted to the Nazi system but one in particular formed a resistance base: the Confessing Church associated with Martin Niemöller. Formed in 1933, many of its leading figures were arrested and worse. Theophil Wurm, the Bishop of Württemberg, who succeeded Niemöller as the head of the Confessing Church, came into contact with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Carl Goedeler's group and the Kreisau circle. Bonhoeffer opposed Nazism from 1933, organising underground and was close to the 20 July conspirators. Arrested in April 1943, he was executed in April 1945. Highly principled, this opposition was largely based on the right to worship God.

Foreign workers and camp labour

A key feature of Cologne was the importance of forced foreign labour. An estimated 100,000 foreigners were forced to work in Cologne in industry, trade, agriculture, private residences, and church institutions, out of a population by 1944 of just under 500,000.

Shortly after the beginning of the war, in October 1939, 1,000 Polish POWs arrived to be deployed mostly on local farms. Throughout Germany hundreds of thousands of Polish POWs were made to work on the land as agriculture wanted forced labourers to replace their workers who had been conscripted. Foreigners came to account for about forty per cent of workers in local agriculture.¹⁹

After the German army had occupied parts of Western Europe, civilian labour was obtained in the Netherlands, Belgium and France. By August 1941, the Cologne State Employment office already employed 7,000 civilian forced labourers but more were needed.

At *Glanzstoff-Courtaulds*, in 1940, so great was the shortage of labour that about

¹⁹ Mason, *The Workers Opposition in Nazi Germany*, p.322

250 Jewish forced labourers were allowed to work there out of the 3000 employees. They were deported to Minsk in July 1942. The factory also employed about 200 workers from the occupied territories in the East as well as French POWs, workers from France, the Netherlands and Belgium, more women than men. By August 1942, in Cologne, there were almost 8,000 workers from the West.

The importance of civilian workers from the Soviet Union increased with each year of the war. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union, about 7,500 Eastern workers were deported to Cologne, mostly young people between the age of 17 and 20 who soon outnumbered everybody else. In 1942, the first contingent of Soviet forced labourers, about 1200 and then about 6000 POWs arrived in Cologne. This added up to over 21,000 forced labourers. The majority of the 1200 forced labourers from the USSR in the summer of 1943 were female adolescents.²⁰

Following the Italian surrender to the German forces, 500 Italian soldiers arrived in November 1943 and were used as forced labourers, as well as being seen as traitors. In August 1944, 369 Italian POWs arrived, who had been reprimanded for their refusal to be categorised as civilian workers.²¹

By September 1944, there were about 30,000 inmates either in labour camps or concentration camps within Cologne city, 40% of whom were Russians and Ukrainians, and the remainder French, Italians, Belgians and Dutch.²² In 1943/44, there were 107 camps, which rose to 300 by 1945, located at or near businesses of vital military importance, with an occupancy of at least 21,000 and probably in reality far more. Camp labour was also made use of by the railways, *Organisation Todt* and highway building.²³ Almost all companies in Cologne used forced labourers, in many cases up to 50% of their workforce. Without them, the companies could not have met their production quotas. Cologne also used detainees from Buchenwald KZ who, from September 1942, were deployed as the SS Construction Brigade III for clearing debris, recovering corpses, defusing bombs, and in hospitals, churches, private households and pubs.

Heps comments on how, as the war ground on, increasingly the workers were forced foreign labourers and POWs. "That was the case at the Cologne cotton bleaching in Holweide...", where he worked. Out of a workforce of about 250 men, there were about 25 Czech forced labourers, who apparently were not friendly, and many deported Poles, who "...were alright. We also had French POWs who were OK.

²⁰ Billstein, Fings, Kugler, Levis, *Working for the Enemy*, p.145

²¹ <http://www.lebensgeschichten.net/selcont3.asp?typ=L&value=1075>

²² Billstein, Fings, Kugler, Levis, *Working for the Enemy*, pp.12, 88.

²³ Billstein et al, pp.12, 88-90, Ulrich, Axel *Fight against Hitler On political resistance against the Nazi regime in the Rhine-Main area*, http://www.mainz1933-1945.de/fileadmin/Rheinessenportal/Teilnehmer/mainz1933-1945/Textbeitraege/Ulrich_Widerstand.pdf

The Ukrainians arrived in early 1942. Some of them spoke perfect German", but, Heps said, Gauleiter Roth described them "as a lost, degenerate, immoral people". Some of the Ukrainians were women. Heps comments how they arrived healthy and became very sick. "The Ukrainians also went on strike once because of the bad food". Some of the young women were singled out as ringleaders, who were transferred to the concentration camp the next morning. But one of the Ukrainians had a picture of Hitler over his bed.

The largest employer of forced labour in Cologne was *Deutsche Reichsbahn* which employed about 3600 foreigners and, in addition, employed about 1000 inmates from the local concentration camp at Grenzstraase.²⁴

The second largest employer was *Ford Werke*. Camp labour was indispensable. From 1933, Ford had colluded with and gained military contracts from the Nazi State and now badly required labour. The first forced labourers there had been French POWs but almost nothing is known about them. In 1942, *Ford Werke* employed 400-500 *Westarbeiten*; one example: Yvon Thibaut, one of 70-80 Belgians.²⁵ In mid 1943, about 50% of *Ford Werke* workforce came from abroad, of whom 1200 were Russians, mostly women, though Schmidt, a senior executive also reported that in June 1943, most of their male workers were foreign. *Ford Werke* also made use of a KZ labour squad of about sixty men, all skilled labourers, assigned from KZ Buchenwald.²⁶

An interview with Anna Nesteruk, from West Ukraine, gives an idea of how the women were recruited for work at *Ford Werke*. Born in 1925, she said how in 1942, a German came to their home and said that if she did not come with them, she would be shot. She was not even allowed to say goodbye to their parents.²⁷ But the German workers gave them bread in the *Ford Werke* camp, which was strictly forbidden, representing significant passive resistance.²⁸

Then there was *Klöckner-Humboldt Deutz AG* (KHD) which in part produced armaments. To quote from the KHD interesting website: The conscription of large sections of the work force created problems, with 4,345 employees from the Cologne plant already called up for military service by August 1943. These losses had to be covered... from 1942 onwards, as was the case in practically all German manufacturing companies, increasingly through the use of foreign workers, forced labor, and prisoners of war. The number of civilian foreigners [sic] working in the

²⁴ The present railway employers have put up a small monument to these forced labourers which, though next to Cologne station, is almost impossible to find.

²⁵ Billstein, Fings, Kugler, Levis, *Working for the Enemy*, pp.182

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp.12, 89, 90, 91

²⁷ Cologne Documentation Centre, 163-228

²⁸ Billstein, Fings, Kugler, Levis, *Working for the Enemy*, pp.179

Cologne KHD plant had reached almost 2,000 by mid-1943, and constituted 25% of all the employees involved in production. These were supplemented by further prisoners of war and by around 400 Italian military internees.²⁹ Many of the 2000 labourers were women.³⁰

On 4 November 1944, the Security Office, the intelligence agency of the SS, authorised local police departments to execute non-German persons without the need for prior clearance by Berlin Head Office, as previously required. No longer accountable, the executions of mainly forced labourers and POWs became ever greater and more random. The first executions in October 1944 were mostly carried out by hanging on transportable gallows, less often by shooting. Seven people could be hanged simultaneously, over a hundred people on one single day. The names of the persons to be executed were drawn up by the Cologne Gestapo. The last executions were carried out on 2 March 1945, four days before American troops reached the city, among them a fifteen-year old Cologne youth, a Russian POW and a Pole.

Resistance within Cologne

Walter Rietig, who worked at *Opel*, had been a member of Socialist Workers Youth, then the SPD, then the KPD, as well as being a member of the Friends of Nature. He formed a clandestine group in *Opel* after 1933, which included SPD, KPD and break-aways from both and, in June 1936, organised a 15 minute strike against the cut in pay and the terrible working conditions. Rietig belonged to a cell of about 5 people and was the contact for French POWs. Fritz Zangerle, a resistance activist who was Rietig's contact man in the KPD cell, interviewed by Peter Schirmbeck, said Rietig listened to foreign radio at a metal grinder, so it could not be heard.³¹ In 1937, Rietig was arrested and convicted on the testimony of three co-workers who were bribed. He was sentenced to death for treason and guillotined on 22 December 1942.³²

As already described in the earlier chapter on resistance amongst foreign workers, we know of limited sabotage at *Ford Werke* in Cologne, for example by Thibaut and by Englebert Brinker, another KPD leader of the underground in Cologne, at the *Klöckner-Humbolt-Deutz-Werke*. On a more individual level, Askold Kurov, abducted from Moscow aged 16, performed small acts of sabotage and stole food and

²⁹ <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/khd-konzern-history/>. This website shows no remorse over what happened during the Nazi period.

³⁰ Billstein, Fings, Kugler, Levis, *Working for the Enemy*, p.89

³¹ *Ibid*, p.180

³² Herbert, Ulrich, 2000, *Forced Laborers in the "Third Reich": an overview*, <http://projekte.geschichte.uni-freiburg.de/herbert/uhpub/forcedlaborers.html>

weapons from parcels.³³

While any Gestapo records have to be read critically, their statistics on work related crimes suggest that it was foreign workers, who had, de facto, become a part of the German working class, who were most likely to be doing any resisting. For them, there was a coalescing of resistance to super-exploitation with hatred of Germans.

From 1941 onwards, the Cologne Gestapo was authorised to transfer workers suspected to be slackers to Gestapo-operated work education camps. In August 1943 alone, the Cologne Gestapo arrested at least 1,713 persons, based on their refusal to work of whom 53 were German nationals. Among the remainder there were 884 Eastern workers, 222 Belgians, 219 French, 123 Poles.³⁴ By 1944, most local KZ prisoners were foreign labourers, many of whom were executed.

Fritz Bilz writes about the plaque on the house Sülzgürtel 8: "This is a site which commemorates the death of the leaders of the Cologne NKFD. The website states: A plaque on the house ... [where they were arrested] commemorates the Cologne resistance group of the "National Committee Free Germany" (NKFD), which was smashed today exactly 60 years ago by the Nazis... In February 1994, the district council decided on the [plaque] proposal by the SPD Ortsverein Lindenthal...The then owner of the house prevented the attachment to the house. That is why [it is on] the sidewalk in front of the house. The present owner had the board attached to the house later at his own expense".

Ferdi Hülser was interviewed about how the People's Committee operated underground:³⁵

"It was Willi Schumacher [a social democrat, ex-Reichstag deputy], who spoke to me... He gave us so much courage. Anyway, he said to me one day: We take a few steps for a walk, I have to talk to you. Then he asked me if I would be willing to participate illegally, i.e. to belong to the direct resistance group. And then I said: Yes, if so, then I want to fight, too, I do not want to be executed so easily, as a simple victim. That's why I've taken on the role of raising arms for the group and training the group in shooting".

"The people of Cologne were informed with pamphlets, leaflets and materials [they could throw]. A leaflet said: Workers and soldiers: Not an hour for the war. Do not go to the front. Fight with us for peace. For the freedom. For the Popular Front. Against the Nazis! Committee of the Popular Front.

³³ Cologne during National Socialism, NS Documentation Centre, 2011

³⁴ <https://museenkoeln.de/ns-dokumentationszentrum/default.aspx?s=784>

³⁵ Fritz Bilz <http://www.taz.de/!670585/>, TAZ.Archiv, Rudi Dutschke-Str. 23, 10969 Berlin.

Other slogans were: Hitler's death - peace, freedom, bread or Do not work for the war - go sick, then you do not need to shoot grenades . And: Get your family to safety or Throw the gun...

There were leaflets calling on the people of Cologne not to go to work, to desert from the front as a soldier, to sabotage war production or to work slowly...

Youth resistance

Non-conformist youth groups, often referred to by the generic term of Edelweiss Pirates³⁶, could be seen as forming the largest resistance grouping in Cologne. They comprised a network of about 3000 mostly working class young people, including those in Youth KPD, *Bündische Jugend*, the Confessional Church groups and the Friends of Nature. The young increasingly worked together. The Darmstadt Gestapo referred to how the Young Communists were mopping up young people who had belonged to the Friends of Nature, which they interpret, correctly, as indicating a decline in sectarianism.³⁷ The regime persecuted the groups of Edelweiss youths with increasing intensity and violence. By the end of the 1930s, a Gestapo file contained more than 3,000 names of dissident Cologne youth.

The loose but overlapping character of youth resistance in Cologne is revealed in the following two examples. Gertrud Kühlem, or Mucki, was born in 1924. Her father, a boiler maker, and her mother, a pharmacist, were active communists. Her father was arrested several times for his resistance work and killed in Esterwegen concentration camp. Mucki joined the *Rote Pioniere*, a communist youth organisation, at school. She then came into contact with the *Bündische Jugend* via the Friends of Nature movement and later met up with the Ehrenfeld Edelweiss Pirates.³⁸ Mucki distributed flyers; she was there when slogans such as *No weapons for the war* were written on trains in Cologne Ehrenfeld. She was arrested in 1941 and 1944 but continued to take part in field trips and distributed flyers between imprisonments. Then she was interned in the Brauweiler concentration camp but survived and continued to live in Cologne.

Hans Weinsheimer was born in 1928. His father, Johann Weinsheimer, was also active in a communist resistance group. Hans helped to distribute flyers or put them on trees or shelters. At the end of 1943, aged 15, he took part in a field trip organised by the *Bündische Jugend* and was locked up in the Gestapo prison for two days. In early 1944, by then 16, Hans was arrested and was brought to the Gestapo prison. In

³⁶ see Chapter 8

³⁷ Heyl, Bernd Walter Rietig and the effort of remembrance, quoted in Billstein

³⁸ The *Bündische Jugend*, which included a variety of youth associations, was based loosely on the principles of the Woodcraft Folk in Britain.

1944, when he was arrested again, he was held until 1945 and survived.

In autumn 1944, a resistance group, many young, gathered around Hans Steinbrück, aged 23, who had escaped from a camp and was good at defusing bombs. Sometimes the Cologne Edelweiss group is over-simply presented as the Steinbrück group. The group consisted of scores of anti-Nazi resisters, runaway forced labourers, Jews, escaped Soviet and other POWs, deserters and refugees, as well as black marketeers, who survived in the bombed-out districts of Cologne.

Although the details are not clear, there was a raid on a local arms depot followed by a battle between the Pirates and the Cologne Gestapo in which the chief of the Cologne Gestapo was killed. On 25 October 1944, Himmler ordered a crackdown on the group. The Gestapo arrested 13 people from the Steinbrück group and in Ehrenfeld, arrested 128 persons, 24 of whom were publicly hanged without trial on 25 October and 10 November, including eleven foreign forced labourers and six youths, some former Edelweiss Pirates.³⁹

The Nazi authorities were close to collapse in Cologne by October/November of 1944. Many political acts of sabotage were committed, including armed engagement. In autumn 1944, there were quasi-partisan battles, when German political resisters, foreign workers, deserters, escaped POWs and youth groups carried out surprise attacks on military supply sites and full scale assaults on the Gestapo.⁴⁰

On 24 November 1944, the Gestapo raided the headquarters of the People's Committee. Heinz Humbach, born in 1928 so only about 17 in 1945, whose father belonged to the Cologne People's Committee, remembered the arrests:

"A comrade had finally revealed our address under the most severe torture. On the day of the arrest, 24 November 1944, I still remember well. I went to the basement to get food. Suddenly I heard sounds: shots, it seemed to me. I went up to the apartment on the first floor, where there were armed SA and SS people. At the door stood a civilian, who asked me, What's going on out there? But as I got closer, he too had a gun in his hand. "Hands up!" he ordered and led me to the others in the kitchen. My father and I were the first to be handcuffed to the police station on Remigiusstrasse".

"I was put in a cell. It was dark...I heard the cries of the comrades who were beaten by the SS ... I want to take my own life, but when I want to cut open the arteries, it will not work... Mindful of the admonitions of my father, I have made myself stupid... I was laid over a chair, my head outstretched under the back, and then three of those Gestapo people hit me with stools. I then became

³⁹ <https://museenkoeln.de/ns-dokumentationszentrum/default.aspx?s=784>,

⁴⁰ Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, pp.161-164; Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*.

unconscious".⁴¹

Heinz Humbach had already been arrested by the Nazis in 1943 and then again along with his father at the end of November 1944 at the age of 16 years. As the US Army advanced, they were repeatedly relocated but Heinz survived.

To return to the interview with Ferdi Hülser about the arrest of the leaders of the People's Front Committee:

"The detainees were cruelly tortured. Engelbert Brinker and Otto Richter [KPD] were murdered, Johannes Kerp [KPD], Max Neugebauer [social democrat] and Karl Stahl [Bible researcher] died in the [hands of the] Gestapo. The detainees were first transferred to the Siegburg prison and then distributed to various prisons. The notorious People's Court imposed death sentences on a total of 72 inmates...The Gestapo on 24 November 1944 arrested the entire leadership of 11 of the Cologne National/People's Front Committee, their family members and two Jewish women who had been hidden in the house and then were deported. Willi Tollmann injured himself in an attempt to escape. Within a few days, between 60 and 70 members of the resistance group were arrested. Gestapo commissioner Ferdinand Kütter applied for capital punishment in a so-called special treatment."

Wilhelm Tollmann, the central director of the KPD in Cologne, was arrested but succeeded in jumping from the second floor of the building and, seriously injured, died.

Conclusion

In August 1943 alone, the Gestapo arrested 2,090 persons in Cologne. The Gestapo records get shaky after that and by late 1944 had stopped. Special forces associated with the Gestapo, such as the *Kommando Bethke* unit, pursued members of the resistance and, from autumn 1944, *Kommando Kütter* pursued the Edelweiss Pirates and the People's Committee. From 1944, the local Gestapo deported thousands of Cologne Jews, took part in the killing of over 1,500 Sinti and Roma people, numerous homosexuals and other so-called antisocial elements.⁴²

On 25 October, 1944, eleven foreign workers were hung at Brauweiler prison for crimes ranging from petty theft to organised resistance.⁴³ Seventeen days later, thirteen German adolescents were hanged there, the youngest nine years old, for the

⁴¹ [www.taz.de/!670585/TAZ.ARCHIV,Rudi Dutschke-Str. 23, 10969 Berlin](http://www.taz.de/!670585/TAZ.ARCHIV,Rudi_Dutschke-Str._23,_10969_Berlin).

⁴² <https://museenkoeln.de/ns-dokumentationszentrum/default.aspx?s=764>

⁴³ Brauweiler KZ, until 1943 used by the Gestapo as a prison, especially for the detention of participants in the Spanish Civil War and Belgian resistance fighters, from the spring of 1944 was used as a base to pursue the Edelweiss Pirates, a resistance group of Polish officers and the National Committee for a Free Germany (<https://museenkoeln.de/ns-dokumentationszentrum/default.aspx?s=764>).

crime of disobeying the police. In February, 1945, a couple of months before final Nazi defeat, somewhere between several hundred and a thousand prisoners were sent for execution.⁴⁴

The leaders of the National Committee were scheduled to be brought before a Special Court meeting in Königswinter. But on 10 February 1945, Brauweiler KZ, the infamous Gestapo detention centre where they were incarcerated, was to be evacuated because of the approaching Allied troops. What was to be done? The Gestapo did not intend to leave any political opponents alive, especially as the Americans were arriving. A Führer Order signed by Martin Bormann ordered "all imprisoned political opponents and those who could still be caught" to be eliminated. But the Americans arrived and the survivors were rescued.⁴⁵

In the last months of war, mass looting occurred by youth, escaped prisoners and retreating soldiers in a city which had been decimated by Allied bombing. Flyers appeared calling for the end to the war. The Cologne Gestapo, who were becoming increasingly frenzied and autonomous, attempted to clear the whole area and create a dead zone. It succeeded in moving out about 200,000 people, combing through the evacuees for deserters and political resisters, who by this point quite often were armed. Eastern workers were shot on the spot if found to have been stealing or dealing in black market goods. The Cologne Gestapo in these frantic months broadened its scope to include civilians who would now be punished by the sharpest measures.⁴⁶ To give some examples of people the Allied soldiers found alive in the local camps: one woman who had refused to commit espionage, a Frenchman who had given scraps of bread to Russian forced labourers and a young Dutchman who had listened to the BBC.⁴⁷

A diaspora of the disaffected developed. What happened in Cologne was close to open rebellion, perhaps even civil war.

⁴⁴ https://www.nrw.vvn-bda.de/.../1839_historische_termine_2018

⁴⁵ Malle Bensch-Humbach, <https://koeln.vvn-bda.de/2014/11/05/die-koelner-gruppe-des-nationalkomitees-freies-deutschland-busfahrt-nach-brauweiler/>

⁴⁶ McConnell, M., 2012, "The Situation is Once Again Quiet: Gestapo Crimes in the Rhineland", *Central European History*, 45(1), 2012, 27-49.

⁴⁷ Billstein, Fings, Kugler and Levis, *Working for the Enemy*, p.87

Chapter 16 - Conclusion

Our understanding of the Second World War has been distorted by later constructions which present it as a noble war, essentially won by the plucky British, with some US assistance, while saving the Jews is often portrayed as a major Allied motivation. What has been almost utterly obscured are both the Nazis' range of motivations and the heroic role of the working class based German resistance. The Nazis never forgot that they needed to rid the world of communism and the anti-Nazis, despite so many giving their lives, never gave up opposing them.

The outbreak of war intensified the Nazis' intent. In September 1939, after Hitler declared opponents could be destroyed as an enemy of the nation, Himmler put his words into practice by launching the regime's execution policy, giving the SS the green light to kill just about anyone they liked. Heydrich even became impatient about the slow uptake and singled out people guilty of communist activities to be mercilessly eradicated. At the start of the war, the Gestapo targeted thousands of the German political enemies of the state who had somehow not yet been picked up.

Then the mass arrests of foreign nationals heated up. The SS first singled out the veterans of the Spanish civil war. Mauthausen and Gusen, two of the toughest camps, were throughout the war used for the "incurable political enemies of the *Reich*" and for the imprisonment and murder of their political and ideological enemies. The SS incarcerated approximately 4,400 Spanish republicans, who had found refuge from the Franco regime in France in 1939 and who the Vichy French authorities turned over to the Germans in 1940. They quickly gained a reputation for bravery and solidarity in the camp, which further infuriated the SS. In 1941, almost 75% of the Red Spaniards perished at Mauthausen: extermination through labour in the quarries.

By the end of 1941, the Government spread its ideological net to non-Germans. On 7 December 1941, the Night and Fog Decree (*Nacht-und-Nebel-Erlass*) stated that non-German civilians in occupied territories engaging in activities intended to undermine the security of German troops or the *Reich*, such as sabotage, espionage, communist intrigues, activities which created unrest and gave aid to the enemy, upon capture, were to have the death penalty applied immediately, either in the country of capture or in Germany. It was soon extended to cover any form of anti-German activity in occupied countries. Political activists and resistance leaders who had not already been picked up from across occupied Europe, including Norwegians, Danes, Dutch, Belgians, Spanish and French were arrested and sent to KZs in Germany.¹

Then there were the Soviet POWs. Arriving in the KZs from early autumn 1941, it

¹ <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/night-and-fog-decree>

is estimated that between 300,000 and 500,000 died every month between October and November 1941, some deliberately murdered, others dying from cold and starvation. Most Soviet commissars were executed, usually shot but sometimes injected, within days of arriving: 40,000 or more in just autumn 1941, dwarfing all previous killing campaigns. Later, in May 1942, at Mauthausen, the first large scale gassing occurred, killing 231 Soviet POWs with Zyklon B; then the local SS gassed hundreds of Soviet POWs in vans.² Though the use of gas is associated with the murder of Jews, it was first used on Soviet POWs.

In the days after the July 1944 failed coup, in August, more than 5,000 left wing activists from the Weimar period who had somehow survived were detained in KZs, during *Aktion Gitter*.³ The police also focused on resistance activities by foreigners inside Germany; in addition, they sent tens of thousands of foreign workers to the KZs for breach of contract. After the crushing of the Warsaw uprising, even more prisoners arrived who were turned into forced labourers.

The final months of the War were the most lethal. The daily inmate numbers in KZs rose from about 21,000 in September 1939 to 200,000 in 1943, about 300,000 in December 1943, and 520,000 in August 1944. Pushed on by Himmler, there were 714,211 new prisoners registered by the SS on 15 January 1945, the eve of the evacuation from Auschwitz.⁴

In the early months of 1945 in the camps run by the SS, they went on a killing spree. It is estimated that between January and March 1945, some 300,000 people were murdered in a final escalation of violence, as the Third Reich went down in blood: preventative action according to SS General Kammler. Freed from virtually any constraint by the collapsing central government structures, camp commandants, often the SS, were finally able to kill those they had especially hated and those they wished to silence, particularly political prisoners and prominent resistance fighters.⁵ Soviet POWs were top of the list; of the several thousand in Mauthausen KZ in mid-1944, only a few hundred were still alive by January 1945.⁶

In their final attempt to rid the world of Bolshevism in the last weeks of Nazi rule the SS used mass executions, shooting, lethal injections and gas. The SS and the guards shot surviving political prisoners and resistance fighters, German and non-German.⁷ As support for Hitler and the Nazi regime evaporated, the Nazi zealots were, as many historians have commented, still terrified by the memory or stories of

² Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.265

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aktion_Gitter. This is an under-researched area!

⁴ Wachsmann, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, p.545

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 568-570

⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 579,580

⁷ *Ibid*, p.568

the 1918/19 revolutions and of the insurrectionary movement which had stopped the Kapp putsch. As Himmler stated as late as 18 April 1945: "No prisoner must fall alive into enemy hands".⁸

Because many millions of Jews died in the Holocaust as a result of Nazi barbarism, because of a dominant historiographic paradigm which focuses on the fate of the Jews and the Nazis' ferocious antisemitism and because comparisons of numbers of victims is inevitably contentious, it can be easy to overlook that it was only in 1942 that Jewish inmates became a major presence in the camps for the first time during the war and the subject of State led, deliberate, systematised, mass murder. The escalation from ideological antisemitism to systematised State annihilation was not an original part of the Nazi plan. It was the decimation of the left, the anti-Nazi resistance and its ideological opposition to Nazism, which was an essential prerequisite for the construction of the Jew as a racialised outsider and the antisemitic practices which followed.

How meaningful is it to talk of organised resistance to the Nazis in Germany? Peukert refers to the memoirs of Heinrich Galm, an ex-KPD activist (expelled in 1929), about how little could actually be done.⁹ Galm talks of how soon after the Nazi victory the flags hung from almost every window in working class districts, suggesting at least superficial Nazi support. Galm writes, controversially, that "we organised no resistance during the entire period". He highlights the crucial misinterpretation of the KPD leadership that the Nazi regime was temporary and how this encouraged KPD members and supporters to organise reckless acts of resistance that were likely to lead to death.

Similarly, Abendroth, who was active in the German resistance, brings out the early break up of the resistance networks. First it was conscription, then the war economy and the brutal exploitation of the occupied areas of Europe which brought increasing employment and a much improved standard of living for German workers, at least till the outbreak of war. Even where there had previously been contacts between resistance groups and civil society, this quickly broke down.

Indeed, such was the terror launched against the communists in particular in 1933 and subsequently, that just surviving and keeping the party organisation in existence underground became the priority for many of the resistance groups. Distributing

⁸ *Ibid*, p.580

⁹ Peukert quoting from Heinrich Galm: *Ich war halt immer ein Rebell*, Offenbach, 1981: Galm joined the USPD in 1917, the KPD in 1920 and was an active trade unionist. From 1924 to 1933 he was a member of the Hesse state Parliament. Galm, who belonged to the right wing of the KPD around Thalheimer and Brandler, opposed the ultra-left union politics of the party leadership and its Stalinisation. Expelled from the KPD in 1929, he became a co-founder of the KPO and in 1932 moved to the SAPD; he was the only person supported by both organisations in the 1932 elections. From 1933, he was frequently arrested but survived.

illegal leaflets, circulating information, maintaining contacts and supporting the persecuted and their families took much solidarity and courage but hardly threatened the Nazi regime.

In the last years of the war, Abendroth argues, the policy of bombing the civilian population, beloved by the British on the grounds this would break the Germans allegiance to the Nazis, was not effective, so great was the fear of the consequences of losing the war. Thus, Abendroth argues, the newly constituted resistance groups in the working class movement only had an influence on small minorities of workers and intellectuals. Many of those left in Germany and not in prison were inexperienced, especially given the clandestine and dangerous nature of underground work. There was little if any contact between the resistance groups and their former political parties. Abendroth argues, and later research supports him, that the Nazi terror apparatus continued till the end, smashing up resistance groups, even if in the final chaos a few got away, helped by the outbreak of typhus: the SS did not want those infected to come close.

The heightened resistance in the last weeks of the war is difficult to interpret. There were about 120 antifascist committees established across Germany, seeking to throw out the Nazis. For example in Leipzig, a group, with about 150,000 supporters, urged soldiers to desert and demanded that the Allies should not cause further destruction, in Dachau, they stormed the Town Hall, although the Nazis succeeded in repelling them, while in Solingen, they temporarily took control. In Hamburg and Halle, the *Antifa* called on soldiers and workers, some armed, not to defend the town against the Allies and planned a revolt should the Nazis resist. Neither the US Army nor the Comintern supported these initiatives. Moscow, including Ulbricht, was opposed to such autonomous actions, but had hardly any influence because of the virtual absence of communication.¹⁰

The goals of the resistance from within the workers' movement shifted significantly but, even in the first phase, the extent to which members of the resistance wanted to overthrow Germany as a capitalist system or wanted Germany to lose the war is impossible to estimate. Certainly, they were willing to make a stand against supporting German nationalism. No way did they take the position 'my country right or wrong'. The main goal of later resistance groups, working alongside the bourgeois opposition, was to bring down the Nazis, not to transform German society. The closer they got to the bourgeois opposition and, in the circumstances, who blames them, the closer they got to the position that they were the good Germans as against those bad Nazi Germans, in effect making a concession to nationalism inconsistent with their earlier socialist goals.

¹⁰ Gluckstein, Donny, 2012, *A People's History of the Second World War*, Pluto Press, pp. 131-134

The German workers' movement, for all that, was the main resistance to the Nazis, although marginalised in the official canon of remembrance. But did the German resistance contribute to ending the Nazi regime in some sort of parallel initiative to that of the Allies and therefore help end the war sooner as the resistance hoped? Did it have more latent internal support than we can observe? Or is its main importance that it showed that many Germans opposed Nazism to the point that they were willing to give up their lives? Maybe its significance is the early influence it had on resistance movements elsewhere, especially in Spain and France and that we now remember them.



Hans Otto, KPD, a well-known actor, from 1930 worked with proletarian worker theatre groups and was the chair of the Berlin section of the *Arbeiter-Theater-Bund* (Workers' Theatre), aligned with the KPD and banned during Weimar, as well as being a representative of the Stage Workers Union. After 27 February 1933, Otto went underground in Berlin but tried to contact members and sympathisers still at liberty. This was especially dangerous as many were well-known. He also distributed anti-Nazi leaflets. In November 1933, he was arrested by members of the SA during a meeting in a café with Gerhard Hinze, an actor from his underground group who survived and became a well-known British actor. He was mercilessly tortured and died a few days later. His body was thrown out of a fourth floor window. The official record stated that he jumped. His death was concealed until Berthold Brecht started to make a fuss from outside Germany.



Hans Otto

Siegi Moos, my father, a KPD member, a director in and theoretician of the agit-prop movement, was a long-time collaborator of Hans Otto in the *Arbeiter-Theater-Bund*. Here, they worked together, along with Maxim Valentin and two others, on what it meant to reorientate the agit-prop movement towards the working class. Moos wrote the poem "To a Dead Comrade" in memory of Hans Otto.

Siegfried Moos

To a dead comrade

A comrade was murdered. A fighter is dead.
Ten days tortured and beaten.
They gave him thrashing and water and bread
but he has borne the torture

And he saw his killers, he saw their faces
when they came into his cell
Outside he saw the sky, the sun and the light.
He has betrayed no comrade.

The leader of the staff gave the order to kill
They accomplished their work with pleasure
and threw the body outside the window
and went to clean their hands

The comrade, full of pain, feels coming his death
and he whispers into the room:
once again- long live the revolution.
Then his lips get silent forever

His killers are marching with singing and sound
as Germany's celebrated heroes
But with them all through the streets
goes the hate of millions of tortured

They commemorate the dead, killed like cattle
beaten (scourged) with whiplashes
They died like heroes. They are chiseled
into our hearts.

Part 2 - German Volunteers in the French Resistance

by Steve Cushion

On the morning of the 24 August 1944, Norbert Beisacker, a German communist, pulled down the swastika flag on the Montcalm barracks in the southern French town of Nîmes, while two other Germans, Richard Hilgert and Hermann Leipold, were setting up their machine-gun to fire on the retreating *Wehrmacht* soldiers. He was not only given the honour of replacing the Nazi flag with the tricolour, he also carried the French national flag on 4 September in the military parade to celebrate the liberation of Nîmes. These three men, along with another 40 of their German comrades who paraded through Nîmes that September morning in 1944, were members of the 104th Company of the 5th Battalion of the *Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* (FFI - French Forces of the Interior).

Much celebrated in the localities where they fought, such German "traitors" did not fit into the post-war ideological reconstruction. The Chairman of the Provisional Government of the French Republic, Charles de Gaulle, who was committed to reconstructing French imperialism, wanted to stress the part that the French had played in liberating themselves from German occupation. The important role played by large numbers of foreign fighters in that liberation, while so many French citizens had collaborated with the occupying forces, was uncomfortable. Meanwhile, in the defeated Germany, the new governments of both East and West Germany wanted to move on and the existence of such incorrigible rebels was an uncomfortable reproach to those who had not resisted the Nazis or who had spent the war in relatively comfortable exile.

Besides, the world was quickly dividing into the Cold War blocs and new animosities were taking priority. But, above all, the example of brave men and women, who placed political principle above their supposed duty to the nation of their birth, struck at the very basis of the nation state, the very edifice upon which the world order is based. By all means celebrate a few senior army officers who tried to stage a coup to replace Hitler when defeat was staring them in the face, but those who had actively engaged in combat against their "own" side at every opportunity since 1933 are not the people that school history books like to celebrate. But, as the extreme right is on the rise again in Europe, it is timely to remember those who did not accept defeat.

Armed resistance to Fascism can perhaps be seen to start with the Spanish Civil War, when thousands of antifascists joined the forces of the Spanish Republic in the International Brigades. Of these, some 5,000 were Germans and Austrians of whom

2,000 died. They fought against the Condor Legion, 15,000 German soldiers sent by the Nazi government to assist the nationalist forces led by General Franco.

But when the Spanish Republic was finally defeated in 1939, the International Brigade volunteers, those who had not perished on the battlefields of Spain, had to flee. The British, Irish, Dutch, Scandinavian and US volunteers were not welcomed home, but at least they had home countries to return to. The German, Italian and Polish volunteers had already fled from their countries of origin and were unable to return. They were sent to French concentration camps, where they were joined on the outbreak of war by thousands of other German, Austrian, Czechoslovakian and Saarland refugees, who were considered "enemy aliens". In 1940, when the British and French Armies collapsed and were defeated at Dunkirk, many of these internees knew what was in store for them and escaped. Their military training and understanding of the nature of fascism were to prove invaluable, while their previous experiences left them with little illusion in the Hitler-Stalin pact.

Once the German Army had invaded the Soviet Union, the battle lines were clarified and a campaign of urban terrorism was launched against the occupiers and their French collaborators. Perhaps the most spectacular was in Nice when Max Brings, a German communist of Jewish heritage whose real name was Alfred Woznik, blew up the German officers' mess just after Christmas 1943. But he was one among many and a visit to most local *Musées de la Résistance* in France will find a reference to German refugees who were active in the local resistance.

Veterans of the Spanish Civil War of all nationalities were to play a vital role in organising armed resistance to the German occupation of France and German volunteers were an important part of that effort. At the introduction, in 1942, of the *Service du travail obligatoire* (STO, Obligatory Work Service), the compulsory enlistment and deportation of hundreds of thousands of French workers to Germany to work as forced labour for the German war effort, thousands of young men fled into the hills and took to the guerrilla formations known as the *Maquis*.¹ Spanish war veterans were crucial to the organisation and training of these young volunteers.

We shall not only examine the German guerrilla fighters in the hills and cities; there were many other ways in which German citizens aided the overthrow of the Nazi regime from outside the country. The *Travail allemand*, (TA, literally "German Work") was an effort by German speakers to infiltrate the occupation authorities, to seek out information that could be of use to the French resistance or the British and US Allies. This organisation, in which women and those of Jewish heritage played a

¹ The expression *Maquis*, used to describe the guerrilla bands of the French Resistance, derives from the Corsican term for the dense scrub vegetation of hardy evergreen shrubs and small trees, characteristic of Mediterranean coastal regions.

prominent role, not only spied on the Nazi machine, they also carried out propaganda amongst the German troops encouraging resistance and desertion. In addition to these efforts organised by the exiled *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD - Communist Party of Germany), the French Trotskyists also attempted to spread propaganda amongst the German soldiers. A very high proportion of these infiltrators from both initiatives paid with their lives, but there was some success and a number of German soldiers were recruited as informants or persuaded to desert. However, the most important desertions were amongst the recruits to the SS from Eastern Europe who, from 1943 onwards, engaged in some spectacular mutinies often killing their German officers in the process.

A purist may say that, despite wearing German uniforms, these people were not, strictly speaking, traitors as they were not Germans, so we shall examine some who were. Otto Kühne was a communist railway worker who had been elected as a *Reichstag* deputy. He fled to France where, on the outbreak of war, he was interned as an undesirable alien in a labour camp. Kühne and about 40 of his comrades, mainly German and Austrian veterans of the International Brigades, fled into the Cévennes mountains. These guerrilla fighters became the 104th Company of the 5th Battalion of the FFI who played such an important role in the battle for the town of Nîmes. Otto Kühne himself was appointed a Colonel in the newly-formed French Army and led a force of 2000 fighters, including a significant number of Armenian deserters from the SS *Ost-Legion*, who had mutinied.

Chapter 1 - From *Sitzkrieg* to *Blitzkrieg*

International Brigades

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 gave those political refugees who had fled the Nazi takeover in 1933 their first real opportunity to oppose the rise of fascism. The German takeover of Austria, Czechoslovakia and the Saarland provided more recruits as antifascist militants, as well as political refugees who had sought refuge in these lands, had to flee. They formed the Thälmann Battalion, named after Ernst Thälmann, historic leader of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD - Communist Party of Germany), who had been arrested in 1933. The KPD issued a statement on 7 August 1936 saying: "We call on all German anti-fascists abroad who have undergone military training to place themselves at the disposal of the Spanish People's Front".¹

Franz Borkenau commented that "the Germans have to wash away the ignominy of their defenceless retreat before the forces of Hitler".² Tom Wintringham wrote of their "bitter, terrible courage - at rare intervals in war, priceless but always costly - and they continued to be shock troops, who did or tried to do the impossible and paid for it".³

The motivation of the German volunteers owed as much to events in Germany as it did to internationalist solidarity. Opportunities for political action within Germany were very limited, but defeating Spanish fascism could also have been the beginning of the end for German fascism as well. Roman Rubinstein, one of the German veterans, said "... most of the political emigrants had already done time in Germany. They had been imprisoned, beaten. Spain was an opportunity to fight the Nazis with a gun in your hand. That played a huge role". Another veteran said: "What I had dreamt as a child, when my father told me stories about the struggle of the working class for a decent existence - Spartacus, Berlin, Leuna on the Ruhr, the victorious Soviet army - wasn't a dream any more, it had become reality. I was a soldier of the working class".⁴

Around 5,000 German and Austrian exiles fought in the International Brigades as members of two German-speaking units named after Ernst Thälmann and Edgar André. About 500 of these volunteers were of Jewish heritage.⁵ Gary McCarthy, an

¹ Franz Dahlem, "The Military-Political Work of the Eleventh International Brigade", *The Communist International*, May 1938, p.446.

² Franz Borkenau, *Spanish Cockpit*, London: Faber, 1937

³ Tom Wintringham, *English Captain*, London: Faber, 1939, p.36

⁴ Josie McLellan, "'I Wanted to Be a Little Lenin': Ideology and the German International Brigade Volunteers." *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 2, 2006,

⁵ Arnold Krammer, "Germans against Hitler: The Thälmann Brigade." *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 2 1969.

Irish volunteer, noted that "at San Sebastian prison in 1938, Spanish and German guards took photos of those lads who were obviously Jewish, and of the Negroes too". In fact Jews were constantly slandered in Spanish fascist radio broadcasts and newspapers. Their large presence in the International Brigades became a target for extreme right-wing newspapers all over Europe.⁶

The Thälmann Battalion fought in the defence of Madrid; at the Battle of Jarama, they lost 450 of their then active 500 soldiers. In each of the successive engagements, the Brigade suffered heavy losses. The Battle of Guadalajara, March 1937, is probably most famous. The whole Italian expeditionary corps of 35,000 soldiers, with 80 tanks and 200 field guns, supported by German aircraft, tried to break through to Madrid and they were defeated by Spanish Republican troops with the Italian-speaking Garibaldi and German-speaking Thälmann Battalions at the front.

However, the Republican military position was continually deteriorating and, by early March 1938, the International Brigades found themselves facing the spearhead of the final Nationalist offensive which was to force them across the Ebro on 16 November. According to Gustav Szinda, commander of the Thälmann Battalion at the time, "the fighting retreat from Azeila to Caspe cost the XIth Brigade a thousand dead and wounded volunteers". Of the brigades which retreated across the Ebro, approximately three quarters were killed or wounded, amounting to approximately 30,000 casualties.⁷

In September 1938, at the height of the Battle of the Ebro, the Republican government led by the socialist Juan Negrín announced the decision calling for the withdrawal of the International Brigades. This was part of an ill-advised effort to persuade Franco's foreign backers to withdraw their troops and France and Britain to end their arms embargo against the Republic. This occurred about the same time as the equally disastrous Munich agreement between the British, French and German governments to allow the German Army to invade Czechoslovakia and seize the Sudetenland, so it is hardly surprising that the German and Italian governments were able to use this to their advantage by increasing rather than decreasing their support for Franco and the Spanish nationalists.

On 23 September 1938 the foreign volunteers were withdrawn from active combat and the majority were sent to Barcelona, others to Valencia, for their discharge from the Republican Army. The 11th Brigade was moved to Bisaura, where they remained for nearly three months awaiting evacuation from Spain. Some 20,000 volunteers,

⁶ Martin Sugarman, *Against Fascism - Jews who served in The International Brigade in The Spanish Civil War*, London: Imperial War Museum, 2014

⁷ Gustav Szinda, *Die XI Brigade*, Berlin: Verlag des Ministeriums für National Verteidigung, 1956, p.68; Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, London: Penguin, 1990, p.561.

including 2000 surviving German veterans of the Thälmann Battalion, crossed the border to France in December 1938 and January 1939, into the unsympathetic hands of the French police and immigration authorities.⁸ A large number of the International Brigaders were refugees from Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy or other countries, such as Poland or Hungary, which had extreme right-wing governments. These volunteers had no home to return to and were quickly interned by the French authorities into the "camps of shame".

The International Brigade volunteers who crossed the border into France in early 1939 were soon followed by nearly a quarter of a million Spanish refugees. The French authorities set up internment camps to house those they considered dangerous "reds". Conditions in these camps were appalling, particularly the first in Argelès-sur-Mer. The defeated Spanish republicans and International Brigade volunteers were dumped on the sandy beach and surrounded with barbed wire, having to construct their own shelters as best they could. Further camps were built at Agde near Montpellier, Gurs in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques, Vernet near Pamiers, as well as four or five other establishments. A total of 173,850 refugees from the Spanish civil war were interned. If we take the example of Gurs, 7,000 *Interbrigadistas* were interned out of a total of 19,000 refugees from the defeat of the Spanish Republic.⁹

These camps are a suitable starting point when considering the history of the German volunteers in the French resistance. The comradeship that developed between the internees meant that the histories of all foreign combatants in France are intertwined and embedded in the whole history of the period. We shall concentrate on the story of the German speakers, but this cannot be told separately from the Italians, the Spanish, and Eastern Europeans who made up the other major sections of the immigrant workers' organisation, the *Main-d'œuvre immigrée* (MOI).

Main-d'œuvre immigrée

France had an appallingly high casualty rate in the First World War, over a million dead and another million permanently disabled veterans. This resulted in a severe shortage of labour which the government attempted to fill by recruiting nearly 3 million immigrant workers, mainly from Italy, Spain, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia. While they officially came as economic migrants, many of these immigrant workers were also fleeing persecution from the extreme right-wing authoritarian and antisemitic governments in the countries of their birth.

⁸ Krammer, *Germans against Hitler*, p.78

⁹ Denis Peschanski, *Les camps français d'internement (1938-1946)*, Doctorat d'Etat. Histoire. Université Panthéon-Sorbonne - Paris I, 2000, p.56

The French trade union movement was split between two federations, CGT (*Confédération Générale du Travail*), dominated by the social democrats of the SFIO (*Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière*) and the CGTU (*Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire*) founded in 1922 as a confederation of radical unions that had left the CGT. The CGTU was dominated by the communist party, but with a significant minority of syndicalists and anarchists.

In 1926, in order to facilitate the organisation of these militants, most of whom initially did not speak French, the *Parti communiste français* (PCF, French Communist Party) set up the *Main-d'œuvre étrangère* (MOE, Foreign Labour Force) through the CGTU, the trade union federation it dominated. This changed its name to *Main-d'œuvre immigrée* (MOI, Immigrant Labour Force) in 1932. It was divided into language sections. Most of the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe spoke Yiddish as their first language and the *section juive* (Jewish section) organised Jews from many countries, however very few from Germany, of whom the vast majority spoke German as their first language.

During this period, 55,000 German refugees arrived in France, fleeing from antisemitism and repression after the Nazis came to power in 1933. In January 1935 the Saar voted for a return to German administration and this led to a further 4,000 people, mainly of German origin, arriving in south west France. A large number of these immigrants were left-wing activists or of Jewish heritage; many were both.¹⁰

The economic crisis that followed the Wall Street Crash of 1929 affected France badly and gave the extreme right a pretext to increase their xenophobic and antisemitic activity. Ninety-two thousand immigrants were expelled in 1932 alone and large scale expulsions continued up to 1936.¹¹ France had its own extreme right-wing *ligues*, groups of violent ex-servicemen and desperate petit bourgeois elements, who staged an anti-democratic riot in Paris in 1934, an ill-judged attempt on power that failed when confronted with a vigorous united mobilisation of organised workers.

Many French workers saw the 6 February 1934 riots as an attempted fascist coup and there was a successful counter demonstration on 9 February. On 12 February the reformist CGT and the more radical CGTU called a one-day general strike, while the communist party and the socialist party, officially known as the *Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière* (SFIO, French Section of the Workers' International), called separate demonstrations. However, the workers themselves forced both the demonstrations to unite and, as a result, this strike and the impressive show of

¹⁰ Ralph Schor, *L'opinion française et les étrangers 1919-1939* Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1985

¹¹ Stéphane Courtois, Denis Peschanski, Adam Rayski, *Le sang de l'étranger. Les immigrés de la MOI dans la Résistance*. Fayard, Paris, 1989, pp.15-30

working class unity began the first step towards the Popular Front government elected in 1936. It also presented an alternative to the racism of the extreme right-wing groups and considerably reduced their influence. The immigrant workers in the MOI played an important part in these antifascist mobilisations. This grassroots working class unity in the face of what was perceived as a fascist threat had obliged the leaders of the divided trade unions to reunite the movement, even though the leadership of the CGT remained divided into two tendencies, the moderate *confédérés* and the more radical *unitaires*. This cohabitation, which lasted up to the Hitler-Stalin pact, facilitated the victory of the left in the 1936 elections.

The failure to prevent the Nazi seizure of power in Germany, compared with the success in preventing a right-wing takeover in France was the nail in the coffin of the so-called Third Period politics of the Communist International. This approach was based on an analysis of capitalism, which saw the world economy from 1928 onward, to be a time of widespread economic collapse and mass working class radicalisation, a time of "class against class" when the time would be ripe for proletarian revolution if militant policies were rigidly maintained by communist parties.

Communist policies during the Third Period were marked by hostility to political reformism as an impediment to the movement's revolutionary objectives. As such, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD, *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) was denounced as "social fascist" by the KPD.

After the Nazi victory in Germany, the Communist International (Comintern) became increasingly concerned by the growth of fascism and changed course, adopting the policy of calling for Popular Fronts, or alliances between the working class and progressive elements in the bourgeoisie. Communist parties began to speak in terms of national unity against fascism and imperialism, while minimising the significance of the class struggle. This reorientation was formalised at the Comintern's seventh congress in July 1935, with the proclamation of a new policy, "The People's Front Against Fascism and War". Under this policy communist parties were to form broad alliances with all anti-fascist parties with the aim of both securing social advance at home and a military alliance with the USSR to isolate the fascist dictatorships.¹²

The Popular Front government led by Léon Blum of the SFIO took office in May 1936. But Blum, despite his previous support for the MOI, failed to implement a new immigration policy, thereby offending both the right and left. The other issue which divided the Popular Front was the Spanish civil war. The French left supported the Republican government in Madrid, but the Blum government decided on a policy of

¹² Guérin, Daniel, 2013, *Front populaire, révolution manquée*, Paris: Agone.

non-intervention and, in collaboration with the British government and 25 other countries, imposed an agreement against sending any munitions or allowing any volunteers to go to Spain. These divisions and the hostility of big business caused the Popular Front to collapse in 1938, when it was replaced by a right-wing anti-communist government, led by Édouard Daladier.

Daladier got his opportunity to move against the left when the *Parti communiste français* (PCF, French Communist Party) supported the Hitler-Stalin pact. Formally known as the "Treaty of Non-aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" and also as the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, this was a neutrality agreement between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed in Moscow on 23 August 1939. In response, the French government interned hundreds of French trade unionists, socialists, anarchists and communists, who were considered politically unreliable. The French government was particularly enraged by the Hitler-Stalin pact as they had imagined that their own Munich Agreement with the German government would allow the Nazis a free hand to attack the Soviet Union, thus pitting their two opponents at one another.

The Hitler-Stalin pact was a disaster for the antifascist movement in a number of ways. It caused deep splits in the workers' movement and gave the French government in particular a splendid excuse to crack down on the left. When the PCF publicly supported the pact, thousands of members resigned and much of the rest of the membership was thrown into confusion at the sudden change of line. The PCF was banned and the death penalty was decreed for membership of the party. The German occupying forces were later able to claim that their executions of communist resistance fighters were merely carrying out French law. At the time, it meant that many French and foreign-born communists ended up being arrested and interned in the waiting concentration camps.

Following the German invasion of Poland in 1939, thousands of Poles joined those making their way to France. After the French declaration of war on Germany, the French government began to use the camps to house "enemy aliens" and French opponents of the war. The Spaniards and *Brigadistas* who still remained in the camp, were joined by 20,000 Germans, mainly antifascists who had sought asylum in France, but who were now considered to be citizens of an enemy power. This group also included citizens of Nazi-occupied Austria and Czechoslovakia. Among them were a significant number of Jews who had fled the Nazi regime as well as communists and socialists (of course, many of these communists and socialists were also of Jewish heritage).¹³

¹³ Peschanski, *Les camps français d'internement*, chaps.2&3

The manpower shortage, as a result of the mobilisation of so many French citizens at the outbreak of war, caused the government to organise many of its interned foreign citizens in *Compagnies de Travailleurs Étrangers* (CTE - Companies of Foreign Workers). Initially employed in maintaining the defensive installations, they were quickly seen as a source of cheap labour by factory and mine owners as well as farmers seeking to replace their agricultural labour force now enrolled in the French Army. Thus, when the *Wehrmacht* defeated the French Army in 46 days during May and June 1940, a large number of the previous inhabitants of the French internment camps were scattered beyond government control.¹⁴

The Fall of France

The defeat of the British and French Armies in June 1940 not only threw the French government into turmoil, the workers' movement was equally disrupted. However, the MOI, led by Louis Gronowski, Jacques Kaminski and Artur London, quickly reorganised to meet the new situation. Its organisation into semi-autonomous language groups facilitated the reconstruction of the organisation.¹⁵ The principal groups in the early days were the Spanish, the Italian and Jewish sections.

In this context, "Jewish" needs a word of explanation. The Jewish section of the MOI organised Yiddish-speaking immigrants from Eastern Europe. This did not include Jews from Germany who had been, by and large, integrated into German society and spoke German as their first language and maybe Hebrew if they came from a religious background. They organised themselves into the *resistance* alongside other Germans. French citizens of Jewish heritage organised themselves according to their politics, the Socialists of the SFIO generally joined Gaullist units, one thinks in this context of Raymond and Lucie Aubrac, while the communists in the PCF joined the *Franco-Tireurs et Partisans* (FTP, Guerrillas and Partisan) and the Zionists also had their own organisations such as the *Armée Juive* (AJ, Jewish Army).¹⁶

Imre Brüll, a Jewish Hungarian fighter in the FTP-MOI group *Liberté* based in Grenoble, said in an interview:

"Of course, there were many Jews in the organisation to which I belonged, but there were also, especially in Grenoble, Italians and then there were some Spaniards and even Frenchmen. The fact that one was Jewish or non-Jewish was absolutely irrelevant. A comrade was a comrade. It would not have occurred to us to consider anyone differently according to whether he was

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp.230-232

¹⁵ Finnemore, Sheila Ann, *Hidden From View: Foreigners In The French Resistance*, University of Birmingham, MPhil, 2013, p.48

¹⁶ Association pour la Recherche sur l'Histoire Contemporaine des Juifs (RHICOJ), *Les Juifs dans la Résistance et la Libération*, Paris: Editions du Scribe, 1985.

Jewish or not. That said, I entered the resistance because I was Jewish and as such persecuted and oppressed. If I had not been a Jew, I would not have come to France, I would have stayed in Hungary".

"But I think that I fought mainly against fascism, moreover, if I had to start again, I would do so. My solidarity was total with all those who fought against this scourge. Whether Jewish or not, was of no importance. When I entered "Liberté", I did not enter a Jewish resistance organisation, I joined an antifascist resistance organisation. Moreover, as far as I was concerned, I had become a communist and I was also fighting for the establishment of another society, a socialist society, more just, less inhuman, a society from which all racism would disappear, all antisemitism. So, all those who fought for this were my brothers, whether Jewish, Italian, French or even German. That what we wanted did not happen is another matter".¹⁷

Most of the German communists in France were still in internment camps as enemy aliens. A new leadership of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD, Communist Party of Germany) in exile had been built in the camps but there was political division, partly as a result of the Hitler-Stalin pact. Those around Franz Dahlem argued that it was important to maintain the modicum of legality resulting from the acceptance of internment. Dahlem argued that the party had lost so many militants in Germany that everyone was needed to rebuild a democratic Germany after the war. He refused to escape from the internment camp at Gurs, from where he was suddenly deported to Mauthausen KZ¹⁸ along with hundreds of others. Otto Niebergall, on the other hand, did see the need to escape. Along with Ottomar Strohl of the *Kommunistische Partei Österreichs*, (KPÖ, Communist Party of Austria) and some others, they managed to steal some identity cards from the camp office and, with the aid of some of the camp guards, who turned a blind eye, they escaped. Similarly, Dora Schaul, a German communist of Jewish heritage interned in the camp at Berns was discouraged from escaping by the KPD leadership in the camp. But as she said in an interview in 1998, "We escaped nevertheless". Which was just as well because the Jewish internees were soon deported to die in the death camps.¹⁹

Otto Niebergall

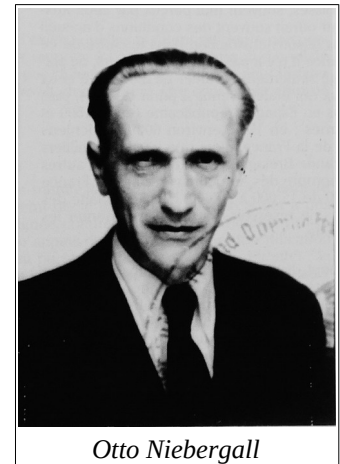
Otto Niebergall was a communist from the Saarland, with a background in the *Roter Frontkämpferbund* (RFB, Red Front) and the metal and mine workers' trade unions. Fleeing to France after the Saarland voted in a referendum to be united with

¹⁷ Collin, Claude, 2013, *Carmagnole et Liberté, Les étrangers dans la Résistance en Rhône-Alpes*, Grenoble: PUG, pp.69-70

¹⁸ *Konzentrationslager* - Concentration camp

¹⁹ Collin, Claude. "Dora Schaul, « Renée Fabre » Dans La Résistance (1913-1999)." *Guerres Mondiales Et Conflits Contemporains*, no. 194 (1999): pp.187-93.

Nazi Germany, he was involved in underground anti-Nazi activity until his incarceration in the Saint-Cyprien internment camp. He escaped on 13 July 1940 and made his way to Toulouse where he linked up with other German communists, including Walter Beling, a veteran communist, who had been involved in the Kiel naval mutiny of 1918. The first priority of the Toulouse group was to get as many of their comrades out of the internment camps as possible and then to obtain false papers, clothing and lodging for them. This was of particular importance given the clause in the 22 June 1940 armistice agreement following the German invasion of France, whereby the Vichy government agreed to deliver all German residents to the Nazis. In October 1940 Pétain signed the decree to intern all foreign Jews.²⁰



The Toulouse comrades reconstructed a clandestine leadership of the KPD in France, while Walter Beling was sent to Paris to establish contact with both the PCF and the MOI, where he found the PCF was interested in propaganda activity aimed at the German military, an idea that the German communists of Toulouse were already discussing. This would mature into a sophisticated operation led by Otto Niebergall, who went to Paris in Spring 1941 to aid its implementation.²¹

Italian Immigration

Late 1940 and early 1941 was a period of construction for the whole resistance, with little visible activity. The Nord-Pas-de-Calais region was therefore notable for its early militancy.

The big difference between the German and Italian political refugees in France was the existence of a large Italian immigration already present in the country, probably a million and a half, most of whom were present as "economic migrants", but for a significant number, part of their reason for emigrating was their hatred of Fascism. This Italian-speaking population was concentrated in the mining regions of the Pas-de-Calais and Lorraine as well as the rural South West, particularly the Lot-et-Garonne. Italian Fascism had been active in France from long before the war and much of the French bourgeoisie had great sympathy for Mussolini, while there was active collaboration between the French and Italian extreme right. In June 1937, the French right-wing terrorist organisation, "La Cagoule", murdered the Italian social

²⁰ Joutard, Philippe et François Marcot, *Les étrangers dans la Résistance en France*, Besançon: Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation, 1992, p.82

²¹ Courtois, Peschanski, Rayski, *Le sang de l'étranger*, pp.105-7;
Perrault, Giles, *Taupes rouges contre SS*, Paris: Messidor, 1986, pp.28-35

democrat Carlo Rosselli on the instructions of the Italian Foreign Ministry.²²

In the mining regions, the employers were strongly pro-fascist and the Italian mining families suffered considerable xenophobic discrimination. By 1941, there was a second generation of this Italian immigration, often French citizens by birth who, remembering the only party that had defended their parents, were extremely loyal to the Communist Party. The north east corner of France, the Forbidden Zone, was cut off from the rest of the country and the local communists operated independently of Paris, so while the Paris leadership of the PCF was still observing the terms of the Hitler-Stalin pact, they were preparing for resistance in the Pas-de-Calais. In May 1941, there was a week-long strike involving 100,000 miners, a strike in which the Italian miners played a prominent role. The miners won their demands, but many of the strike-leaders had to go underground to escape the resulting repression. Living in the relative security provided by the traditional solidarity of mining communities, an armed resistance developed in the region, considerably in advance of the rest of the country.²³ One of the most successful of these groups was led by a young Italian electrician, Eusebio Ferrari, who organised a series of increasingly audacious sabotage attacks, including several train derailments, and an early example of direct attacks on German soldiers. He was finally cornered by the French police and shot dead in February 1942. His group was composed of young Italian, French and Polish workers, but also one young German exile, Paul Henke.²⁴



Paul Henke

²² Pugliese, Stanislao G., 1997, "Death in Exile: The Assassination of Carlo Rosselli", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.32 no.3, p.305-319

²³ Dejonghe, Étienne, 1986 "Les communistes dans le Nord/Pas-de-Calais de juin 1940 à la veille de la grève des mineurs", *Revue du Nord*, tome 68, n°270, Juillet-septembre, pp. 685-720.

²⁴ Pierrart, André & Rousseau, Michel, 1980, *Eusébio Ferrari*, Paris: Editions Syros

Chapter 2 - Infiltration and Propaganda

While most of the German volunteers in the French resistance were organised within groups associated with German exile organisations such as the KPD, there were a considerable number of isolated individuals, such as Paul Henke, who engaged with whichever groups they came across. Equally, attempts to infiltrate and destabilise the German army of occupation began on an ad hoc basis and did not start as an organised initiative.

Wally Heckling and Lispeth Peterson, two German communists in exile in Paris decided on their own initiative not to join the mass exodus when the German Army arrived in 1940, but managed to get jobs in a German company's offices in Paris. They used their position to supply false papers to active fighters, to get jobs for those facing deportation and supply information to the Allies. Only later were they incorporated into the "official" KPD operation to infiltrate and conduct propaganda in the German army. Similarly, from July 1940, two German communists, Sally Grynfolgel and Roman Rubinstein, started making leaflets using a child's printing set and sticking them up on the walls of German army barracks.¹

Travail allemand

There was scepticism at first among the KPD leadership in France. Franz Dahlem, one of the communist leaders in the internment camps, thought the idea of infiltrating the *Wehrmacht* suicidal, particularly as many of the volunteers were of Jewish heritage. The exiled leadership of the *Kommunistische Partei Österreichs* (KPÖ, Communist Party of Austria) was, however, much more enthusiastic about the idea and actively encouraged the involvement of its members and supporters in France. As a result, the majority of militants involved in this activity in the early period were Austrians, while the Germans only really played their full part following the German military takeover of the southern zone.²

Nevertheless, the establishment of the new KPD leadership in Toulouse in early 1941 and their contact with the PCF leadership in Paris set the wheels in motion. An operation, known as *Travail allemand* (TA, literally "German work") was formally established, led by Artur London of the *Komunistická strana Československa* (KSČ, Communist Party of Czechoslovakia), seconded by Otto Niebergall for the KPD and Franz Marek of the Austrian Communist Party.

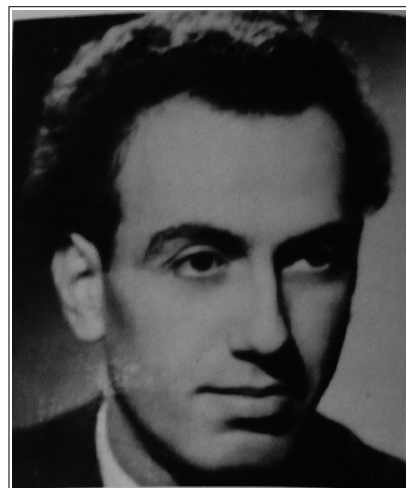
¹ *De l'exil à la résistance. Réfugiés et immigrés d'Europe centrale en France (1933-1945)*, Actes du colloque, Paris, 1989, Arcantère, coll. « Histoire et émancipation »

² London, Lise, 1995, *La Mégère de la rue Daguerre. Souvenirs de résistance*, Paris: Seuil, pp.107-9

Artur London

Artur London came from a communist family of Jewish heritage in Czechoslovakia. He himself joined the Czechoslovak Communist Party as a young man.

Having worked for the Comintern in Moscow, he served in Spain during the Civil War, although as an NKVD³ operative rather than a soldier. He was implicated in the purges of the *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya* (PSUC - Catalan Communist Party). Returning to France after the fall of Barcelona, he was one of the "Leadership Triangle" of the *Main-d'œuvre immigrée* that re-established the organisation in August 1940. From this position, he was given responsibility for leading the *Travail allemand*, which he did from the summer of 1941 until his arrest in August 1942. He was deported to Mauthausen KZ but survived until the end of



Artur London

the war. Returning to Czechoslovakia in 1948, he was appointed Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs but ironically, given his own past as a Stalinist enforcer in Spain, he was arrested in 1951. He became a co-defendant with Rudolf Slánský in the Slánský trial, one of several show trials against Eastern European communists at the time. Accused of being a Zionist, Trotskyite and Titoist, he was forced to confess and sentenced to life in prison and was not released until after the death of Stalin.

Franz Marek

by Eric Hobsbawm ⁴

Among other things, Franz Marek, Austrian communist (1913-79), born Ephraim Feuerlicht to Galician refugees, survived conventional heroism in the French wartime resistance. He headed the resistance organisation for foreigners, doing work among the occupying German forces which a survivor described as "more terrifying than straightforward armed action". He was captured, sentenced to death but saved by the liberation of Paris. His "last words" survive, as recorded on the wall of Fresnes prison on 18 August 1944. But that is not the reason I choose him as my hero.

³ NKVD (НКВД, People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, Народный комиссариат внутренних дел), the interior ministry of the Soviet Union. During the Spanish Civil War, NKVD agents detained, tortured, and killed hundreds of Anarchists and Trotskyists. In 1937 Andrés Nin, the secretary of the POUM was tortured and killed in an NKVD prison in Barcelona.

⁴ *Guardian*, 12th December 2009

When I came to know this short, quizzical, laconic, formidably intelligent man who radiated a sort of self-effacing charisma even when hiking in the Vienna woods, he was still a leading member of the party he joined in 1934, though he already belonged to that lost generation of reforming "Eurocommunist" leaders whose last survivors are Gorbachev and the current president of Italy. After the Prague spring of 1968 he was forced out of the party and lost the only paid job he had ever had since the age of 20, that of "professional revolutionary", for which he had given up academic ambition. The Comintern had given him his first new jacket and trousers, for the childhood of education-hungry Galician Jews without money did not run to such luxuries. For the next 12 years he lived on false papers.

He was plainly a natural at this work, rising to running the inland activities of the now illegal Communist party. It gave him joy, filled his life and, he later recognised, blocked out everything else. After Hitler took over Austria in 1938, he was sent to Paris, returning in 1946, full of hope, to a party career in the Vienna of The Third Man. He said "it needed the shock of 1956 to open me up to strong emotions", including, he admitted, love. Still working to change the world, he died of a long-awaited heart attack. All his material possessions could be fitted into two small suitcases. A 20th-century hero? I think so.

Travail allemand operated under the auspices of the MOI. Otto Niebergall later recalled:

"The TA received invaluable help from the MOI [...]. They put at our disposal a large number of comrades, women and men who spoke German, Poles, Hungarians, Romanians and others, as well as hundreds of non-German speaking collaborators".⁵

The *Travail allemand* had three objectives: distribute antifascist propaganda among the occupation troops, attempt to recruit soldiers to the anti-Nazi struggle and to obtain information, such as troop displacements or Gestapo activity, that might be of use to the resistance.

Young German-speaking women would make the acquaintance of German soldiers, seeking those who might be good prospects for recruitment who could be passed on to their "minder". Another tactic was to seek employment in the service of the *Wehrmacht* as a caterer, interpreter or administrator. Equipped with more or less good quality false identity papers, they would explain their mastery of German by claiming to come from Alsace, which had only returned to French administration in

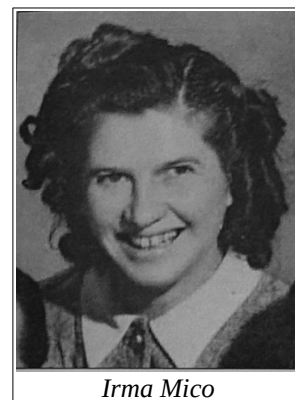
⁵ Collin, Claude. "Le « Travail Allemand »: origines et filiations", *Guerres Mondiales Et Conflits Contemporains*, no. 230 (2008): pp.132-3

1918. The risks were enormous, the German Army was highly supervised by state security and many of the soldiers were convinced Nazis. Even if a soldier was persuaded by the arguments, most would have been too afraid of being denounced to distribute the propaganda material. It frequently happened that one of the *Travail allemand* operatives would think that they had a possible contact, only to find themselves arrested at the next meeting. There was a heavy price to pay for this activity and over 100 activists, mainly women, were tortured and executed or died in deportation.⁶

Irma Mico

Irma Mico, one of the surviving volunteers tells us:

"It was exhilarating work because we were conscious of demoralizing this powerful German army and contributing to its defeat. We usually went in pairs, in places frequented by Germans, for example the Palace of Versailles. When they were free, they came as tourists, puffed up, carrying cameras. And we had to find a way to approach them and talk to them. It was then that we had to exercise our psychology, distinguish quickly if we were dealing with a fanatical Nazi or a man likely to listen to our propaganda. At the first meeting, one could only fumble, make them talk. And so on. As soon as our interlocutor turned out to be a convinced Nazi, we did not insist. But when we were lucky to find those who seemed more or less likely to listen favourably to our propaganda, we went slowly and made another appointment. We made an extremely strict selection, so that of the soldiers we contacted, we only managed to create a few groups. We found many nuances in their attitudes".⁷



Irma Mico

The main organ of the *Travail allemand* was *Soldat im Westen*. Antonie Lehr, who wrote much of *Soldat im Westen* with Franz Marek, said:

"Our writings were intended to draw the attention of the soldiers on the course of the war ... The information was communicated to us partly by the Allied radio that we listened to and partly by the resistance. We tried, with the means at our disposal, to demonstrate to the soldiers the absurdity of the war and their situation and invited them to cross to the other side as soon as the opportunity arose. The day we learned by Radio Moscow that, on the front, an Austrian soldier had crossed the Russian line, *Soldat im Westen* in hand, was the most beautiful of our struggle".⁸

⁶ Joutard & Marcot, *Les étrangers dans la Résistance*, p.84

⁷ Gronowski-Brunot, Louis, 1980, *Le Dernier Grand Soir: un Juif de Pologne*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, p.156

⁸ *Ibid*, p.56

The main emphasis of *Soldat im Westen* was defeatist along the lines of: "The war cannot be won", "Hitler has led the country to disaster". Once the USSR had entered the war, soldiers were encouraged to desert to the Red Army or, at least to surrender without a fight. Unfortunately for this effort, most soldiers knew exactly how the German army had behaved on the Eastern Front, the atrocities, the massacres and the burnt villages, and they were afraid that if they surrendered or if Germany lost the war, they would suffer reprisals. As Gerhard Leo, a German *Travail allemand* activist, expressed it: "This led them to believe that 'We cannot afford to lose this war or we shall suffer the same fate as we have we have inflicted on others'".⁹

However, according to a report compiled by the *Travail allemand* leadership in August 1944, there were 37 soldiers' committees; 51 groups comprising between two and five members; and more than 75 soldiers who had joined the TA on an individual basis.¹⁰

Tilly Spiegel

Tilly Spiegel was a Communist from Vienna, who was exiled in France following a period of imprisonment in Austria. Between 1941 and 1943 she was based in Nancy as a regional *Travail allemand* co-ordinator for Meurthe-et-Moselle. Later she moved to Lille to undertake similar duties. In 1943 she returned to Paris where, in August 1944, she was arrested by the Gestapo and detained, like her husband Franz Marek, in Fresnes Prison. They were both sentenced to death, but were freed in the struggles that accompanied the liberation of Paris. She tells us:

"At first, the dangerous leaflets were distributed very 'simply'. By making them appear as programs, they were distributed very quickly in front of the nightclubs frequented by members of the *Wehrmacht*. Cyclists threw them over the walls of the barracks; at rush hour, in the subway, they were slipped into the soldiers' bags, left on park benches, in cinemas and other public places; they were stuck on the walls of the quays and on the trees of the alleys".

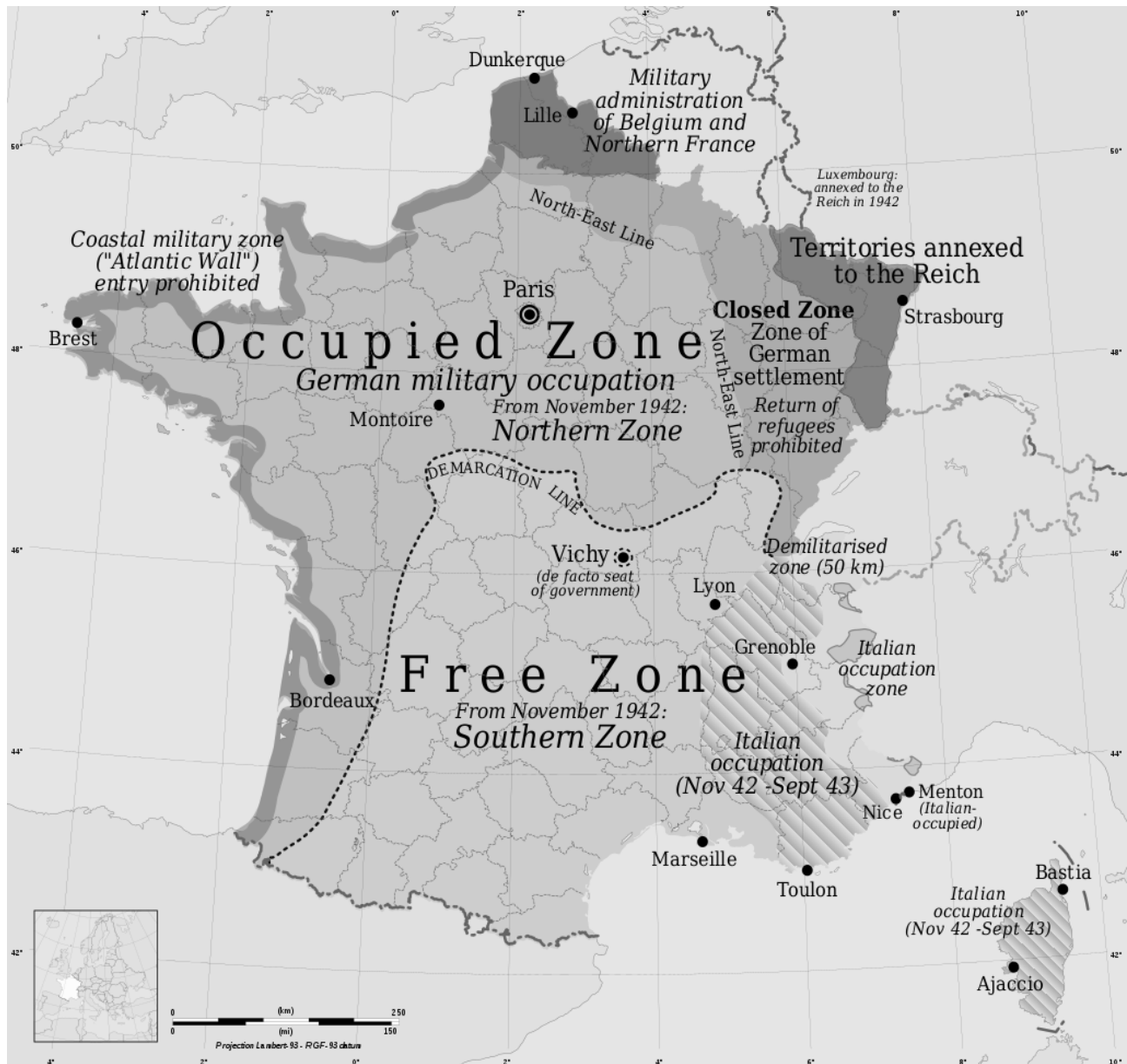
Division into Zones

From the invasion in 1940 until November 1942, France was divided into three zones, the *zone interdite* (forbidden zone), basically the departments of the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais, which was administered from Brussels, and to which refugees were forbidden to return. The occupied zone (*zone occupée*) consisted of the rest of northern and western France as well as the western half of Aquitaine along the Atlantic coast. The southern part of France became the *zone libre* ("free zone"),

⁹ Perrault, *Taupes rouges*, p.70

¹⁰ Heiniger, Alix, "German communists in West Europe during the Second World War: actors and networks against Nazism", *Twentieth Century Communism*, July 2014, p.49

administered on behalf of the Germans by the collaborationist regime of Maréchal Pétain based in Vichy. The demarcation line (*ligne de démarcation*) between the free zone and the occupied zone was a de facto border, necessitating special authorisation and a *laissez-passer* from the German authorities to cross. These restrictions remained in place after Vichy France was occupied and the zone renamed *zone sud* ("south zone"). The German and Italian armies invaded the *zone libre* on 11 November after the Allied landings in North Africa, the Italian army occupying the left bank of the Rhône.



Travail allemand initially operated in the *zone occupé*, but as the occupation spread to the south, so too did the resistance activities.

Dora Schaul

Dora Schaul, then Dora Davidsohn, grew up in Essen in northern Germany. She left Germany in 1933, fearing persecution for her Jewish heritage and settled in Amsterdam where she met her future husband, Alfred Benjamin, a German communist exile. Benjamin was sent by the KPD to Paris where they both worked for *Secours rouge*, the French section of International Red Aid, the social service organisation established by the Communist International in 1922 as an "international political Red Cross", providing material and moral aid to class war political prisoners around the world.

The couple set off for Spain to join the International Brigade, but Alfred Benjamin was refused as he suffered from tuberculosis. On their return to France in 1939, they worked to support the interned Spanish Republican refugees in the internment camps. At the outbreak of war, they were both detained as "enemy aliens" and Dora was herself interned in the camp at Rieucros, while Alfred was placed in a *Groupement de travailleurs étrangers* (GTE) forerunner of the *Compagnies de Travailleurs Étrangers* (CTE - Companies of



Dora Schaul

Foreign Workers) in which interned foreigners were put to work and hired out to French employers as cheap labour. In July 1942, Dora, now in the Brens camp escaped and made her way to Lyon where, by coincidence and unknown to her, Alfred was passing through in his attempt to escape to Switzerland. He did not make it and his body was later found near the French-Swiss border.

Faced with suspicion by the few German communists in Lyon, Dora's initial involvement with the resistance was with the Polish and then the Jewish sections of the MOI. She eventually contacted the Austrian communists in Lyon who passed her to a German comrade who remembered her from her days in Paris. Her first activity was helping others escape from internment.

"For my part, I helped some German comrades, Hanns and Lya Kralik, and a comrade, Emil Miltenberger who were still in Chanac, to escape and come to Lyon. Then they helped other friends escape. At the beginning of 1943, we were a few, but by the Liberation, the group of active Germans numbered at least thirty people. I remember that those escapes that we helped were not really wanted by the German party but we did it anyway."

"A comrade came from Paris to give us some guidelines, but most of what we did, we did, at first, on our own initiative. We started by sticking up leaflets where German soldiers passed regularly. They were small stickers on which we

wrote anti-Nazi slogans. We did not always agree on what to write on these leaflets. Emil Miltenberger wanted to put phrases like this: "Hitler is a pig who must be killed". I thought it was a totally unrealistic and ineffective slogan. So we put things like: "The French did not invite you, What are you doing in France? Go home".

Dora became one of the front line women who made the initial approach to German soldiers seeking anti-Nazis.

"Some comrades nevertheless managed to convince some soldiers and small groups were sometimes formed within the *Wehrmacht*, some of whom came into contact with the resistance and, for example, allowed them to get some weapons. It must be recognized that it was quite rare.

It was extremely risky work. For example, Irene Wosikowski, who was originally from Hamburg, did the same work as us in Marseilles. She was reported by an informer, arrested, tortured and guillotined at Berlin-Plötzensee Prison.

Once again, it was extremely difficult and dangerous work, the results of which were quite meagre."



Dora later got a job in the *Feldpost*, the German Army postal service, from where she was able to inform her comrades of the movements of German Army units as their post was redirected. She also managed to use the postal service to compile a list of all the members of the Gestapo and the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD, Security Service of the *Reichsführer-SS*) agents operating in the southern zone, including Klaus Barbie, whose office was in the next building.

"I passed on all these names, and the comrades of the French party communicated them to London. I was later told that this list was broadcast on BBC French radio program".

At this point, her comrades thought it was too risky to continue and she was withdrawn. Given that she was now known as a *collabo*, she was given an "attestation" by the PCF to affirm that she had been working for the resistance all along. Armed with this, she was able to join the celebrations for the liberation of Lyon.¹¹

¹¹ Perrault, *Taupes rouges*, pp.92-100

Collin, Claude, 1999, "Dora Schaul, « Renée Fabre » Dans La Résistance (1913-1999)." *Guerres Mondiales Et Conflits Contemporains*, no. 194: pp.187-93.

Wally Heckling

Wally Heckling was a courier for the KPD living in Paris. She obtained employment as an accountant for a German firm involved in building an aerodrome at Boissy-l'Allerie near Paris. Initially only taking the job to make ends meet, she quickly realised the possibilities and, by recommending other comrades for employment, managed to gain control of the company's administration. This gave her access to the precious stamps that validated the identity passes of the workers. They were able to employ French comrades who were on the run and who did not have the necessary papers and to invent fictitious workers whose salaries they could launder to a resistance movement always in need of funds. And, of course, useful information about airport construction could be copied and passed on.

Peter Gingold

One of the activists who benefited from a pass obtained by Wally Heckling was Peter Gingold. He was the son of Jewish Polish immigrants to Germany. He joined the KPD in 1931 and fled with his family to Paris in 1933. Sent to Dijon after the German invasion, he became the organiser of *Travail allemand* in eastern France. He was arrested in 1943 when he was betrayed by an informer who was pretending to be a deserter from the *Wehrmacht*.

He was sent to Paris because the authorities believed that he was actually the head of the whole communist resistance for eastern France. Convincing the Gestapo that he was ready to betray his comrades, he managed to engineer his own escape. Needless to say, his actual comrades were suspicious at first, but his story was verified after 4 weeks. He spent the rest of the occupation in hiding, transcribing BBC and Radio Moscow transmissions.

"Summer 1944 arrived. We took part in the preparation of the insurrection. When it broke out, Otto and I took our bikes and sped to Paris. Armed with a white flag, we went to the places where the Germans were still fighting, for example at the Buttes-Chaumont, and asked them to surrender. It did not do much good. They were afraid ... They preferred to surrender to the English or the Americans. After the liberation of Paris, I was told to go to the Reuilly barracks, where Colonel Fabien had formed the 1st Regiment of Paris. I followed him to the front. We wore disparate clothes, half civilian clothes, half uniform. And there, with the help of loudspeakers, we continued, outside of Metz, Thionville, in Luxembourg, then in Germany, to incite the German troops to stop fighting".¹²

He then went to northern Italy and fought with the Italian Partisans. After the war

¹² Gingold, Peter, 2013, *Jamais résigné!*, *Parcours d'un résistant du XXème siècle*, Paris: LHarmattin

he joined the German Communist Party in Frankfurt and was active, amongst other campaigns in the Auschwitz Committee, the coalition formed to expose the role of I.G. Farben during the Nazi era and in particular its use of slave labour in Auschwitz.

On 14 July 1994, the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Paris, President François Mitterrand invited Chancellor Helmut Kohl to attend a parade, in which German soldiers from the Eurocorps were also marching. At the request of the French resistance associations, the government had agreed to send to the federal authorities a list of German citizens who had participated in the resistance in France. Kohl refused to cooperate and Mitterrand did not insist. So Peter Gingold did not stand on the official platform, but with an antifascist comrade, he came to Paris despite the official snub and attended the ceremonies on the pavement.¹³



Peter Gingold

Gerhard Leo

Gerhard Leo was the son of an antifascist German Social Democratic lawyer, Wilhelm Leo. The family moved to France in 1933 after Wilhelm was released from "preventative detention" in Oranienburg concentration camp. In 1942, the 19 year old Gerhard joined the *Travail allemand* and managed to get work as a translator in the *Kommandantur* in Toulouse, the German administration charged with organising military and civil transport throughout southern France. He was able to use this position to inform the resistance of troop movements and even update the information on the success or failure of attempts to sabotage the transport system. He was also able to use his access to the military postal system to distribute antifascist propaganda via the mails.

The level of corruption in the *Kommandantur* was such that many of the German officers and NCOs were more interested in their black market trade in coffee than in doing their jobs or maintaining security. This enabled Gerhard to obtain confidential information that, in one case, enabled him to warn a Gaullist *résistant*, who was

¹³ l'Humanité, *Décès de Peter Gingold*, 7 November 2006

working in the officers' mess, that his cover was blown and that he was about to be arrested.

Gerhard Leo became friendly with Sepp Weininger, the chauffeur of Oberstleutnant Horchler. He had been a social democrat in Vienna before the German invasion. They quietly discussed politics and Weininger took copies of *Soldat am Mittelmeer*, the German language antifascist newspaper circulating in the south of France. In the early hours of one morning, Sepp Weininger rushed into Leo's lodgings to tell him that he had overheard Horchler speaking with Hauptmann Wächtler of the *Abwehr*¹⁴, who had asked for permission to arrest an interpreter called Leban, Gerhard Leo's false identity. Weininger used the official car to drive Gerhard to the station, where he was able to use his *Kommandantur* identity card to pass the police control and escape.

His next mission was in Castres, east of Toulouse, where there was a German garrison, and where he was tasked with attempting to contact sympathetic soldiers. He distributed antifascist propaganda, leaving leaflets in cafés, posting through letterboxes in the dead of night and throwing material over the walls of the barracks when no-one was looking. He frequented the same cafés as the German soldiers and tried to engage them in conversation. This enabled him to gauge the morale and attitudes of the soldiers, which in turn advised the articles he wrote for *Soldat am Mittelmeer*.



Gerhard Leo

He met his most promising contact, an NCO called Günther Wegener, in the art museum in Castres. All seemed to be progressing nicely, but when he turned up for a meeting with Wegener in a café, he was surrounded by *Feldgendarmen*¹⁵ and arrested. Günther Wegener had betrayed him, whether because he was a convinced Nazi, or out of fear for his own neck, was never clear.¹⁶ Either way, it resulted in Gerhard being locked up in the notorious Toulouse prison.

Berthold Blank

Gerhard Leo's main contact in the *Travail allemand* was Werner Schwarze, a man described as having a natural talent for underground work, to the extent that even today it is hard to find trace of him. It was Schwarze who recruited Berthold Blank, the first *Wehrmacht* deserter in Toulouse. Blank had been a member of the Social Democratic Party youth organisation in Leipzig before the Nazi takeover and hated

¹⁴ Wehrmacht intelligence service

¹⁵ German military police

¹⁶ Leo, Gerhard, 1997, *Un Allemand dans la Résistance: Le train pour Toulouse*, Paris: Editions Tirésias, pp.67-173

the army and its petty discipline. As punishment for returning late from leave on one occasion he had been sent to a disciplinary battalion that was guarding the Birkenau KZ. Here he became aware of the Nazi extermination programme, the details of which he was able to give to the writers of *Soldat am Mittelmeer*. Berthold Blank was said to have the knack of speaking to soldiers and greatly improved the style and content to the anti-Nazi propaganda.

In the summer of 1943, Blank had finally had enough of army life and deserted with all his weapons and equipment. He was sent by the resistance to fight with a *Maquis* group in the Aude region of the south of France and, after several missions against the occupying forces, he was killed on 3 August 1944 in the fighting near the village of Espéraza.¹⁷

Kurt Hälker, Hans Heisel and Arthur Eberhard

Hans Heisel was a first mate in the German navy, working in the naval communications centre at the Ministry of Marine in the Place de la Concorde in Paris. Without any previous political activism, but more than fed up with life in the German military, he stumbled on a French communist barber who, realising the possibilities, put him in touch with a Yugoslavian immigrant, a tailor who was also a communist. Together, they recruited him to the *Travail allemand*.

Arthur Eberhard had been a member of the SPD, but became disillusioned with their moderation. When he arrived at the Place de la Concorde, he quickly became friends with Hans Heisel. In turn they recruited Kurt Hälker, who had been contemplating deserting and trying to escape to Portugal, but who they persuaded to stay and oppose the war.

They distributed tracts opposed to the war and were able to pass information that was useful to the resistance and even some communications that were passed to London. One day, their *agent de liaison*, who they knew only as "Mado", but who in reality was Thea Beling, said that the resistance needed a pistol urgently. Hans passed over his own, which, however left him with a problem of replacing it. They solved this at the swimming pool, where the German soldiers left their weapons in the changing room from where Hans and Arthur were able to steal 20 or so pistols that they passed over to Mado.¹⁸



Hans Heisel

¹⁷ Perrault, *Taupes rouges*, pp.126-7

¹⁸ Collin, Claude, 2013, *Le "Travail allemand", une organisation de résistance au sein de la Wehrmacht*, Paris: Les Indes savantes, pp.79-99

Following the Normandy landings on 6 June 1944, these three sailors used the chaos of the last days of the German occupation of Paris to smuggle weapons out of the ministry building and, via the intermediary of the Yugoslav tailor, sent them to the resistance. On the day their unit was due to leave Paris, Arthur and Kurt loaded their pockets with guns and ammunition and deserted. Finding themselves at the headquarters of the PCF, they went in and volunteered. Faced with suspicions from the occupants, they proved their bona fides by demonstrating how to operate a *Panzerfaust*¹⁹ and using it against a German tank. Meanwhile, Hans Heisel, who was working in an outstation, burnt his uniform and joined a group of Yugoslav resistance fighters, with whom he fought for the rest of the struggle over the liberation of Paris. The three of them went on to join the *Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* (FFI, French Forces of the Interior) and fought on the Alsace front with the 1st Regiment of Paris led by Colonel Fabien.²⁰

Albert Hauser

Albert Hauser worked with the French resistance in Dijon until the Gestapo arrested him. He was sent to Borgermoor penal camp in Germany, where he spent nine months of hard labour. He was then sent to forced labour, building the V2 bunkers in the North. He escaped during an air-raid and was found by a French peasant wandering in her fields. She moved him on to the French underground, who nursed him back to health and, following discussions with the German section of MOI, dispatched him to join a resistance group near Clermont l'Hérault and he participated in the liberation of Montpellier.²¹

Walter Kramer and Willi Ahrenz

Walter Kramer was an NCO stationed in Toulouse, where he ran a bookshop for the *Wehrmacht*. He had a regular customer, a young woman called Herta Tempi, who claimed to work for the Red Cross but was, in reality, an activist in the resistance. Desperate to find some comrades, Walter chanced telling her that he had been the local president of the SPD in his home town of Meuselwitz and the connection was made. Walter, in turn, recruited Willi Ahrenz and another soldier who had also been in the SPD before the war. Willi was an administrator in the *Kommandantur* security office, from where he obtained information about raids and round-ups. He passed these to Walter who in turn passed them on to Herta. Thus they were able to forewarn of the big round-up of Jews in Toulouse, which was planned for the next day, enabling many to escape arrest.

¹⁹ German anti-tank weapon

²⁰ Collin, Claude, *Travail allemand*, pp.79-100
Perrault, *Taupes rouges*, pp.72-84, 224-228, 235-7

²¹ Hauser, Albert, n/d, *A la croisée des chemins*, Document, ARC 1000-No.31, Paris: Institute d'histoire du temps présent.

On leave in October 1943, Walter made contact with his wife's nephew, Kurt Kresse, who acted as liaison between Walter and Otto Engert, who was active in the internal resistance in Leipzig. However, that network was broken by the Gestapo and both Kurt Kresse and Otto Engert were executed.

Committee for a Free Germany in the West

The political concept of the "Popular Front Against Fascism", which had been adopted in 1935 and which called for alliances between the working class and progressive elements in the bourgeoisie, was not static, but changed with the international situation, although always ultimately dependent on the foreign policy of the government of the USSR. Thus, in the early days, the emphasis had been on unity with the leadership of the Social Democrats and the trade union bureaucracy. However, as the war progressed, the Communist position became increasingly nationalist and the only mention of "socialism" was in terms of support for the Soviet Union.

By the end of 1942 Wilhelm Pieck, Secretary of the Communist International, was already explaining to German communists in France that the KPD's leadership wanted to create "a large national peace-seeking organisation gathering opponents of Hitler in a wide sense, including former members of right-wing parties". Its aim would be to overthrow the Nazi regime and to rebuild a democratic and peaceful Germany.

It became clear in the summer of 1943 that Germany had militarily lost the war. Political manoeuvres started taking place for the post-war period that saw a change in orientation for the German communists in France. Following a number of clandestine meetings with social democrats and even more right-wing organisations, as well as high-ranking officers of the *Wehrmacht*, the *Comité Allemagne libre pour l'Ouest* (CALPO, Committee for a Free Germany in the West) was set up, following a similar move on the Eastern Front. CALPO formed an autonomous German resistance organisation in France, recognized by other French resistance groups and movements.

With the prospect of a democratic future for Germany, the German communist leadership attempted to overcome the contradiction between the concept of national identity and their support for the Allies. In some ways, this can be seen as a return to the policies advocated by Franz Dahlem for a greater emphasis on post-war reconstruction of Germany.

Activities stayed more or less the same, even if it meant a modification of the relationship with the PCF and separation from other non-French communists. By creating CALPO, the German communists freed themselves from the tutelage of the

PCF and began a new mobilisation on a national basis, targeted mainly towards Germans. *Soldat im Westen* became *Volk und Vaterland* (People and Fatherland), underlining the national nature of the new organisation. Moreover, the emphasis moved more towards contacts with officers rather than common soldiers. Otto Niebergall had a meeting with Colonel Caesar von Hofacker, the cousin of von Stauffenberg, the officer who placed the bomb in Hitler's bunker.²²

Leaflets distributed to soldiers highlight developments in the way in which the German communists viewed their homeland. The leaflets emphasised how the German population had been affected by the war, through the destruction of their cities by bombing, and their sons being taken away by the army. "The Nazi regime has brought only destruction and misery". The slogan, "How much longer?", attacked the regime for abandoning its responsibilities to the population.

The leaflets reflect on German living conditions and their dramatic deterioration due to the war. The family is in the centre of this approach, embodied by the mother, who is trying to save her son from the army, or the younger mother who takes her child to her chest. The background shows the war and the fact that recently the front line of the war had arrived in Germany.²³



Otto Niebergall again:

"For obvious security reasons, there could be no question of organizing a conference on the subject. We therefore proceeded by successive interviews. For my part, I contacted Fritz Glaubens, a social democrat from Dillingen (Saarland).

²² Joutard & Marcot, *Les étrangers dans la Résistance*, p.84

²³ Heiniger, *German Communists in West Europe during the Second World War*, pp.53-57

He also introduced me to another leader of the Saarland SPD, Karl Hoppe. Both of them would then work to convince several prominent members of their party, such as Luise Schiffgens, Karl Messinger, Paul Hertzberg, Ludwig Adolf and Knissel. The Austrian comrade Leo discussed the affair with the lawyer Meerheim, who was a member of the Bavarian People's Party and who would win over the democrat Wilhelm Tesch, one of the future vice-presidents of the committee. The latter in turn contacted Captain Arnim Goltz of Royan's staff. For my part, I also discussed our project with Major Krause and Franz Gall of the Weapon Staff, with whom we had been in touch for some time through the MOI. The latter then entered into contact with a construction adviser of the Government, and with Professor HW Friedemann, a member of the Centre Party and President of the Association of Catholics of Jewish Origin, who would also become one of the vice presidents of "Free Germany". We were also in contact with Friedrich Kümmel, a member of the Centre Party from Leipzig, with Lieutenant Franz Schneider from Pforzheim, who was serving in a DCA unit stationed at Bordeaux, with Captain Albert Dolli of Lille, with Lieutenant Oskar Scherer and eight of his comrades from the Armament Staff in Paris".²⁴

CALPO, taking its lead from a similar grouping formed in Russia among German troops who had surrendered at Stalingrad, used conservative symbols and ideology. For example, the old flag colours of Imperial Germany were used instead of the Weimar flag. CALPO presented their case in terms of German civilians and soldiers placing the interests of the German nation above those of their Nazi leaders.²⁵

The Austrians

Austria became part of the German Reich following the annexation into Nazi Germany on 12 March 1938, the *Anschluss*. Austria had been an authoritarian dictatorship for several years before and the Austrian left had considerable experience operating underground. The response to the *Anschluss* from the Socialists and the Communists was radically different. The Socialists advocated fighting for socialism within the newly formed Greater Germany, while the Communists favoured campaigning for the restoration of an independent Austrian republic. This discussion continued even in Auschwitz, from where Alfred Klahr escaped in order to spread the word of the decision by *Kampfgruppe Auschwitz*, in favour of independence. He was shot by the SS in Warsaw.²⁶

"The view that the Austrian people are a part of the German nation is theoretically unfounded. A union of the German nation, in which also the

²⁴ Perrault, *Taupes rouges*, p.140

²⁵ Veyrier, Marcel, *La Wehrmacht Rouge, Moscou 1943-45*, Paris: Julliard, 1970. pp. 90, 91, 116/17

²⁶ Joutard & Marcot, *Les étrangers dans la Résistance*, pp. 88-90

Austrians are included, never existed and does not exist today either. The Austrian people have lived under different economic and political conditions than the remaining Germans in the 'Reich', and have therefore chosen another national development".²⁷

The initially greater enthusiasm of the KPÖ leadership for the *Travail allemand* meant that, in the early days of the operation, Austrians were considerably more prominent, particularly in the north. The Gestapo sent a special team from Vienna specifically to deal with the Austrian TA activists. The influence of Austrians in the *Travail allemand*, can be seen by the number of articles about Austrian liberation that appear in surviving copies of *Soldat im Westen*.

A *Front National Autrichien* (FNA, Austrian National Front) was set up in October 1942 to specifically aim at destabilising the Austrian sections of the *Wehrmacht*. There were some notable successes. A regiment of Alpine troops stationed in Versailles protested against their poor quality food and harsh discipline. When the ringleaders were sent to fight in North Africa, they immediately surrendered to the Allies. In Bordeaux, two companies of Austrian troops joined the FNA en masse and began engaging in sabotage and theft of petrol. When they were sent to the Eastern Front as a punishment, many quickly deserted to the Russian lines.²⁸ After the liberation of France, many Austrians went to Yugoslavia and joined those Austrians fighting with the Yugoslav partisans, eventually arriving in Vienna.²⁹

In August 1943, a Thälmann Battalion had been founded in West Slavonia as an ethnic German unit within the Yugoslavian Partisan forces. It was composed mainly of *Wehrmacht* deserters and local ethnic Germans led by Commander Hans Pichler, a veteran of the Spanish civil war, with Johann Mucker, a Yugoslav communist as political commissar. The battalion comprised roughly 200 men and was reinforced from German-speaking Yugoslav recruits from Croatia and the Serbia.³⁰

Slovenian-speaking Austrian guerilla fighters had been operating in the borderlands of Carinthia between Austria and Yugoslavia, working in conjunction with the Yugoslav Communist Partisans. They set up a liberated zone on the border, but the first incursions did not gain great local support and retreated. The Styrian Combat Group made up of Spanish Civil War veterans and former members of the *Schutzbund*³¹ returned and started conducting operations in the Alpine forests. As the

²⁷ Klahr, Alfred, 1937, "Zur nationalen Frage in Österreich", *Weg und Ziel*, nr. 3.

²⁸ Laroche, Gaston, 1965, *On les nommait des étrangers*, Paris, Éditeurs français réunis pp.335-7

²⁹ Joutard & Marcot, *Les étrangers dans la Résistance*, p. 91

³⁰ Lyon, PD, 2008, *After Empire: Ethnic Germans And Minority Nationalism In Interwar Yugoslavia* (PhD Dissertation), University of Maryland.

³¹ *Republikanischer Schutzbund* (Republican Protection League) was an Austrian paramilitary organisation established in 1923 by the Social Democratic Party (SDAPÖ).

defeat of Nazi Germany became obvious to all, the Styrian Combat Group started to win support from the local peasants as well as winning recruits from German Army deserters and escaped Soviet prisoners of war. Eventually, five battalions of Austrian-led forces joined the Red Army for the liberation of Vienna.

Sergeant Anton Schmid took an active part in the Jewish resistance. A catholic radio repair engineer from Vienna, he helped some Jewish friends escape to Czechoslovakia following the German annexation of Austria. He was briefly arrested when he slapped a Nazi who had broken the window of a Jewish baker. He was conscripted into the *Wehrmacht* on the outbreak of war and found himself managing a carpentry workshop in Vilnius in German-occupied Lithuania employing about 100 "Work Jews", who he sought to protect.

He managed to contact Jewish resistance groups in the ghetto and became friends with Jewish resistance leaders such as Mordecai Tenenbaum and Abba Kovner; he was made an honorary member of *Hashomer Hatzair*, a left-zionist organisation. He procured weapons for the resistance and transported Jewish partisans in his *Wehrmacht* trucks to the ghettos of Bialystock and Warsaw. His apartment in Vilnius was a safe haven for Jewish partisans where they could rest and plot their activities with advice from Schmid. In February 1942, he was arrested, tried by a German military court, sentenced to death and executed on 13 April 1942.



Anton Schmid

After her husband's death, neighbours reviled Frau Schmid as the wife of a traitor and attempted to drive her from their neighbourhood in Vienna by smashing her windows. In 1965 Simon Wiesenthal arranged for her to visit to her husband's grave in Vilnius, where the inscription reads: "Here Rests A Man Who Thought It Was More Important To Help His Fellow Men Than To Live".³²

³² For a fuller account see: Schoeps, Karl-Heinz, 2008, "Holocaust and Resistance in Vilnius: Rescuers in "Wehrmacht" Uniforms", *German Studies Review*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 489-512.

The Italian Experience

It is worth saying something about a similar initiative by the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI)³³, although we should beware of too close a comparison as there was a much larger Italian immigrant population in France and Italian Fascism never had the same overwhelming ideological, political and state security control that the Nazis had in Germany.³⁴

South east France was occupied by the Italian Army after 1942 and the Italian section of the MOI, led by Teresa Noce, an exiled communist textile worker and trade unionist, conducted propaganda amongst the occupation forces, publishing a duplicated sheet "Parola del Soldato" and setting up *Comité d'action du peuple italien* (Italian People's Action Committee). The Italian community in Grenoble was particularly successful in fraternising with Italian conscript soldiers and passing propaganda. A communist since 1923, Joseph Buffa, managed to trade food for hand grenades and a rifle when he discovered that two soldiers in the local garrison were relatives of his wife. They had a modest success in encouraging desertions before 1943, but this activity really paid off when Mussolini was deposed in 1943 and the new Italian government changed sides. The German Army started to round up Italian soldiers and the MOI was able to help several thousand of them to desert and either go underground in France or return to Italy. There was fighting that left 100 dead when German soldiers disarmed the garrison in Grenoble.³⁵

Many of those Italian activists wishing to return to fight in Italy gathered in Marseilles, from where they sought secret passages over the Alps. Meanwhile, they took an active part in the resistance in the Alpes-Maritimes region. The large Italian community based round the bauxite mines in Brignoles was not only the centre of recruitment for the armed struggle, it was the scene of extended strike action from January to March 1942. The Italian IV Army, the main force occupying south eastern France, collapsed in the summer of 1943, soldiers committees were set up and thousands deserted, while several dozen joined the FTP.

In the confusion, the leading Italian activists crossed back into Italy where they put their experience to use and became partisan fighters.³⁶ On a more domestic note, a number of Italian soldiers used the collapse of the Italian forces of occupation to marry their local girlfriends and lose themselves in the local population.³⁷

³³ Before 1943 it was called the Communist Party of Italy (*Partito Comunista d'Italia*, PCd'I)

³⁴ Guérin, Daniel, 1973, *Fascism and Big Business*, New York: Pathfinder.

³⁵ Collin, Claude, 2005, "Les Italiens dans la M.O.I et les FTP-MOI à Lyon et Grenoble." *Guerres Mondiales Et Conflits Contemporains*, no. 218, pp. 67–83.

³⁶ Guillon, Jean-Marie, 1989, "Les Étrangers dans la Résistance provençale." *Revue D'histoire Moderne Et Contemporaine*, vol. 36, no. 4, pp. 658–671.

Walter Pätzold

from the testimony of Irene Recksiek, translated by Irena Fick.³⁸

This photograph tells an intriguing story of resistance in troubled times. It is on an ID card and shows a man in German army uniform. However, closer inspection of the top right-hand corner shows the stamp of the *Brigate d'Assalto Garibaldi*, the communist section of the Italian anti-fascist partisans. The *Istituto piemontese per la storia della Resistenza e della società contemporanea* in Turin holds an index card for the Partisan Walter Pätzold, the man in the photo.



Walter Pätzold

The Garibaldi Brigades were partisan units organized by the Italian Communist Party and fighting as part of the Italian resistance during the Second World War. Composed mostly of communists, they were the largest of the partisan groups organised under the umbrella *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* (Committee of National Liberation, or CLN) and suffered the greatest total losses during the partisan war. These brigades were distinguished by the red scarves worn around their necks.

Historical background: In July 1943, following a vote of the Fascist Grand Council (*Gran Consiglio del Fascismo*), the main body of Fascist government in Italy, Mussolini was deposed by the King, arrested and held prisoner. From this time onwards, Italy was engaged in negotiations with the allied forces until the beginning of September 1943. These negotiations culminated in the signing of an armistice agreement and a ceasefire was announced shortly thereafter. The German army immediately invaded and occupied the North of Italy, provoking a massive resistance movement that had to fight both the German occupying forces and the Italian fascists still loyal to Mussolini. It thus became both a war against German occupation and a civil war.³⁹ The *Piemonte* region was a stronghold of the partisan movement, with many thousands of combatants by mid-April 1945, when the increasingly militant activities of the partisans spilled over into a general strike and insurrection.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ville de Brignoles, n/d, *J'étais là et je me souviens de la Libération de Brignoles...*, Archives Municipales de Brignoles

³⁸ We are most grateful for the testimony written by Irene Recksiek about her father, Walter Plätzold. It was translated by Irena Fick. Without their help we would not have known about this fascinating history.

³⁹ Tom Behan, *The Italian Resistance: Fascists, Guerrillas and the Allies*, London: Pluto Press (2009); Claudio Pavone, *A Civil War: A History of the Italian Resistance*, London: Verso (2014)

⁴⁰ We only have rough estimates of the number of resistance fighters in regional partisan brigades and total number of fighters and these figures vary enormously. See Battaglia, Roberto and Garritano, Giuseppe, *Der Italienische*

The partisan liberation of each city began in Bologna. By 21 April 1945, the town was free of German occupying troops. Reggio Emilia was freed on 24 April. Milan followed on 25 April 1945. On this date, the CLN for Northern Italy called for a national uprising, which followed a general strike that commenced on 18th April 1945. Turin and Bergamo were also liberated by 28 April 1945.

Günther Meinhold, the commander of German troops in Genoa, deliberately disobeyed Hitler's orders not to surrender on any account. He held negotiations with the regional CLN and together with partisan leaders, signed the armistice agreement on 25 April 1945. He and the soldiers under his command were captured on 26 and 27 April 1945. This was a unique response from a German city commandant in Italy. However, in their effort to crush the partisan movement, the Germans were responsible for countless massacres from September 1943, even during their retreat. Their victims were often innocent civilians, including many children.

So, where does Walter Pätzold fit into this? His daughter, Irene Recksiek, has researched Walter Pätzold's life and during her research, found the photo and index card proving that her father was an active member of the Italian partisans. She also tells us that Walter Pätzold was born in 1906 in Silesia, a province in the East of the former German Empire. As a young man he had been politically active, first in the Social Democratic Party and then later with the Communists.

Walter Pätzold was arrested, along with thousands of other socialists, communists and trade unionists on 4 March 1933, the day before the last multi-party elections, although the campaign had already been the subject of considerable Nazi brutality against representatives of the other parties and could not be considered "free".

He was first taken to the prison in Hirschberg (today Jelena Góra), later to a prison in the then capital of Silesia, Breslau (today Wrocław). He was subsequently held, in the form of internment without trial known as "protective custody", at the KZ Esterwegen concentration camp situated in the northern region of the former German Empire from 10 August 1933 until the so-called "Christmas Amnesty" at the end of 1933. Little is known of his life in the time before the war, when he lived with his parents, working in their grocery shop. The country changed dramatically during his imprisonment of almost a year. Civil liberties were abolished and apart from the National Socialist Party, all other parties and unions were banned. Oppositional political activities were only possible if done illegally.

The Second World War began in September 1939 and Walter Pätzold was conscripted into the *Wehrmacht* in February 1940. He was initially attached to a

construction regiment, then after November 1940 to the *Munitions-Verwaltungs-Kompanie 577* (Ordinance Maintenance Company 577). We do not know where this unit spent most of the war, but it was eventually based in Villastellone near Turin in Northern Italy. The local chronicles of Villastellone (by Antonio Alasia) tell us of the "Deployment of around 80 members of the *Wehrmacht* after June 1944". The soldiers built and managed a large ammunition depot, the largest in west Piedmont, in a villa surrounded by parkland, in the centre of the village.

Irene Recksiek has tried to find contemporary witnesses. One of these had a father who himself was a partisan. Walter Pätzold and his family visited Italy in the 1950s. As a child, this witness had observed a meeting of his father with Walter Pätzold. He said he could see how Walter Pätzold was warmly welcomed as an old and trusted friend, as they knew each other from their days as partisans.

Irene Recksiek tells us:

"My father definitely didn't desert the army. He was still part of his company until the end of the war. I couldn't find out what my father did as a partisan. There are obviously no written records. It would also have been far too dangerous, as supporting the partisans was something that could never have been made public. In that respect, we can only speculate about what he might have done. It is possible that he smuggled ammunition from the depot to the partisans. A witness reported that the ammunition held at the depot was booby-trapped and an explosion anywhere in the vicinity would have caused the whole of the depot to explode, destroying a large part of Villastellone itself. It is believed in Villastellone that Walter Pätzold disconnected the fuses, thereby saving the town from destruction.

My father always used to talk about how he had managed to prevent the deliberate detonation of an ammunition transportation by retreating German soldiers during the final days of the war."

It may come as a surprise that there is a partisan ID card for Walter Pätzold. To be caught with such a document during the war would have meant certain death. If you take a closer look at the document, you can see that his membership of the partisan movement was not issued until after the war was over, so that Walter Pätzold could openly proclaim his allegiance to the *Brigade d'Assalto Garibaldi*. No matter, we can be glad that it has given us the opportunity to recover the history of a courageous man.

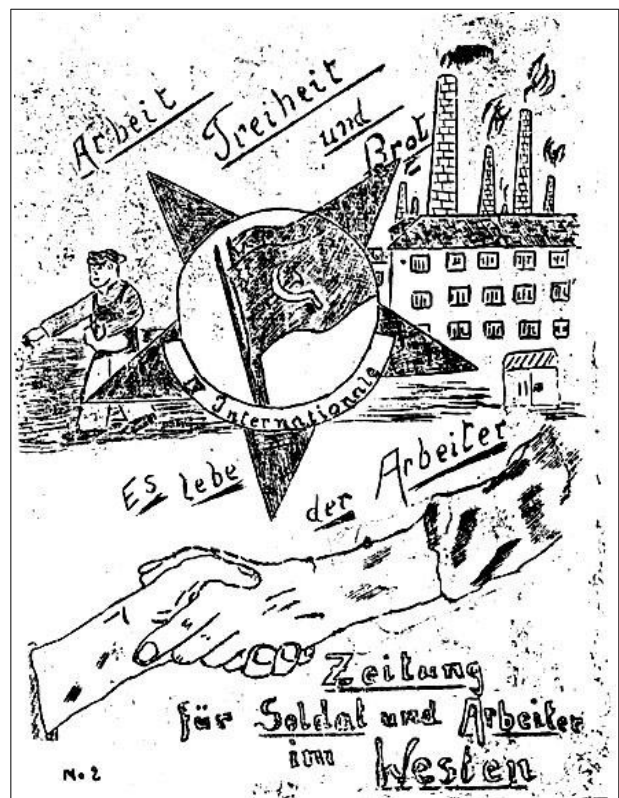
The Trotskyist Alternative

Martin Monath was a Berliner of Jewish heritage who had been a leading member of the German section of the socialist zionist organisation *Hashomer Hatzair*. This organisation encouraged Jews to emigrate to Palestine to build a Jewish nation state, but they wanted the new country to have a socialist economy. Monath's brother and sister went to join a kibbutz in Palestine but, for reasons that are not entirely clear, he did not follow. While the Nazi regime destroyed the organisations of the workers' movement, they tolerated the zionists until 1938, seeing them as organisations trying to help Jews leave Germany. *Hashomer Hatzair's* Hebrew language magazine was permitted in Nazi Germany, even to the extent that it published some of Trotsky's articles. Martin Monath was clearly influenced by these articles and, when he managed to flee to Belgium, he joined the Belgium Trotskyists, one of whose leaders was Abraham Leon, who had been one of the leading figures in the Belgian section of *Hashomer Hatzair*.

Monath was a delegate to the first European conference of the Fourth International in 1942 held near Paris. He stayed in Paris and began production of a small newspaper *Arbeiter und Soldat* (Worker and Soldier), with the aim of spreading revolutionary ideas and organisation amongst the German occupying forces.

The Trotskyists rejected the idea that World War II was a war between "democracy" and "fascism". Trotsky and his co-thinkers based their policies on the idea of "Transform the imperialist war into a civil war against the imperialist bourgeoisie". They rejected the idea that the struggle against fascism required the workers' movement to subordinate itself to the "democratic" bourgeoisie.

During the first half of 1943 in Brest, in northwest France, the Nazis were constructing a massive U-boat bunker. In February of that year, the Red Army had smashed the *Wehrmacht* at Stalingrad, in July, Mussolini had been overthrown. Many German soldiers started to realize that the war was not going to end well for Hitler. A German soldier in Brest met a young French postal worker, Robert Cruau, and they started to talk about the



situation. The soldier was the son of a former communist official, so he understood something about socialism. Robert Cruau revealed that he was part of a clandestine revolutionary movement, while the soldier spoke of his small group of like-minded soldiers. Robert put this soldiers' committee in touch with a printer and they started to produce their own small bulletin for other soldiers in Brest called *Zeitung für Soldat und Arbeiter im Westen* (Newspaper for the Soldier and Worker in the West). They continued to meet regularly to discuss politics, but there were language difficulties, so Martin Monath was invited to one of the secret meetings in the summer of 1943. He brought along copies of *Arbeiter und Soldat*. In particular, they discussed why the official communists were calling for an alliance with the bourgeoisie against Hitler.

However, the Gestapo was able to introduce a spy into the group, Konrad Leplow. Enthusiasm for the prospects led to a lack of security and the Gestapo were able to raid a meeting of 10 soldiers. During October 1943, 25 German soldiers and 25 French Trotskyists were arrested. Twelve soldiers were immediately executed, while others were deported to the Eastern Front or to concentration camps, but Martin Monath was able to escape.

By early 1944, he was back in Paris and resumed publication of *Arbeiter und Soldat*. However, his luck ran out in July 1944 when he was arrested by the French police who turned him over to the Gestapo. He was tortured and shot just days before the general strike and insurrection broke out in Paris.⁴¹

The approach of *Arbeiter und Soldat* was very different to that of *Soldat im Westen* and would probably have appealed to a different audience amongst the German soldiers. Or maybe any anti-Hitler sentiments would be attractive to a soldier who was fed up with the war and who was looking for a way to actively oppose it. The Trotskyist organisation in France only had a fraction of the resources given over to *Travail allemand*, so it is unfair to make too many comparisons.⁴²

WHAT DOES ARBEITER UND SOLDAT STAND FOR?

Is proletarian revolution coming?

Once again the spectre of communist revolution haunts the globe. In Germany Göring invites his “compatriots” to eliminate any German worker who speaks out about the coming proletarian revolution. Goebbels writes that “this war is synonymous with social revolution”. He uses exorcisms like this and others to try and escape the abyss of the now inevitable revolution. In Britain even the Tories, hoping to calm the proletarian tide, are talking of projects to improve the well-being of the

⁴¹ Flakin, Wladek , 2018, *Arbeiter und Soldat. Martin Monath—Ein Berliner Jude unter Wehrmachtssoldaten*, Stuttgart: Schmetterling Verlag

⁴² Craipeau, Yvan, 2013, *Swimming against the Tide: Trotskyists in German-occupied France*, London: Merlin.

masses after the war. In the United States high finance warns “If Stalin goes over to the Trotskyist theory of world revolution”—or, more precisely, if communist revolution breaks out—“we will crush it with arms”. In the name of the capitalists of the United States and the rest of the world, Roosevelt demanded that Stalin dissolve the Comintern. In Russia—yes, in Russia!—the Stalinist clique has indeed dissolved the International. The Russian bureaucrats have called for revenge against the German people and they have made great pains to prove to their dear allies their honourable intention to crush any communist revolution in the egg.

This is how these gentlemen view the danger of communist revolution, and this is how they prepare to greet it. But what of the workers, the hundreds of millions of exploited? Most importantly, what of the German proletariat? Are we really on the threshold of communist revolution, or will the ruling class have more to show for itself than the bloodbath of peoples it has organised in its quest for profit?

The question must be posed even more sharply. These gentlemen would have no objection to an uprising against Hitler’s clique which ushered in victory for the Anglo-Saxon imperialists: on the contrary. It is with this goal in mind that working-class districts are bombed day and night with the aim of heightening exasperation and thus pushing the desperate masses into revolt. An uprising would have its place in these heroes’ programme, as long as it brought some dictator to power or, in the worst case scenario, some sort of “democratic” regime, which they would simply require to respond to the wishes of Anglo-American capital.

But revolutions are a dangerous thing, and a lot can change. If millions of workers took to action they may well go beyond that and fight for their own objectives, creating a Soviet Republic as the basis for socialist construction. But is there any sign that the leaders in Washington, London and Moscow will not get their way? Didn’t the German proletariat let the revolution slip through its fingers once already? Haven’t Himmler’s terror and Goebbels’ brutal propaganda broken the German working class and completely destroyed its faith in its own revolutionary strength? Can anyone really believe that the European revolution will go beyond the tight confines of the Anglo-Saxon imperialists’ plans? That is the question posed.⁴³

Robert Cruau

André Calvès writes:

"At the beginning of 1943, Comrade Robert Cruau, who had fled Nantes where he was wanted, actively began directing propaganda at German soldiers. The clandestine newspaper "Arbeiter und Soldat" as well as some mimeographed flyers were distributed in Brest.

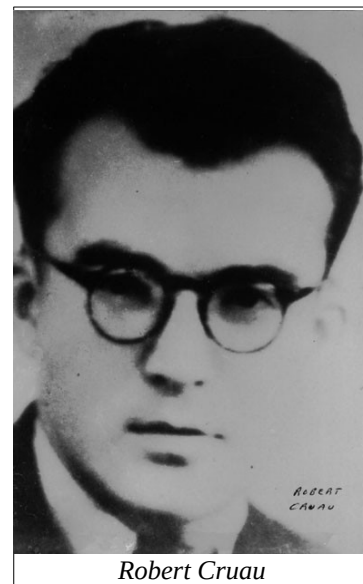
In August 1943, Cruau set up a network of 27 anti-Nazi German soldiers. It

⁴³ *Arbeiter Und Soldat*, For Revolutionary Proletarian Unity, No. 1 July 1943 - translated by David Broder

consisted of a few former German communists but mainly young men. Robert Cruau said that the old remained opposed to Nazism, but they were defeated and very few could take the decision to engage in underground work. On the other hand, although German youth was to a large extent intoxicated by Hitler's propaganda, it was nevertheless among the young people that we could find the most combative elements to form the German revolutionary movement.

A notable part of the clandestine articles explained to the German soldiers the real conditions experienced by French workers under the Nazis. The majority of German soldiers did not know much. The articles ended with calls such as: "Do not make yourself the guard dogs of capitalism and Nazism. Help young French workers fight against deportations".

But we could only produce 150 copies, what a drop in the ocean! However this drop of water had enabled us to contact 27 German soldiers. As soon as these soldiers had taken this step, it was not possible to make them believe that a just peace would come from the colonialist British Empire, it was not possible to make them respond to the calls of a General Von Paulus speaking on Radio Moscow.



Robert Cruau

To find a common ground of understanding and struggle with the German proletariat, it was necessary to speak of "Workers" and not "Nationalism". The clandestine leaflets also spoke of the causes of the war, and here too, the correct explanation, the Marxist explanation, could only be understood: Hitler makes war, but Ford, Schneider, Krupp, Churchill and company have made Hitler. Finally, the only solution was the struggle for the proletarian revolution in Germany as in France.

In October 1943, a traitor provoked the destruction of the Trotskyist organisation in Brest. The Nazis immediately killed Robert Cruau. Many other comrades were deported to Ravensbrück and Buchenwald, then to Dora".⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Calvès, André, 1984, *Sans bottes ni médailles: un trotskyste breton dans la guerre*, Lyon: La Brèche.

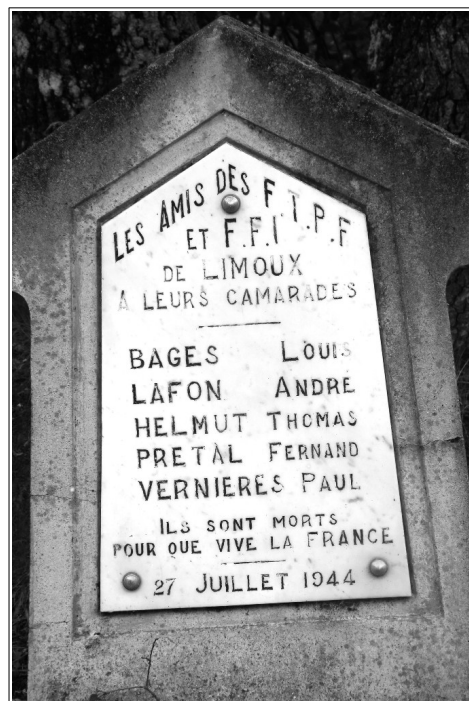
Anarchists

Thomas Helmut

Thomas Helmut was a tailor from Darmstadt in Hesse who was active in the KPD and the Red Front until the Nazi seizure of power, when he sought refuge in Saarland. There he left the KPD and joined the *Deutsche Anarcho-Syndikalisten* (DAS, German Anarcho-Syndicalists). After the 1935 referendum, when Saarland voted in favour of union with Germany, he moved briefly to France but, by July 1936, he was in Barcelona for the *Olimpiada popular* (People's Olympics, organised in protest against the Berlin Olympic Games) where, on hearing of Franco's attempted coup, he joined the militia organised by the anarcho-syndicalist union, the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT, National Confederation of Labour) and fought with the Durruti Column.⁴⁵ Following the confrontations between the Anarchists and the Communists in Barcelona in 1937, he was expelled from Spain back to France where he spent some months in prison.

He spent the early part of the war in a suburb of Toulouse but, following the occupation of the southern zone, he was denounced as a Jew and deported, only to be freed when his mother provided an *Ariernachweis*⁴⁶. However, this proved he was eligible for military service, so he was conscripted into the *Wehrmacht* and sent to the Eastern Front. His unit suffered heavy losses and the survivors were sent to France to reinforce the occupation forces.

Once back in France, he quickly deserted from the Army and joined the *FTP Maquis Faïta* which operated in the Aude, near Limoux. He fought in several engagements, but was finally caught in an ambush by German soldiers on 17 July 1944. He survived the initial attack, but was badly wounded and when the German soldiers finally found him they immediately killed him with a bullet in the back of the neck. There is a monument on the site of this final engagement at the Col de la Flotte.⁴⁷



Monument commemorating the ambush at the Col de la Flotte where Thomas Helmut was killed

⁴⁵ Florimond Bonte makes the erroneous claim that he fought in the International Brigade. Bonte, Florimond, 1969, *Les antifascistes allemands dans la résistance française*, Paris: Sociales.

⁴⁶ Certificate attesting to his aryan ethnicity

⁴⁷ <http://maitron-fusilles-40-44.univ-paris1.fr/spip.php?article205715>

Nelly Sturm

Was it worth it? Nelly Sturm, an Austrian *Travail allemand* activist in Belgium said:

"It is surprising that a small group of young immigrants wanted and knew how to fight a giant war machine. One can also wonder if the game was worth the candle. Were our interventions effective? The answer is not easy to give, even today with hindsight [...] Even with extreme vigilance, we could be arrested at any moment, particularly in our daily contact with soldiers. As modest as it was, our action still must have opened the eyes of a few individuals. If it helped to shorten this terrible war by a single day or even a few hours, our action was not in vain. Personally, during these years, I went through several crises of discouragement, but I never thought of giving up. In spite of all the questions that I have asked myself since then, the doubts that I have had, I still have the certainty of having been a useful little stone in the immense mosaic that was the anti-Hitler resistance".⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Collin, *Travail allemand*, p.12.

Chapter 3 - The Revolt of the *Ost-Legion*

One of the difficulties faced by *Travail allemand* was the high casualty rate suffered by the *Wehrmacht* on the Eastern Front. This led to increasingly frequent transfers of army units from the occupation of France to front-line combat in the East, which thereby removed quite a few promising contacts from the attentions of the TA activists. However, the security situation in France after 1942 and the withdrawal of the Italian forces in 1943 also meant that the occupation forces had an increased need for manpower. One of the ways that the German authorities addressed this was to conscript non-German citizens in the areas they conquered. There were citizens of the USSR from the smaller republics who felt that they had been oppressed by the Russian domination of the Soviet Union, such as Armenians, Azerbaijanis or Ukrainians. There were Russian and Polish prisoners of war who were offered the chance to enlist. Given the atrocious conditions in German POW camps in the East, where a million and a half Red Army prisoners starved to death, this was often the only alternative to a slow death. However, the German authorities did not trust these new recruits not to desert to the Red Army lines at the first opportunity, so they solved, they thought, two problems by sending them to fight against the increasingly restive resistance in France. This did not always turn out as intended as, whatever their reasons for joining, they had little interest in fighting in France. This made fertile ground for mutiny and desertion.

Yugoslav Mutineers

The first rebellion among the non-German SS troops in France took place in Villefranche de Rouergue, a small town in the Aveyron valley, in the south of France, where a unit of Yugoslavian Muslims was stationed.

By 1943, following the massacre of 2,000 Muslims by Serbian nationalists in eastern Bosnia, some Bosnian Muslim leaders approached the German government asking for protection and, in return, offered to raise a Muslim force as part of the SS. Muslim clergy helped recruitment and the 13th *Handzar* division, as it was called, was to have a *Mufti* (Muslim chaplain) attached to each unit. Some 12,000 men were quickly enlisted but the officers were all German and treated the recruits with racist contempt. While many Bosnians enlisted to protect their families and expected to remain in Bosnia as a home guard, the division was sent for training in Germany where there were rumours it was being prepared for the Russian front. Not all Bosnian Muslims were so impressed by the offers of Nazi Germany and many had already joined the Yugoslav Partisans led by Josip Broz Tito, among them Ferid Dzanic from Bihac. Dzanic, who had studied railway engineering at Belgrade, had

been called up to the Yugoslav army in 1941, then joined the partisans in the Autumn of 1942, becoming political commissar of his battalion. Captured in an ambush in March 1943 and sent to a prison camp near Sarajevo, Dzanic volunteered for the new division. He was joined by Bozo Jelinek, a Croat who had been imprisoned for Communist Party membership in Zagreb in 1941. After his release, the partisans sent him to infiltrate the 13th *Handzar* division. When the Bosnians and a unit of Croat engineers were sent to Villefranche de Rouergue in August for further training, Djanic and Jelinek met Nikola Vukelic, a Croat who deeply regretted joining the SS. Once in Villefranche, the three conspirators contacted the resistance and were put in touch with a Yugoslav, Milan Ralafatic, and a Brazilian, Apolino de Carvalho, who had fought in Spain.

On the night of 16-17 September, the mutiny started just after midnight. Lieutenant Kirschbaum, the battalion commander, was taken prisoner, and along with other German officers, brought before a rebel tribunal, condemned to death and shot.

However, one of them, Colonel Eck was only wounded, and managed to escape, while Sub-Lieutenant Schweiger, an ethnic German medical officer from the Yugoslavian region of Carniola, persuaded the rebels that he was a compatriot, and that they should let him go. He was able to raise the alarm and make contact with loyal Nazi troops. By 4 am the rebels had taken over the Gendarmerie and railway station. Some 200 armed themselves and made off into the country. Others hesitated, not speaking the French language or knowing the local terrain. Hodja Halim Malhe, the Muslim chaplain, tried to urge the soldiers to give up their rebellion and surrender to the Germans, but the mutineers burned the battalion's papers, so reprisals could not be taken against their families. Ferid Dzanic took a group of 40 men and tried to break through the German forces encircling Villefranche, but he was killed in a gun battle. In the town centre, Vukelic was wounded. He was later captured, tortured and then shot. German reinforcements arrived, guided by Vichy police and by late afternoon 30 or 40 of the mutineers had been killed. The hunt for escaped Yugoslavs went on for a week. As well as the town, SS units with armoured machine gun carriers scoured surrounding villages and fields. Over a 100 of those recaptured were executed, lined up before a pit and machine-gunned.

Many rebels were helped to get away by local people and joined the resistance. Marie Regoud, an elderly widow, saw a man hiding behind a pile of logs under the railway bridge near her home. She gave him civilian clothes to enable him to escape. A nearby farmer employed Bozo Jelinek as a farm labourer for a couple of months until it was safe to move him to Toulouse. As "Lieutenant Leopold" he earned a Croix de Guerre for his combat in the *Maquis*. At the end of 1944, with 600 compatriots, Jelinek arrived back in Yugoslavia to join the partisans. Hodja Halim

Malhe was hanged in Yugoslavia in 1947.

In September 1968, retired Captain Bozo Jelinek of the Yugoslav People's Army returned to Villefranche de Rouergue, to honour his dead comrades, visit local families who had helped and to attend a civic banquet. In 2006, the Memorial of the Croatian Martyrs was erected at the place where many of the mutineers were shot.⁴⁹ The mutiny at Villefranche remained an isolated incident until the Allied landings left little doubt that it would only be a matter of time until Germany lost the war.

Soldats de Vlassov

Andrei Andreievitch Vlassov was the Red Army General who commanded the 20th Army's defence of Moscow in December 1941, then in the winter of 1941-42 organised the defence of Leningrad, where he was captured when the 2nd Army was destroyed. Once in German hands, he was persuaded to change sides and to raise a force to be known as the Russian Liberation Army (*Русская освободительная армия*, ROA). The ROA was composed of deserters from the Red Army, White Russian emigrés and prisoners of war, as well as Cossacks, Georgians, Armenians, Poles and other national groupings who felt discriminated against by the USSR's increasing Russian chauvinism. However, after the tide of war started to turn with the German defeat at Stalingrad, many of these recruits started to have second thoughts and desertions back to the Red Army became a problem. To place them out of the way of such temptation, the *Ost-Legion* was sent to France to replace German troops to be sent East. By June 1944, the *Vlassovs*, as these troops were known, formed a tenth of the overall forces of occupation in France.

The counterproductive nature of German racism now became evident. These soldiers, most of them less than enthusiastic to start with, were treated brutally by their German officers and NCOs. Very quickly, contacts were made with the local resistance and plans were made to mutiny. In areas where this did not prove possible, whole companies resolved to surrender to the advancing Anglo-US forces at the first opportunity, while others escaped via Spain to give valuable information to the Allied intelligence services. There is currently no comprehensive survey of the "Revolt of the *Ost-Legion*" but, in addition to the better documented examples below, Gaston Laroche lists the following mutinies: the 1st Georgian battalion in Cherbourg, the 4th Georgian Battalion at Vannes, as well as a smaller group in Le Havre. There was a more general revolt of the Armenian conscripts in the South, with successful mutinies and mass desertions in Marseilles, Saint-Tropez, Toulon and Castres.⁵⁰ The Armenian revolt links with the story of a *Maquis* of antifascist Germans in the Cervennes, to

⁴⁹ Erignac, Louis, 1980, *Révolte des Croates*, Villefranche de Rouergue: Imprimerie Guibert; *Workers Press*, "The Revolt in Hitler's Army", October 21, 1995

⁵⁰ Laroche, *On les nommait des étrangers*, p.249

which we shall come in good time. Meanwhile, let us examine in closer detail several incidents which are more fully documented.

Polish deserters from the *Wehrmacht* in Autun

The Polish group of the *Maquis* « *Valmy - Brully* », that operated in the south of the Côte-d'Or with about a hundred men, had been part of the German forces retreating from the south-west of France in the face of the US landings. In the second half of August 1944, in the region of Autun in Burgundy, these Poles killed their German officers and deserted. Arriving in Côte-d'Or, they made contact with the resistance, the *Maquis Valmy*. They kept their armaments, trousers and boots; the *Maquis* provided them with a *bleu de travail* worker's jacket and an FFI armband.

Their first responsibility was the defence of the village of St-Romain and they subsequently took part in guerrilla actions on the RN73 national highway, between Nolay and Meursault. They were honoured in a military ceremony which took place in the town hall of Beaune, in the presence of the General de Lattre de Tassigny, on 9 September 1944.⁵¹

Walerian Pankiewicz⁵², the commander of this Polish company on stated:

"On 25 August 1944, Walerian Pankiewicz with his company of 110 fusiliers escaped from the German army and thanks to the French civilian population was able to contact the "Valmy" group of French partisans. The leader of this group was the French Captain Erick. He made us very welcome and after making sure we were Poles and hated the Germans as much as they did, extended the hand of friendship.

From that moment on, we started working together with the French partisans against our eternal German enemy. I believe that Captain Erick was very satisfied with our Polish company. The food we received was very good and my soldiers liked the tobacco. The armament was also very good. Thanks to Captain Erick, who knew his way round the area very well ... we were able to raid the Germans every night. The Germans took a lot of losses. As for us, we have had no casualties.

Before Captain Erick's departure for the front and our company for Marseilles, we had a great farewell dinner. On behalf of our Polish company, I send you my warmest thanks for the great reception given to my company by Captain Erick".

⁵¹ Departmental Archives of Côte-d'Or (Cote 6 J 138), a note from Roger Meuret, the correspondent for the Côte-d'Or of the Foundation for National Defense Studies and the Institute of the History of Contemporary Conflicts.

⁵² Hennequin, Gilles, *Resistance in Côte-d'Or, Volume VI*

These men were then enrolled in the Polish Army; they were sent to Marseilles, then travelled to Naples and joined the Free Polish Army fighting on the Italian front.



The Carmaux Uprising

In February 1944, the MOI leadership sent a communist militant of Polish heritage, Roman Piotrowski, to the Carmaux mines. He was a miner from the region of St Etienne, where he was already wanted by the police. Arriving on 28 March 1944, he started a recruitment campaign among the Polish immigrants working in the Carmaux mines.

After the Allied landings on 6 June 1944, a strike committee was set up in the mining basin to organise both French and Polish workers for an insurrection. In this context, several *Maquis* companies were also set up, including the "*FTP-MOI 4214*" formed mainly of Poles and commanded by Roman Piotrowski.

The strike committee issued a call for a general strike throughout the Tarn coalfield to start on 14 July. The mines were occupied and 3,500 miners stopped work, including 1,500 Poles. The strike had four main objectives:

- To win a series of economic demands from the employers.
- To be part of a proposed national uprising against the occupation and against collaboration.

- To destabilise the local German forces by persuading as many of the Vlassov troops to desert as possible.
- To seize the German arms depot held in a local school.

The position of the local resistance was relatively favourable. A high proportion of the occupying forces were from Kazakhstan and the MOI had made favourable contact with them already. The miners of Carmaux had been active in demanding economic improvements in the period immediately before D-Day and were ready to strike. Armed *maquisards*, dressed as miners were ready to enter the mine with a view to protecting the miners once the strike started. Despite the opposition of the "official" leadership of the trade union, the miners overwhelmingly decided to strike on the morning of 13 July after Wladyslaw Krawczyk, a Polish miner, was arrested, tortured, shot and thrown in an open grave.

That same day, all the local companies of the FTP attacked Carmaux and the German forces were forced to withdraw. On 14 July, the Germans counter attacked at nightfall, retaking the town. Between 15 and 16 July, the Polish FTP 4214 was reinforced by 47 Kazakh soldiers who deserted with their weapons to join the guerrillas. On 17 July, at dusk, Piotrowski's detachment took part in the new attack on the town of Carmaux. The fighting continued through the night, until the arrival of SS reinforcements forced the guerrillas to retreat at dawn and return to the hills.

No longer trusting the Kazakh soldiers, the Germans disarmed the remainder and replaced them with Georgians from another division. However, Polish civilians, particularly women, worked hard to persuade these men to desert as well. So, on 4 August 1944, dozens of Georgians joined the *Maquis*, with their weapons, taking their German officers with them as prisoners. With this latest reinforcement, the FTP 4214 had gained a total of 185 additional fighters.

This was too much for the SS command and they began actively to search for FTP 4214. On the basis of information provided by two informers, the camp of the *Maquis* was located in the village of Jouqueviel on the road between Carmaux and St Christophe. On 6 August at 3pm, the Germans launched a surprise attack on the village, supported by armoured vehicles. The village was set on fire and Roman Piotrowski, eleven Polish partisans, two French and fourteen *maquisards* of other nationalities were killed. German losses were also quite heavy.⁵³

⁵³ Medrala, Jean, 2013, "La compagnie FTP-MOI 4214 du Tarn" in DVD-ROM *La Résistance polonaise en France*, AERI;

Sentis, Georges, 1995, "La grève générale des mineurs de Carmaux (13-22 juillet 1944). Une étape décisive vers l'insurrection nationale", *Cahiers d'histoire* no.58



Monument on the Place de l'Église at Jouqueviel

Azeri Revolt

Of course, some attempts at mutiny ended in complete disaster. One such was the 16 August 1944, the revolt of the Azeris in Rodez, in the Aveyron, where the troops of the *Ost-Legion* were, for the most part, former Soviet soldiers of Asian origin including Azerbaijanis, Turkmen, Uzbeks, Armenians and Georgians. In June 1944, as many as 75% of the occupying troops in the Aveyron were non-Germans, compared with 50% in other departments of the region. Many were volunteers, recruited by promises of national independence in the event of a German victory. These men had very little interest in fighting, especially as their hopes of national independence had disappeared with the German retreat on the Russian front. For the Aveyron resistance, undermining the loyalty of these troops would be an effective means of weakening the occupying army. So contact was made between *Maquis* groups and the potential deserters.

Several hundreds of desertions occurred, mainly after July 1944, in Carmaux, Capdenac, Saint-Africa or during the retreat of the German troops from Rodez, in August 1944. Several of the *Maquis* groups of southern Aveyron were strengthened by deserters from the occupation forces. This is the case of the *Maquis Braig*.

The painter Paul Braig, a German antifascist and long term resident in France, who was working for the Gaullist intelligence service, had organized a *Maquis* that was based at the Razal farm near Sainte-Eulalie-de-Cernon. This *Maquis* was reinforced, in August 1944, by about about twenty Russians, deserters from the Larzac camp, who had been recruited by Paul Braig's wife who spoke Russian fluently. This *Maquis* engaged in sabotage of telephone lines and installations serving the German troops of the Larzac camp. They even made an incursion inside the camp, at the beginning of August and committed some small-scale damage to offices and equipment.

However, some desertion operations failed, such as the general revolt of the Azeris at Rodez on 16 August 1944. For several days, the departmental FFI was in contact with three NCOs of the Azerbaijani Legion, stationed in Rodez. According to the testimony of Richard Bonnafous:

"Two were officers of the Red Army and the third, Mahmedov, had been a political commissioner. This work was very dangerous, firstly because of the surveillance exercised by the Germans and secondly because the officers had been able to ensure the loyalty of some of the soldiers who opposed the Soviet regime or who they had bribed. The first task of the conspirators is therefore to get rid of these traitors. It was decided that the revolt of Vlassov's troops will take place simultaneously throughout the region. They must either take prisoners or kill the German officers and NCOs and then cross over to our side with their weapons and equipment. It is necessary to provide a uniform, a place of withdrawal, supplies and means of transport. We did not agree to take them individually or in small groups except in case of imminent danger to them".

However, on 15 August, German police arrested and shot Grégoire Romaniuck, a Polish domestic servant, interpreter and liaison between the resistance and Azerbaijani and Armenian soldiers in the garrison at Rodez. The capture of Grégoire Romaniuck and betrayal by internal informers led to the failure of the revolt and the arrest of sixty officers and non-commissioned officers. The troops were disarmed and machine guns were installed at the strategic points around the town. On the morning of 17 August, Captain Lieb, commander of the battalion, set up a court martial. The court sat from 1pm to 7pm and pronounced 19 death sentences against five officers and fourteen non-commissioned officers, all Azeris. As soon as the death sentence was pronounced, the condemned were taken to the cemetery to be shot. Along the way, the convicts attacked their guards and threw them out of the truck. Five Azeris were killed, the others managed to escape. As a result of this escape, the Germans arrested all the officers and NCOs of the Azerbaijan Legion and shot about sixty, while others managed to escape into the countryside.

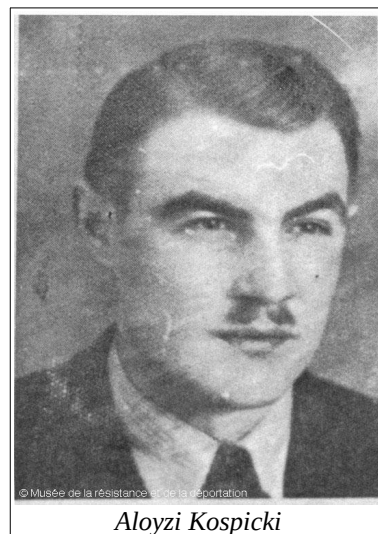
After the German retreat, more than thirty corpses were discovered at the Burloup barracks: eleven in shallow graves dug under the pines surrounding the flagpole and around twenty in a mass grave opposite the entrance.⁵⁴

Aloyzi Kospicki

Aloyzi Kospicki, of Polish origin, joined the *Wehrmacht* in 1941, although there is no record of his reasons or circumstances at the time. He arrived in Grenoble in the summer of 1943 after the German army replaced the Italians following the coup against Mussolini. He was stationed in the Bonne barracks, which also served as a munitions dump. The resistance had already blown up another arms depot in Grenoble, the Polygone, but the Bonne barracks, four hectares in the heart of the city, looked much harder to destroy. Kospicki had already contacted the resistance and, on the night of 1 December, he managed to set explosive charges that blew up the whole depot, the explosions lasting for 4 hours and left 200 dead; the column of smoke could be seen by the partisans on the Vercors plateau. His battalion was moved to a nearby school from where he deserted, together with his friend Gradinski, to join another Polish deserter at Domène. They then joined the partisan group "Petit-Louis", named after its leader, Louis Clavel.

On 20 August, in Domène, two days before the Liberation of Grenoble, Aloyzi Kospicki was killed fighting a German patrol while on a reconnaissance mission for his group.

There is a street in Grenoble named after him.⁵⁵



Aloyzi Kospicki



Bonne barracks after the explosion

⁵⁴ Font, Christian and Moizet, Henri, «Construire l'histoire de la Résistance, Aveyron 1944», et «De la Libération de l'Aveyron à la Libération de la France», Rodez: CDDP de l'Aveyron.

Association Départementale des Anciens Résistants, Déportés et Amis de la Résistance de l'Aveyron, 1995, "Maquis FTP aveyronnais", d'après Erignac, Odru, Testas, colloque de Rodez.

⁵⁵ Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation de l'Isère

Leon Hloba

In 1942, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (*Українська повстанська армія*, UPA) was operating in the Ukraine, fighting the *Wehrmacht* and the Soviet Partisans in equal measure, with the object of a Ukraine independent of both Germany and the USSR. To secure their occupation of the Ukraine, the German authorities recruited local men into home guard units (*Wach-Bataillon*), which the UPA proceeded to infiltrate. Leon Hloba was one such infiltrator. The UPA grew increasingly powerful during this period, with forces of 40,000 in the summer of 1943, more than a match for the *Wach-Bataillon*, while the Red Army offensive started to clear the *Wehrmacht* from Ukraine, which became the scene of major fighting. Leon Hloba and his Ukrainian nationalist comrades had no objection to fighting against the Soviet Union, but no desire to fight in France. Of course, they were not consulted and, after training near Danzig, arrived in August 1944 in the Haute-Saône region of France, reorganised as the 3rd Battalion of the 1st Regiment of the 30th Division of the *Waffen-SS* [to add insult to injury known as the 2nd Russian Division]. Major Leon Hloba was the nominal commander of the battalion, although real control was exercised by a German officer, *Sturmbannführer* Hanenstein, and over 100 German NCOs.

One of Hloba's co-conspirators, Lieutenant Vozniak, managed to make contact with Simon Doillon, a leading figure in the local resistance and son of the owner of the dairy in Noidans-lès-Vesoul in the Haute-Saône. They agreed that the Ukrainians would kill their officers and NCOs the next day, 24 August and pass over to the resistance. However, in the night they got orders to march the following morning, so the plan was delayed. There followed a couple of days of confusion, with the troops marching first in one direction, then another and Hloba and Vozniak becoming increasingly worried that their plot has been discovered, particularly after the German officers held a confidential meeting to which no Ukrainians were allowed.



Leon Hloba

On the morning of the 27, a green flare was launched, the signal for the uprising, and Hloba orders "Helmets On!". As the Germans reached for their helmets, the Ukrainians stabbed or shot them. Ninety-seven Germans were killed for the loss of four Ukrainians killed and four wounded. Eight hundred men changed sides with 4 x 45mm guns, 4 x 82mm heavy mortars, 37 x 52mm mortars, 21 heavy machine guns, 120 light machine guns, 130 hand held machine guns, 700 rifles, 500 x 45mm shells, 1000 mortar shells, 6000 grenades, one million cartridges, 500 draft horses, 90 riding

horses, 30 heavy trucks, 180 light trucks. Some following troops in the 118th battalion, also Ukrainian, seeing what had happened, also killed their officers. The combined units, now 1200 strong, went to the rendezvous at the Bois de Confracourt, meeting Simon Doillon along the way, who assumed formal command in the name of the FFI. A German unit sent to capture them hesitated, then retreated in the face of such a well equipped force.

Simon Doillon, now a Captain in the FFI, arranged to have their uniforms dyed blue in the vats of his father's dairy and they are given *Bérets basques*, to replace the German headgear. There followed a series of engagements with German forces, during which the 1st Ukrainian Battalion (1st BUK) of the FFI, as they were now known, acquitted themselves well, in part because of the racist contempt of the German authorities who woefully underestimated them.

A month later, the 1st BUK was incorporated into the French Foreign Legion as an independent unit and sent to the Belfort front. But after two months of fighting, under pressure from the Soviet embassy, it was dissolved and its members are scattered in different units of the Legion. Many Ukrainian soldiers remained for years in the Legion, fighting in Indochina and Africa for French imperialism, ironically, given their background, as part of an army of colonial occupation. Some chose to stay in France, others emigrated to the United States or Canada.

Major Hloba, Captains Djouss and Zintchouk and Lieutenant Boyko were decorated with the Croix de Guerre. Leon Hloba emigrated to Canada.

Conclusion

Can we really count the "Revolt of the *Ost-Legion*" as part of the German resistance? This is the same question as asking whether we can count immigrant workers as part of the working class. The answer depends in the end on your political opinions. A social democrat politician who ultimately is only concerned with those who have the right to vote, or a political scientist who makes a study of voting patterns would not, in practice, consider immigrant workers part of the working class. On the other hand, a trade unionist trying to organise a factory would want everyone involved, not just citizens, and a labour historian studies all those who work in the area under investigation. The *Ost-Legion* wore German Army uniforms and were an important part of the German war machine. If we count the FTP-MOI as part of the French resistance, then logically we must count the Yugoslavs of Villefranche de Rouergue, the Kazakhs and Georgians of Carmaux and other *Ost-Legion* mutineers as part of the German resistance. The local people of these towns certainly do, as they have honoured those who died by erecting a monument.

Chapter 4 - Urban Terrorism

Emerging Resistance

It is useful to look in some detail at the situation in Northern France following the German invasion. This area formed part of a "Forbidden Zone", run directly by the German authorities in Brussels and effectively cut off from the rest of France, allowing resistance groups to develop with greater independence. In particular the Communist Party in the mining basin of the Pas-de-Calais entered into active resistance much earlier than the national organisation. Many of these communist miners were convinced that the war would end in revolution, as had happened in Russia after the war of 1914 and that revolution would spring from the ashes of the defeat of German fascism. French capitalism was weak, they argued, the war would weaken it still further until it became merely an adjunct of German capitalism. Julien Hapiot, head of the Young Communists in the Pas-de-Calais and a veteran of the International Brigades in Spain thought that: "It is much better to shoot the master rather than the dog".¹

While the PCF leadership in Paris was attempting to negotiate the legal publication of *Humanité*, on the strength of their support for the Hitler-Stalin pact, their comrades in the North were gathering as much of the weaponry abandoned by the fleeing French soldiers as they could.²

A group of communist miners succeeded in organising a mass strike against increased workloads in June 1941, involving 100,000 miners, 85% of the workforce in the region. They held out impressively for 10 days, but eventually the sheer weight of German Army repression forced a return to work. In organising a strike to resist the employers' attack on their wages and conditions in the mines, rather as they might have done in times of peace, but coming up against the reality of the Nazi occupation, the local communists concluded that the defeat of the occupying forces was an essential prerequisite for any social progress and that this required armed action. Although they were unhappy with the national line of the party which accepted the German occupation, they had tried to ignore the problem as far as possible. Being so forcibly confronted with the German Army, they realised that they could not duck the issue and so, as the strike went on, one can see the link between opposition to the occupation and social liberation becoming more evident in their propaganda.

¹ Pannequin, Roger, 1976, *Ami si tu tombes*, Le Sagittaire, Paris, p.90

² For more on the national position of the PCF at the start of the occupation:

Noguères, Henri, 1967, *Histoire de la Résistance en France*, Laffont, Paris (Volume 1)

Courtois, Stéphane, 1980, *Le PCF dans la Guerre*, Editions Ramsay, Paris

Tillon, Charles, 1977, *On Chantait Rouge*, Laffont, Paris,

The employers of the region collaborated completely with the Germans and their attitude may be summed up by a letter from a Lille factory owner to his trade newspaper: "I would rather see my country occupied by the Germans than my factory occupied by the workers".³

Armed Struggle

The mine owners gave the police the names of those employees they considered to be ringleaders. As a result, 450 arrests were made, of whom 270 were deported to concentration camps in Germany and 130 of these never returned. The repression led many other militants to go into hiding. Emboldened and politically radicalised by the strike, many of these began a campaign of sabotage with the aim of encouraging the local population and sapping the morale of the occupying forces and their collaborationist allies. These militants armed themselves, initially for self-defence, and, from their base of support in the mining communities, started blowing up electricity pylons, derailing trains and similar acts of sabotage. This led to a need for more explosives and these were obtained by raids on the dynamite stores in the mines, which in turn produced violent confrontations with the security forces. In northern France, the first attacks on individual German soldiers were to a large extent motivated by the need to obtain more weapons. The first two attacks in early 1941 turned to farce when the old pistols misfired and the assassination attempts degenerated into fist fights. This inexperience could only be overcome by practice and demonstrates a major practical problem, when the time comes to fight, political correctness is no substitute for experience.

The main political outcome of the strike was to provide the French resistance with its most solid base. The traditional solidarity of the close knit mining communities and the anti-German, anti-Vichy and anti-employer sentiments generated by the strike enabled these urban guerrillas an unparalleled freedom of movement and support networks. In 1942 and 1943 over half the armed attacks and sabotage in France happened in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

A major objection to attacks on German soldiers is that this would hinder the appeal to mutiny or desertion. This argument ignores the fact that mutinous situations and collaboration with erstwhile enemies rarely arise when their army is victorious: Russia 1917, Germany 1918, the US in Vietnam. The largest group of German soldiers who changed sides in WW2 were recruited into the Red Army after the battle of Stalingrad.⁴ While German soldiers could treat France as a holiday camp, there was little incentive to rebel or even think about it. The insecurity caused by attacks on

³ *Revue du Nord*, 1988, "L'Occupation en France et en Belgique 1940-44" , No 2 (hors série), Lille, p746

⁴ Veyrier, Marcel, *La Wehrmacht Rouge*, Paris: Juillard, 1970

German soldiers was more likely to produce an atmosphere receptive to anti-fascist propaganda than when they were living the high life in the "City of Light". In the north of France, the tactic of individual assassinations became largely replaced by the derailing of troop trains; why kill or injure one when you can get them 500 at a time. The most famous transfer of allegiance was that of the Paris Police, who had loyally carried out the commands of their Fascist hierarchy, including being responsible for rounding up the Jews of Paris. However, in 1944, with German and Vichy France facing defeat, they saved their bacon by joining the uprising.

German-speaking communists in the MOI published *Soldat im Westen*, at the same time as they and other immigrant communists were engaged in armed resistance. The two tactics, the carrot and the stick, were, I would argue, correctly seen as complementary.

Two communists had been executed on the 19 August 1941 for their role in a demonstration in Paris. To avenge them, Pierre Georges, later to become famous under his codename "Fabien", was instructed to execute a German officer in order to set an example and to force his comrades to overcome their reservations. On 21 August 1941, he killed a German officer, Alphonse Moser, with two shots from his revolver on the platform of the Barbès metro station.⁵

His actions also triggered great debate within the Communist Party and between the communists and the other resistance movements. Until then, the PCF's line had advocated mass action and condemned what they called "petit bourgeois anarchism".

In March 1942, Charles Debarge, recently appointed military commander of the Communist resistance for the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, received orders from Paris. He wrote in his diary:

"I have received precise orders. We have been instructed to attack the Germans directly and I must lead my comrades with determination into this new form of struggle. I will set an example and personally head the armed groups as much as possible. It will be hard at the beginning, that is obvious. I will have to overcome the apprehensions of those comrades who say that each time we kill a German, it will cost the lives of some hostages".⁶

On 22 August the *Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich* decreed that:

"Any Frenchmen under arrest will, henceforth, be considered as hostages and if there are any further actions, a number of hostages corresponding to the

⁵ Noguères Henri, 1967, *Histoire de la Résistance en France*, tome 2, Paris: Laffont, p.69

⁶ *Carnets de Charles Debarge* cité par Claude Angeli et Paul Gillet, RÉMY (editeur), *La Résistance dans le Nord*, Famot, Genève, 1974 p149

gravity of the action will be shot".⁷

There was a high proportion of communists amongst the hostages who were shot and, at every announcement of the shooting of a dozen hostages, the PCF would get forty or fifty new recruits. The audacity of the communist resistance gave many men and women the idea that it was possible to oppose the occupation. Even Colonel Rémy, main spokesman for the Gaullists, said:

"Nevertheless, the echo of the executions aroused a righteous indignation in French hearts, often precipitating people into underground activity".⁸

Albert Ouzoulias, who was in charge of the fighting units organized from within the ranks of the communist youth, wrote:

"For us, even a Nazi was a human being and our discussions had revolved round this point. The comrades would not execute a German soldier who could have been a communist from Hamburg or a Berlin worker. Even an officer could have been an anti-fascist teacher although no-one objected to killing a Gestapo officer. But our comrades had not yet understood that the best way to defend our country in time of war was to kill the maximum number of German officers, that this would hasten the end of the war and the end of our misery. Internationalism at that moment was best served by killing as many Nazis as possible."⁹

There was also the problem of collateral damage and on one occasion the Manouchian group of the MOI refused to plant a bomb in a brothel because they did not want to kill innocent civilians.¹⁰

When the employers are seen as traitors, the class struggle appears patriotic. Overcoming this contradiction requires skilful political work by socialists, stressing the class nature of resistance. In France the reverse happened, as the tactic of the Popular Front played down the class struggle to ensure collaboration with Anglo-American imperialism. Roger Pannequin, one of the leaders of the communist resistance in the Pas-de-Calais, notes in his memoirs that, in the period between his arrest in May 1942 and his escape in December of that year, the new militants he encountered on his return to militant activity had adopted a more nationalist and class-collaborationist political approach.¹¹ By the end of 1942, many of the old guard communist militants were either dead, in prison awaiting execution or had fled to remote parts where they were not known. This allowed the national leadership of the

⁷ Noguères Henri, 1967, *Histoire de la Résistance en France, tome 2*, Paris: Laffont, p.82

⁸ *Ibid*, p.161

⁹ *Ibid*, p.73

¹⁰ Thanks to Ian Birchall for this information

¹¹ Pannequin, Roger, 1976, *Ami, si tu tombes*, Paris: Le Sagittaire.

PCF to ensure that its policies were accepted by the newly emerging, inexperienced militants.

MOI and the International Brigade

When seen from the perspective of the MOI, armed attacks on German soldiers take on a different perspective. Many were refugees from the Spanish Civil War, both Spanish republicans and International Brigade volunteers, others were Jews who had watched their families and neighbours being deported. During 1942 and the first half of 1943, they provided the only active armed groups in Paris. It is unlikely that these fighters risked their lives for "la France"; a socialist explanation of their motivation is much more plausible and is consistent with the surviving evidence. I therefore join André Calvès, a Trotskyist who himself was engaged in spreading propaganda amongst the German soldiers and sailors in Brest, in honouring Manouchian and his comrades who fought in the MOI and were tortured and executed by the French Police for their pains.¹²

While the importance of International Brigade veterans to the resistance struggle is widely recognised, it has been said that their military training had been for conventional warfare and that this served little purpose for guerrilla combat.¹³ However, I would argue that the importance of actual combat experience cannot be overestimated. The Gaullists argued for a policy known as "*attentisme*", waiting until the Allied landings before engaging in actual offensive combat. However, when the time came to fight, they did not have the level of combat instinct necessary for maximum effectiveness; this can only be developed through the experience of bullets flying round the ears. The communist approach of launching guerrilla actions as early as they could provided that valuable experience and that is why International Brigade veterans came to dominate the immigrant resistance command structure.

Leo Kneler

In the summer of 1943, when Joseph Epstein was appointed head of the FTP-MOI (*Franco-tireurs et Partisans – Main-d'œuvre immigrée*), the armed wing of the MOI affiliated to the main communist led resistance organisation, the *Franco-Tireurs et Partisans* (FTP), he appointed Missak Manouchian as his deputy who would lead the organisation's operations in Paris.

Manouchian, a refugee from the 1915 Armenian genocide, commanded about 50 fighters in Paris, divided into four detachments, Jewish, Italian, Hungarian/Romanian and the "Derailers". He quickly developed new tactics to use against the occupying

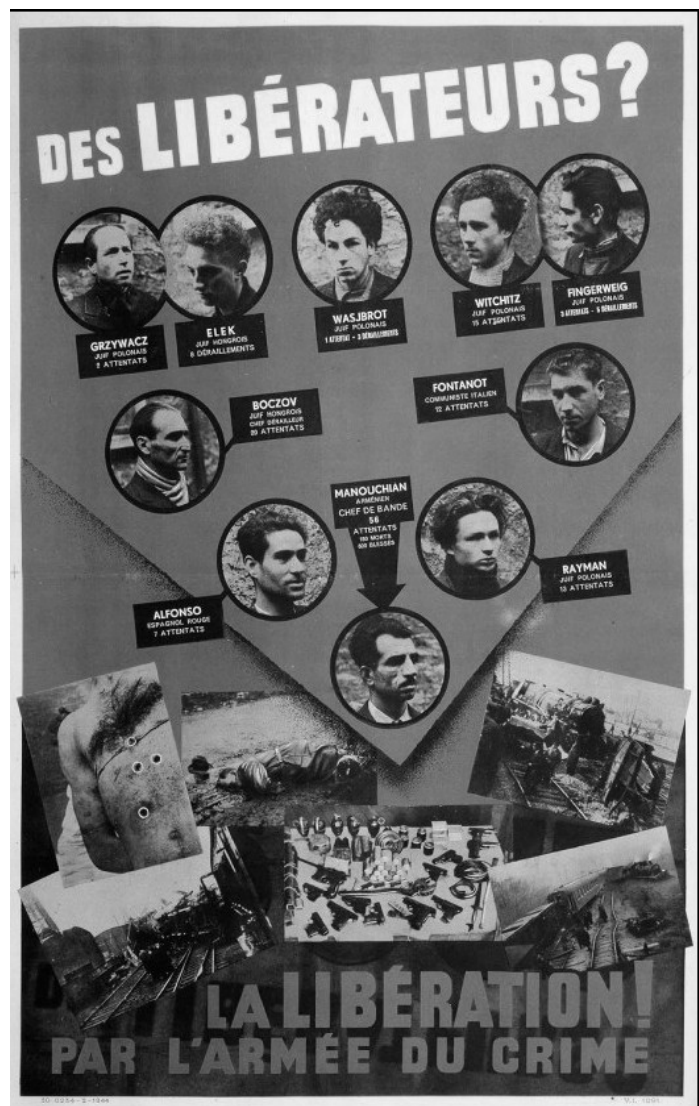
¹² Calvès, *Sans bottes ni médailles*.

¹³ Collin, *Carmagnole et Liberté*, p.14

forces. Where previously attacks had been conducted by a three man team, one to throw the hand-grenade at a German patrol and two to use their pistols to ensure their escape, Manouchian developed a new approach. Three activists threw their hand-grenades, while nine others in two ranks fired at any German soldiers or Vichy Police who gave chase. This gave the impression of much greater numbers than there actually were. Manouchian also set up special squads that were not based on the language sections, but were, rather, selected for their particular talents.¹⁴

Thus on the morning of 28 September 1943, Marcel Rayman, a Pole, Spartaco Fontano, an Italian, Celestino Alfonso, a Spaniard and Leo Kneler, a German, shot and killed SS Colonel Julius von Ritter who was in charge of drafting young French workers to be sent to forced labour in Germany.¹⁵ The pistol Leo Kneler used to kill Von Ritter was the very one that Hans Heisel had given to his contact in the *Travail allemand*, Thea Beling.¹⁶

Leo Kneler was a carpenter in Berlin in the 1920s. A communist militant wanted by the police, he was forced to leave Germany in 1929 to escape arrest. He then lived successively in Antwerp, Paris, Zurich and returned to Germany in 1932 following an amnesty. Three months later, he was arrested. Released and imprisoned again, he went into exile in France upon his release. In Paris, in 1936, he joined the International Brigades. He joined the XI Brigade and fought in Spain until early 1939. A refugee in France, he was interned in Saint-Cyprien, then Gurs and finally the Vernet camp from which he escaped in March 1941 on instruction of the German Communist Party with the mission to engage as a voluntary worker for Germany. In the Ruhr, he organized a resistance network with the help of Henri Karayan, an



¹⁴ Courtois, Peschanski, Rayski, *Le sang de l'étranger*, p.326

¹⁵ Gildea, Robert, 2015, *Fighters in the Shadows*, London: Faber and Faber, p.233.

¹⁶ Perrault, *Taupes rouges*, p.77 and see chapter 3

Armenian communist militant interned like him in Vernet. Spotted by the Gestapo, they fled to France. Back in Paris, Henri Karayan introduced him to Missak Manouchian who recruited him to the FTP-MOI in which he became, from June 1943, a member of the "special squad" which carried out the most dangerous operations.¹⁷

In mid-November 1943, the French police arrested 23 members of the FTP-MOI, including Missak Manouchian and another 21 men: eight Poles, five Italians, three Hungarians, two Armenians, a Spaniard, and three French; and one woman, who was Romanian. Eleven of these were of Jewish heritage. After having been tortured and interrogated for three months, by the French police and the Gestapo, the 23 militants were tried by a German military court. All but one of the accused were executed before a firing squad in Fort Mont-Valérien on 21 February 1944. Olga Bancic, who had served the group as a messenger, was taken to Stuttgart, where she was beheaded on 10 May 1944.¹⁸ In the spring of 1944, the Vichy authorities launched a propaganda campaign, designed to discredit the FTP-MOI in an attempt to divert public anger over their execution. They published a poster, which became known as *Affiche Rouge*, due to its red background. It featured ten of the men in the group, with nationality, surnames, photos and descriptions of their crimes. The Germans distributed an estimated 15,000 copies of the poster. Along with these posters, the Germans handed out flyers that claimed the resistance was headed by foreigners, Jews, unemployed people and criminals; the campaign characterized the resistance as a conspiracy of "foreigners" against French life and the sovereignty of France. This backfired badly as many of the posters were defaced with the graffiti *Mort pour la France* (They Died for France), an inscription frequently found on war memorials, and flowers were placed underneath the posters.

Leo Kneler escaped the wave of arrests that fell on the FTP-MOI organisation in Paris in November 1943. He was sent to Normandy where he joined the *Corps Franc* of the Gaullist *Libération Nord* resistance movement. He participated in the liberation struggles in Normandy and Paris. After the war, Leo Kneler returned to Berlin. He lived in East Germany until his death in the 1979.¹⁹

¹⁷ <http://maitron-en-ligne.univ-paris1.fr/spip.php?article138162>, notice KNELER Léo par Jean-Pierre Besse.

¹⁸ Courtois, Peschanski, Rayski, *Le sang de l'étranger*, p.352

The film, "Army of Crime" (*L'Armée du crime*) is a 2009 French war drama directed by Robert Guédiguian and based on a story by Serge Le Péron. It gives a fairly accurate portrayal of the FTP-MOI in Paris. The *Musée de la Résistance Nationale*, which provided historical advice for the production team, also produced a series of handouts for schools to accompany the film.

¹⁹ Holban, Boris. 1989. *Testament: après quarante-cinq ans de silence, le chef militaire des FTP-MOI de Paris parle*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.

Hamacher, Gottfried, 2005, *Gegen Hitler. Deutsche in der Résistance, in den Streitkräften der Antihitlerkoalition und der Bewegung »Freies Deutschland«*, Berlin: Dietz, p.105

The South

Norbert Kugler

The *Affaire de l'Affiche Rouge* has made the Paris section the most famous, but urban sections of the FTP-MOI existed outside Paris as well and in the southern zone they were led by a German exile.

Norbert Kugler was born into a Jewish family in Upper Bavaria. An apprentice in the wholesale textile trade in Munich, activist in far-left organisations, he fled Germany shortly after the arrival of Hitler to power and joined his brother in Toulouse. In the autumn of 1936 he joined the International Brigades and fought in the Thälmann Battalion of the 11th Brigade. Promoted to Lieutenant, he was a staff officer of the 45th Division of the Spanish People's Army. At the end of 1938, he returned to Toulouse and met his wife, Mira, a former International Brigade nurse.



Norbert Kugler

He was arrested in 1939 and interned in various camps in the South West and Normandy. Released before the arrival of the Germans, he resumed his illegal work in Toulouse. Arrested again in 1941, he was interned at Camp Recebedou from where he escaped.

He went to Lyon, where he attended the meeting of 6 June 1942 at 55 Boulevard de la Croix Rousse, that decided to create an FTP for all immigrants in the southern zone. Kugler went on to recruit the nucleus of the FTP-MOI group in Grenoble, called *Liberté*. This initial group were all immigrants of Jewish heritage. FTP-MOI activity in the southern zone increased over the autumn, but really took off when the German and Italian armies moved in to occupy the region. Grenoble was under Italian occupation until the fall of Mussolini in the summer of 1943, when German soldiers replaced the Italian Army, some of whom joined the resistance.

Norbert Kugler became head of the Rhône and Isère regions, *FTP Región H14*, where the main urban guerrilla units were *Liberté* in Grenoble and *Carmagnole* in Lyon; effectively two regional arms of the same organisation under Kugler's leadership. These groups were initially composed almost entirely of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, other national groupings were recruited as time went on although the East Europeans continued to dominate. On the other hand, the Italian and Polish immigrant communities, well established in the region, provided the majority of the infrastructural support, safe houses, provisions, armaments and so

on, as the Jews were, by now, in a completely illegal position and operated underground, relying entirely on local legal support. This support network was essential to the success of the urban guerrillas and, in many ways more dangerous, as they were sitting ducks for the forces of repression.

It should be noted that there was a higher than average proportion of women in these two groups, not only in the more familiar roles of propaganda, liaison, information gathering and medical care, but also a good number of the active fighters were women. An analysis of the first names of the list of members at the time of the Allied landings enables us to make an estimate of 25% female membership.

On 29 May 1943, Simon Frid, one of the founding members of *Carmagnole* was arrested during a botched raid aimed at stealing ration cards. He was tried, sentenced to death and guillotined on 4 December. In reprisal, a week later, Norbert Kugler ordered a hit squad composed of Ignaz Krakus, Ezer Najman and one other to assassinate Jacques Faure-Pinguely, the prosecution lawyer responsible for the condemnation. Similarly, Mendel Langer²⁰, leader of the 35th Brigade of the FTP-MOI that operated in the area around Toulouse, was captured in February 1943 and at his trial, the prosecutor, Pierre Lespinasse said: "*Vous êtes juif, étranger et communiste... Voilà trois raisons pour que vous soyez exécuté*".²¹ Langer was guillotined in July 1943 but, on 10 October, l'avocat-général Pierre Lespinasse was gunned down in the street on his way to mass by Enzo Lorenzi, one of Langer's comrades. The Vichy government had set up special anti-terrorist courts in 1941, but the FTP-MOI developed the tactic of shooting the magistrates who condemned their comrades to death, which had the effect of making it much more difficult to find lawyers willing to serve on these *sections spéciales*.²²

Herbert Herz

Herbert Herz was a fighter in both *Carmagnole* and *Liberté*. He was born in 1924 in Augsburg, Bavaria where he spent his childhood. His father, Simon, and his uncle, both convinced anti-Nazis, were arrested in 1933.

Released three weeks later, the two brothers immediately decided to leave Germany and emigrated to France. They were interned as "enemy aliens" at the outbreak of war. Herbert's gymnastics teacher, Monsieur Ganteret, provided him with a sporting certificate, which stated that he had been born in Strasbourg rather than Augsburg "so that you will not be bothered". This enabled a sympathetic local

²⁰ Also known as *Marcel Langer*

²¹ "You are a Jew, a foreigner and a communist, three reasons for you to be executed"

²² <http://maitron-en-ligne.univ-paris1.fr/spip.php?article97485>, notice KUGLER Norbert par Jean-Pierre Besse; Joutard & Marcot, *Les étrangers dans la Résistance*, pp.120-123; Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, p.226.

authority administrator to issue a French ID card. However, faced with a police enquiry, he moved to Grenoble where the Italian occupying authorities were not interested in persecuting Jews.



Herbert Herz

On 9 September 1943, Grenoble was occupied by the German army. A policeman, one of Herz's neighbours provided him, in exchange for a few cigarettes, with an identity card in the name of Georges-Hubert Charnay, born in Dijon in 1925. One of his friends, Charles Wolmark, offered him a chance to fight instead of hiding and recruited him to the communist youth organisation. Herz

became a member of an FTP-MOI group entirely made up of Jews, led by Nathan Sachs²³.

The FTP-MOI had chosen Grenoble as a battlefield: bombs on the path of German soldiers, the assassination of militiamen and German officers, sabotage, "recuperations" of food ration cards and so on. The most common actions were train derailments.

Herz recalls how, on the morning of 31 January 1944, a platoon of German troops left their barracks in Grenoble. "They walked along the banks of the Isère singing," . He carefully pushed his detonators into the Cheddite, a yellow explosive that filled what we would now refer to an an "improvised explosive device" (IED). Herz connected the wires and the battery and detonated the device. The FTP claimed that they killed 15 Germans in the attack although Herbert later commented that this was "probably an exaggerated number". Sixty-five years later, he said: "I would have preferred to attack SS or officers."

Why did he enter a communist network? "Chance, I could have entered a Jewish or Gaullist organisation as well". A "soldier without a uniform", he just joined a combat group. Weapons were rare:

"What we had, we had to take by shooting down German officers or by taking them from French gendarmes.

Our daily bread was the sabotage of the railways and, more rarely, the occupations and the sabotage of factories".

In 1944, Herz was appointed "technician" of the detachment. He looked after the

²³ or Saks

provision of weapons, their distribution and maintenance. In March, when his presence in Grenoble became too dangerous, Herz was transferred to Lyon where his activities continued. "By day we did intelligence, by night we sabotaged the tracks, but we were very lonely. For fear of arrests, we lived separately. We had no friends".²⁴

Max Brings

Little is known of the early life of Alfred Woznik, other than that he fought in the International Brigade in Spain. Known as Max Brings in his capacity as military chief of the FTP-MOI in Provence, he formed part of a small squad that decided to attack a building in central Nice that consisted of an officers' mess in the Café Noailles and, upstairs, the offices where the round ups of young French men to be sent to forced labour in Germany were organised and administered.

On Christmas Eve 1943, Max Brings, accompanied by a female Polish comrade, Rosine Fryd, went into the Café Noailles officers' mess having arrived in a stolen German Army staff car, dressed in a *Wehrmacht* uniform that had been taken from a German captain who had been taken prisoner by the resistance. They found a table and placed Rosine's handbag filled with explosives on one of the chairs. Max activated the timing device and the couple left. When they were safely out of the building, the bomb exploded. The police report on the incident speaks of 17 victims of the blast, six German soldiers and 11 French civilians. The report also speaks of two more bomb blasts in Nice the following evening causing material damage but no further casualties. The German authorities rounded up 400 French civilians and extended the curfew in reprisal.²⁵



Max Brings

Max Brings was also involved in a robbery at the *Reich* security centre in Aix en Provence. As well as an SS training centre, it contained the archive of the *Sicherheitspolizei-Sicherheitsdienst* (Sipo-SD, German Security Police). At the request of the PCF, Max Brings and August Mahnke dressed as SS officers and,

²⁴ <http://www.ajpn.org/personne-Herz-Herbert-1622.html>

Herz, Herbert, 2007, « *Fighting in the French Resistance* », *Memories of a young German Jew*, Paris: Manny Samuel Editions.

²⁵ Report issued by the *Renseignements Généraux* (French intelligence agency) on the attack against the Café Noailles in Nice, dated the 27th of December 1943, in: Panicacci, Jean-Louis, 2012, *En territoire occupé. Italiens et Allemands à Nice, 1942-1944*, Paris, Vendémiaire.

accompanied by some French comrades disguised as Gendarmes, went to the offices on a day that it was known that the director would be in Paris. They persuaded his secretary that they needed to consult the archive and then, when they were admitted to the director's office where the records were kept, they overpowered the secretary, loaded the papers into cases and left the building. Passing the papers over to their French comrades, they returned to Marseilles.

After the Allied landing, Max Brings was made a Major in the FFI, but we know little of his life thereafter.²⁶

Escape from Castres

The prison at Castres in Languedoc was specially set up to contain the most intransigent internees. The inmates were a mixture of former *Interbrigadistas* from the internment camp at Vernet, some Gaullist officers who had tried to escape from other prisons, as well as a couple of British agents. The ex-internees from Vernet formed an international committee composed of a Yugoslav, an Austrian, a Spaniard, a Pole and a German, Heinz Priess. It was chaired by Ljubomir Ilic from Yugoslavia and served as the escape committee. This escape committee was in contact outside with a French woman, Madame Desoilier-Podweletski, who pretended to be the aunt of one of the Yugoslav prisoners and who was thus able to liaise between the prisoners and the resistance group outside charged with assisting their escape. In turn, they were able to contact the non-communist prisoners and added seven French, four Poles, five Belgians and two English women, SOE agents, to the conspiracy.

The first two attempts to escape failed, but when the prisoners heard that there was soon to be a convoy taking a number of them to Germany, they decided on desperate measures. On the night of 16 September 1943, they managed to overpower the guards in the cell block and next called for the medical assistant, then for the deputy governor, both of whom they overpowered as well. They finally managed to overpower the night shift one by one as they arrived. Once in control of the prison, they left in twos and threes. Their contacts in the town of Castres were an Italian shoemaker, himself a veteran of the Spanish war, Roberto Tossi, and a French trade union activist, Noémie Bouissière, while the exterior operation was co-ordinated by a German communist, Werner Schwarze. These were the same Werner Schwarze and Noemie Bouissière who later worked with Gerhard Leo in his attempt to infiltrate the German authorities in Castres.²⁷

Of the 35 who managed to escape, 17 were veterans of the International Brigades

²⁶ Schaul, Dora, 1973, *Résistance – Erinnerungen deutscher Antifaschisten*, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, pp.210-213 and 273-278

²⁷ See pp.235/6 for Gerhard Leo.

of 7 different nationalities, including five Germans and three Austrians. The other 18 (including two women) were French and Allied officers, Allied intelligence agents or members on non-communist resistance groups.²⁸

Heinz Priess

A Hamburg electrician, he served as a Captain in the International Brigades. Following his escape from Castres, Heinz Priess served in the resistance as head of military reconnaissance for the southern zone and was, together with Ernst Buschmann and Max Brings, a Member of the Military Commission of the Movement Free Germany for the West (CALPO). He acted as liaison between the French partisans and the CALPO groups in Paris and Switzerland. He was present for the liberation of Paris in August 1944. In October 1945 he returned to Hamburg where he edited the KPD journal *Hamburger Volkszeitung*. In 1950, he was sentenced to two months' imprisonment for insulting the mayor of Hamburg, Max Brauer. In July 1951 he moved to the GDR where he pursued a career in broadcasting.



Heinz Priess

Ernst Buschmann

An electrician born at Solingen in Germany, he commanded a battalion in Spain. After the escape he went to Lyon where he became responsible for CALPO in the southern zone. He worked closely in the production of *Soldat im Mittelmeer*, organising the distribution of the journal through the CALPO network. He also acted as liaison between the Germans fighting in the FTP-MOI.

Franz Raab

A Major in Spain, he went first to Marseilles upon his escape, then in 1944 he was sent to join the Maquis de Picaussel in the Aude. This Maquis group had formed by chance when a British arms drop had been parachuted in the wrong place and local youths managed to hide it before the German forces arrived. The chance nature of the formation of this group would have welcomed the military experience of Franz Raab.

Hans Weyers

Hans Weyers, a miner from Recklinghausen in Germany, had been a Sergeant in Spain. After his escape he went straight into the Maquis in the Lot-et-Garonne.

²⁸ Granzow, Jonny, 2009, *16 septembre 1943, l'évasion de la prison de Castres*, Toulouse: Nouvelles Editions Loubatières.

Emanuel Edel

Emanuel Edel was an Austrian from Vienna who served as a doctor in the International Brigade medical service. After the escape he worked in the *Travail allemand* until the Allied landing, when he joined the FFI under the name Roger Dumaine. After the liberation of the south of France, he went to Yugoslavia where he fought in an Austrian unit of the Yugoslav People's Liberation Army.

Moritz Margulies

An Austrian bank clerk from Czernowitz, he had organised the transfer of volunteers to Spain. After the escape he joined the resistance in Paris but was arrested, tortured and deported. He managed to escape from the train to become Political Commissar of the 2nd Austrian Battalion of the Yugoslav People's Liberation Army.

Franz Storkan

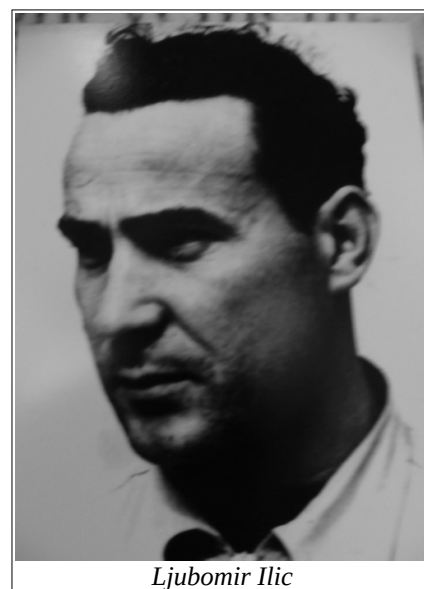
Franz Storkan, a mechanic from Bad Vöslau in Austria, had engaged in recruiting Austrians to fight in Spain. After the escape, he returned to Austria to help the Austrian resistance, but was arrested in July 1944 and was killed in Mauthausen KZ on 7 April 1945.

Rudolf Leonhard

A German poet who, after his escape from Castres, obtained refuge in the monastery of En Calcat, from where he wrote for the journals of *Travail allemand* and other antifascist publications.

Ljubomir Ilic

Following his escape, Ljubomir Ilic was to become chief of the FTP-MOI for the southern zone then, at the beginning of 1944, he was appointed head of the national FTP-MOI and moved to Paris as a member of the national leadership of the FTPF. Returning to Yugoslavia after the war, he worked in the diplomatic service. After the 1948 split between Stalin and Tito, Ilic, outraged that the 400 Yugoslavian volunteers in the International Brigade were denounced as Gestapo agents during the show trial of László Rajk in Hungary, tried to contact his old comrade, Charles Tillon of the



Ljubomir Ilic

PCF central committee, who had been in overall command of the whole FTP. But Tillon would not see him.²⁹

When Ljubomir Ilic was called to Paris in the spring of 1944 to head the whole FTP-MOI operation, Norbert Kugler replaced him at the head of the FTP-MOI in the southern zone. After the Allied landings, Kugler was appointed a Lieutenant-Colonel in the FFI. In 1949, he returned to the GDR, but he was accused of "Titoism", arrested and imprisoned for several years. One wonders if Norbert Kugler's association with Ljubomir Ilic was a contributing factor in his imprisonment. Be that as it may, the arrest and imprisonment of people like Norbert Kugler and Artur London, who had given so much to the anti-Nazi struggle, is a disgrace and represents a mirror image of the US show trials of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Lillian Hellman's expression "Scoundrel Time" applies just as much to Stalinist Eastern Europe as it does to the Red Scare of Senator Joseph McCarthy in the USA.³⁰

²⁹ <http://maitron-en-ligne.univ-paris1.fr/spip.php?article89903>, notice ILICH Hiubr ou Ljubomir par Claude Pennetier.

³⁰ Hellman, Lillian, 1976, *Scoundrel Time*, Boston: Back Bay Books.

Chapter 5 - The Rural Revolt

By 1943, the losses on the Eastern front resulted in the German government deciding to implement a programme of forced recruitment of labour from France to compensate for their lack of manpower in German industry. This measure would have unintended detrimental effects on the German war effort.

The *Service du Travail Obligatoire* (STO), started in February 1943, was the organisation set up by the Vichy government to organise the dispatch of forced labour from France to Germany. Some 600,000 French workers were sent to Germany in 1943 and 1944. Another 200,000 managed to evade the round-up and these young men formed the basis for the massive increase in the rural resistance. This round-up and deportation to what was essentially slave labour, initially enforced by the French Police and *Gendarmerie* and later aided by French fascist paramilitaries, such as the *Milice* and *Parti populaire français*, (PPF, French Popular Party) as well as the German armed forces, was massively unpopular and may be seen as an important turning point in alienating French public opinion from the Vichy government of Maréchal Pétain. There was a severe shortage of labour in the country as a million and a half French soldiers were still being held in German POW camps. The *réfractaires*, as those fleeing the STO were called, were sheltered in rural areas in return for their labour on farms and it was a natural step to supporting them as they took to the hills and forests when the Vichy authorities came looking for them. In turn it was logical for these *réfractaires* to arm themselves against the forces of repression. They then quickly turned from defence to attack, from being the hunted to the hunters.

In the densely wooded hills and mountains of the Morvan in western Burgundy, the Haute-Savoie region in the east and the southern reaches of the Massif Central, particularly the Cévennes region of Aveyron, Lozère and Tarn, the Vichy forces found it particularly hard to deal with this growing rural resistance, partly because the German occupation authorities did not trust the *Gendarmerie* and would only allow them to have a pistol and nine cartridges each. This lack of trust was well founded as many rural Gendarmes, either from conviction or because of local community pressure, were sympathetic to the *Maquis* or at least turned a blind eye. They would frequently allow themselves to be tied up and given a few bruises during a *Maquis* operation, to excuse the fact that they had done nothing to stop the attack. Some even went so far as to tip off the *Maquis* when they had foreknowledge of German anti-partisan operations.

In some ways, the existence of the rural resistance can be seen as a form of large

scale collective action, a form of community civil disobedience. This was a milieu that welcomed the Spanish, German, Yugoslav, Italian and Jewish veterans of the International Brigades as they had a common enemy in the German and Italian occupation forces together with their French fascist allies, while their previous military experience was much appreciated. The German authorities certainly saw the situation as a rural revolt and treated the peasants in the villages with extreme brutality. There was a general policy of burning villages and massacring civilians in areas of strong *Maquis* activity in an attempt to terrorise the base of support of the guerrilla bands. For example, having failed to catch some resistance fighters in an isolated village in the Cévennes because the rebels had received a tip-off from a friendly Gendarme, the German army burnt most of the village and took three men and a woman back to Nîmes, where they publicly hanged them in the town centre.¹



In this brutal war, the civilian supporters were just as much in the front line as the fighters in the hills and this affected women particularly. In the cemetery of Alès in the Gard are two tombstones recording the murders of Hedwig Robens et Lisa Ost: "*Partisane allemande, morte pour la liberté, assassinée par le Gestapo*".² These two

¹ Kedward, H. R., 1993, *In search of the Maquis : Rural Resistance in Southern France, 1942-1944*, Oxford : Clarendon Press, pp.85-87, 123

² "German Partisan. Died for Freedom. Murdered by the Gestapo"

German women, formerly of the International Brigades, were acting as a courier and a nurse for the local *Maquis* when they were picked up in an SS raid on the village of Nozières in which they were staying, taken to prison in Alés, where they were tortured and killed by the German security service.

This growth of a rural guerilla movement was also an opportunity for the hard-pressed urban terrorist networks to send at least some of their fighters into the hills to train and lead these groups of militarily inexperienced young men. Given that most of the *réfractaires* were from the cities, they were as much "strangers" in the countryside as the foreign volunteers.

There was a considerable German and Austrian contribution to this rural guerrilla movement. Many local resistance museums have a reference to one or two Germans who fought with the local partisans. Similarly in the surviving documentation, there are frequent, if tantalisingly vague, references. For example, the *Maquis de Vabre*, part of the Gaullist *Armée secrète*, which operated in the Tarn department, by December 1943, organised 464 combatants. An analysis of the names in the register of the group shows 55 foreign volunteers, 16 Poles, 12 Germans, 7 Romanians, 6 Spanish, 4 Russians, 3 Italians, 3 Czechs, 1 Belgian, 1 Hungarian, 1 Swiss and 1 Turk.³

However, before we look for the German and Austrian involvement in the *Maquis*, let us set the scene by looking at the contribution of other national groupings, particularly the Spanish and the Italians.

Los Guerrilleros

Of the 500,000 Spanish Republican refugees who fled to France after the victory of the Francoist forces, there were still 120,000 living in France in the spring of 1940, of whom about 15,000 were interned in French concentration camps, 55,000 were enrolled in *Groupements de travailleurs étrangers* (GTE), 40,000 directly employed replacing mobilised soldiers.⁴

The German authorities had a particular hatred for the Spanish republicans, a hatred shared by Pétain who was a personal friend of Franco following his time as French ambassador to Spain; the 8000 Spanish republicans in the French Army in 1940 who were captured during the German invasion were denied Prisoner of War status and 5000 were killed in Mauthausen KZ. The first convoy from Angoulême to Mauthausen on 20 August 1940 contained 927 Spanish refugees. This produced a feeling that they had nothing to lose which, combined with the sentiment that they

³ <https://maquisdevabre.wordpress.com/documents/registre-du-maquis/>

⁴ Peschanski, *Les camps français d'internement*, p.63

had unfinished business with fascism, meant that the Spanish were very early volunteers in the resistance.

The leadership of the *Partido Comunista Español* (PCE, Spanish Communist Party) moved quickly to either the USSR or Mexico, leaving a new, younger group to organise the Spanish communists in France under the leadership of Jesús Monzón. In August 1941, they established *Unión Nacional Española* (UNE, Spanish National Union), which would unite all left-wing political sectors opposed to Francoism, including sections of the anarcho-syndicalist *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT, National Confederation of Labour) and the social democratic *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE). The anarchists in UNE even had their own paper, *Solidaridad Obrera*. This move towards the more radical forces represented by the anarchists went against the increasingly rightwards trajectory of the Popular Front policy of the rest of the Comintern. A clandestine meeting PCE delegates, held in the Argelès-sur-Mer French concentration camp in October 1940, decided to ignore the Hitler-Stalin pact and asserted that the "War against Fascism continues".

The journal of the UNE itself was entitled "*Reconquista de España*" (Reconquest of Spain). This summed up the double priority of the Spanish exiles in France, not only to fight the fascist forces occupying France, but also to prepare for a return to Spain to fight against the Franco regime. This dual priority was to cause a certain tension with the French Communist Party, whose leadership felt that the foreign fighters on French soil should prioritise the French resistance. The UNE and its armed wing, the *Agrupación Guerrillera Española* (AGE, Spanish Guerrilla Organisation), in the end, related to the rest of the resistance via its own direct representation and not through the MOI.

By January 1944, there were around 10,000 active *guerrilleros* in 7 divisions operating in 31 departments. They were particularly important in the south-west where some 3,500 Spanish guerrillas played a determining role in the liberation of Toulouse. There was probably an equal number operating in local *Maquis* organisations on an individually recruited basis.

However, when World War Two was over and the Cold War started, they became an embarrassment as the US and its Allies set about rehabilitating Franco as an anti-communist; the "Heroes of the Resistance" became "foreign terrorists".⁵

Italians

There was a large Italian immigrant population already present in France, probably a million and a half, concentrated in the mining regions of the Pas-de-Calais and

⁵ Ortiz, Jean, 2010, *Sobre la gesta de los guerrilleros españoles en Francia*, Biarritz: Atlantica.

Lorraine as well as the rural south west, particularly the Lot-et-Garonne.

The department of Lot-et-Garonne was an area with a long tradition of Italian immigration, mainly farmers and agricultural labourers, who had maintained their traditional loyalty to the Italian Communist Party. The PCI could count on the loyalty of some 150 families in the area round the departmental capital Agen, providing a solid basis for the Italian section of the FTP-MOI which was affiliated to the Toulouse based 35th Brigade. Led by Fiore Lorenzi, his son Enzo and Maria Lesizza, not only did they provide a significant number of fighters, they were also able to shelter many resistance fighters on the run in farms in the region. Their first loyalty was to the PCI rather than the PCF and they retained a certain independence. Thus, against PCF advice, they assassinated Cardinal Torricelli, who organised propaganda in favour of Fascist Italy in Agen, and when the Italian partisan movement became properly organised in 1943, a considerable number of Italian resistance fighters crossed the Alps to join the fight in Italy.

It is clear that there were different motivations within the Italian sections of the FTP-MOI and, while the more established immigrants and especially their children, now French citizens, were much more likely to see themselves a part of a specifically French resistance, the more recent immigrants and political refugees saw the fighting in France as a stage on the road back to fighting their home grown fascism in Italy.

Many of those Italian activists wishing to return to fight in Italy gathered in Marseilles, from where they sought secret passages over the Alps. Meanwhile, they took an active part in the resistance in the Alpes-Maritimes region. The large Italian community based round the bauxite mines in Brignoles was not only the centre of recruitment for the armed struggle, it was the scene of extended strike action in January to March 1942.

Given the size and stability of the Italian community in France, it was much easier for them to form their "own" *Maquis* units, particularly as Italian youths were subject to the STO. The fact that many of these Italian volunteers had their own political agenda may not have pleased the leadership of the French resistance, nevertheless, they formed an important part of that resistance, making a contribution out of all proportion to their numbers in the population.⁶

⁶ Bechelloni, Antonio, 1999, "Antifascistes italiens en France pendant la guerre : parcours aléatoires et identités réversibles", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, vol. 46 N°2, Avril-Juin 1999. pp. 280-295
Boursier, Jean-Yves, 1992, *La Guerre de Partisans dans le Sud-ouest de la France 1942-1944, La 35è Brigade FTP-MOI*, Paris: L'Harmattan

Germans in the Maquis

Given the comparatively small numbers of anti-Nazi Germans living in France, their recent arrival, their lack of established roots in the French working class, the brutal nature of the German occupation, particularly its rabid antisemitism and the obvious impracticality of returning to fight in Germany, it is hardly surprising that the German fighters in France concentrated on helping the local forces of the French resistance as their first priority, seeking the military defeat of Nazi Germany. The growing mass partisan movement in Italy and Yugoslavia or the recent experience in Spain with a civil war required to impose fascism had left many rank and file communists from these countries with a continued belief in the possibility of self-emancipation. The absence of a mass movement in Germany left most German exiles in France relying on a victory by the Soviet Union, which restricted their possibility for political independence.

The majority of Germans who took up arms enlisted in units of mixed nationality in which they were a small minority; most are unknown. Ernst Scholtz, himself a fighter in the FTP in Savoie and future GDR Ambassador to France, tells us of the German soldier, a conscripted worker from Mannheim, who turned up at the *Maquis* camp with a lorry and a load of stolen armaments and cigarettes. We do not even know his name.⁷

Another German veteran, who we only know as "Karl", became the Lieutenant in command of the otherwise French "*Groupe Karl*" *Maquis 11, groupe Vendôme*, operating near Gaillac in the Tarn. After the Liberation, his 40 men wrote glowing tributes to his military leadership in an exercise book which they lodged in the military archive.⁸

Nevertheless, one such German volunteer, who was the only German in his FTP unit, has left us his extended memoirs.

Gerhard Leo

We left Gerhard Leo in Toulouse prison.⁹ Fortunately for him, he was in the hands of the *Abwehr*, the military intelligence service of the *Wehrmacht*, rather than the SS or the Gestapo. They handled him roughly but did not torture him. On 3 May 1944, he was taken before a German Court Martial accused of "Treason". His defence was that he had been stripped of his German citizenship and therefore could not be charged with treason as he was stateless. The court in the epitome of Nazi bureaucracy ordered that a new charge sheet be composed, "Terrorism" this time, and

⁷ Perrault, *Taupes rouges*, p.217

⁸ Laroche, *On les nommait des étrangers*, pp.342-3

⁹ Chapter 2 above.

he was sent to Paris on 3 June for a retrial and interrogation by the Gestapo.

The train had one carriage full of *Feldgendarmerie*, in which he was held prisoner and handcuffed, while the remainder of the train was full of STO conscripts and their French *Milice* guards. The train had to pass through the wooded Corrèze region, a *Maquis* stronghold. When it reached the small town of Allasac, it stopped in the station and the driver and fireman disappeared. A local *Maquis* group then attacked the train. The German police fled, but not before attempting to murder Gerhard Leo with a bullet in the head which, luckily for him, only grazed his skull.

Leo was recruited into the FTP group that had rescued him and a young partisan, code name "Michel", befriended him and instructed him in the use of the British Sten Gun. A couple of days later, following D-Day, they merged with a unit of the *Armée secrète* (AS) to form a battalion of the FFI, with instructions to attack the departmental capital of Tulle. They managed to persuade the Tulle Gendarmerie to surrender at the first sign of trouble. Following a fierce gun battle, the German garrison of Tulle surrendered on the 8 June 1944. Leo was able to use his interpreting skills to facilitate that surrender. However, the celebrations were premature as Tulle lay directly in the path of the SS *Das Reich* division en route to Normandy.

Gerhard and Michel's section, FTP "Jean-Robert", was sent, with two requisitioned Gestapo cars and some explosives to sabotage the Toulouse-Paris railway in the Vézère gorge. However, en route, Michel's car was surprised by a German road-block and collided with a tank. Leo managed drive into the woods where the tank could not go and where the German soldiers were afraid to go on foot. Michel was one of the 99 French people hanged from lamp-posts following the arrival of the SS *Das Reich* division in Tulle later on 8 June, when they retook the town. In the days that followed, 149 men were sent to the Dachau concentration camp, from where 101 did not return. SS *Das Reich* division then went on to commit the destruction of the village of Oradour-sur-Glane on 10 June 1944, when 642 of its inhabitants, including women and children, were massacred.

Gerhard Leo, having completed the mission to sabotage the railway, went to visit the Michel's family, where he was surprised by a raid by the SS, during which he shot and killed his first German soldier, thereby keeping a promise he had made to himself when he had first heard of the lynching of Michel. He was wounded himself in the exchange of fire.

Returning to Tulle, now with its now much reduced German garrison following the departure of SS *Das Reich*, Leo was able assist once more in the surrender negotiations. He finished the war with the rank of Lieutenant in the FFI.¹⁰

¹⁰ Leo, *Un Allemand dans la Résistance*, pp.241-307

Egon Berlin

Another German volunteer of whom we know a little more is Egon Berlin. Following *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, a group of Belgian women organized a rescue mission which enabled nearly 1,000 Jewish children to leave Germany and Austria. Following the German invasion of France and Belgium, ninety-three of these children were put on a freight train and travelled through the night into the relative safety of Vichy France. Ranging in age from five to sixteen, the children along with their protectors spent a harsh winter in an abandoned barn with little food before eventually finding shelter in the isolated Château de la Hille in southern France.

In "The Children of La Hille", Walter Reed, himself one of the child refugees, gives us this account of Egon Berlin and three others who joined the *3101e compagnie de FTPF de l'Ariège*:

"The prime example of their spirit and determination is the story of the four teenagers, each about sixteen years old, who joined the Franc-Tireurs et Partisans (FTP) French resistance forces in the late spring of 1944. Georges Herz, Egon Berlin, Joseph Dortort, and Kurt "Onze" Klein had recently left the château to establish themselves a hide-out in the countryside not far from La Hille in order to escape the repeated searches by the police authorities.

An Alsatian named Schnee engaged them to cut trees in the nearby woods. When German forces killed several young Maquis resistance fighters and civilians in an engagement near Vira (about twenty-five kilometers east of La Hille) on June 9, 1944, word of the tragedy spread and reached the La Hille youngsters in their hideout. Egon Berlin is said to have exclaimed "If we don't act, who will? Let's go fight the Germans, let's join the Maquis...."

Egon, Kurt, and Joseph contacted their friend Audi Oehlhaum at a nearby farm and headed in the direction of Vira. At first they fell into the hands of Spanish guerilla fighters, but then were accepted by "Daniel," a French Maquis leader. They were now ready to fight the French milice (Vichy militia) and the German occupation troops. "Onze" was seventeen, and the other three were each just sixteen years old. Their French Maquis fellow fighters, for the most part, were under twenty years old and their objective was to waylay and harass German troops and French militia soldiers in preparation for the expected Allied landings on the Mediterranean coast. They had to adopt new names, in case they were captured.

Egon Berlin became "Paul Berdin" and soon was nicknamed "Petit Paul.", He was one of the youngest maquisards (Maquis members) of their group. Capturing arms, providing food for the group, committing sabotage, and punishing French collaborators were their main activities.

On July 1, almost a month after the June 6 invasion in Normandy, the group of young fighters moved into the hilly area near the hamlet of Roquefixade, about thirteen kilometers east of Foix. Five days later French militia forces arrived in the area to hunt down the partisans. In the battle on the hillside, seventeen of the young fighters were killed, including the sixteen-year-old Egon Berlin of La Hille.

A monument on the site draws veterans for a commemoration service every year. Egon Berlin is buried beneath a monument to the fallen in the cemetery at Pamiers along with several of the other victims. In March 2003 the entrance hall of a Pamiers high school in the Ariège region was named "Salle Egon Berlin" in his honour.

"Onze" Klein was taken prisoner by French police forces during this battle and detained in Toulouse until liberation. Joseph Dorton and Audi Oehlbaum were able to escape and Audi later joined the French Foreign Legion.

At least six members of the La Hille population became allied soldiers and thus were able to participate in the efforts to defeat their German persecutors - another remarkable aspect of the colony which is unusual in the history of the Holocaust, especially regarding teenagers".¹¹

Maquisards allemands dans les Cévennes

There was, however, one group of Germans who did fight as a self-contained *Maquis* group, forming a particularly efficient combat unit that played a vital role in the liberation of the town of Nîmes.

The Cévennes is a mountainous region of southern France with a long history of rebellion. Since the 16th Century it has had a large Protestant population that suffered persecution from Paris. It was the site of a popular rebellion by *les Camisards* following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which made Protestantism illegal. The revolt broke out in 1702, with the worst of the fighting continuing until 1704, then skirmishes until 1710 and a final peace by 1715. Legally allowed to practice their protestant religion since the French revolution, the people of this region have never really trusted Paris and it became a stronghold of anti-Vichy feeling during the Second World War. Their own history of persecution and exile led the *Cévenols* to immediately sympathise with the group of German communist resistance fighters, led

¹¹ Reed, Walter W. 2015. *The Children of La Hille: eluding Nazi capture during World War II*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, p.229

by Otto Kühne, who sought refuge in their mountains in November 1943.

Otto Kühne was a communist railwayman from Berlin, born in 1893, who was elected to the *Reichstag* in 1931, where he was secretary of the KPD parliamentary group. Following the *Reichstag* fire, he was exiled in Norway, Denmark and France, from where he went to fight in Spain from 1936 to August 1938.

At the outbreak of the war, he was interned by the Vichy regime and worked under the authority of GTE 321 (*Groupement de Travailleurs Étrangers*), foreign workers camp established in Chanac in the Lozère, where he formed a resistance group of German veterans of the International Brigades. They made contact with a group of Protestant pastors who had formed a resistance group; one of the German communists, Richard Hilgert, was even persuaded to sing in the church choir at Easter 1943.

The GTE had hired out five of the Germans, including Otto Kühne, to the steel-mill at Saint-Chély-d'Apcher, which gave them a degree of independence, but it also meant that the authorities had them registered under their real names. In March 1943, they were informed by members of the Gaullist resistance group "*Combat*", who were working in the public administration, that five German antifascists working at Saint-Chély-d'Apcher, would be arrested the next day. *Combat* provided them with a refuge in a woodcutters' camp at Bonnecombe, at altitude of 1,300m and 25 km from Marvejols. Another German from the 321 GTE quickly joined the group which constituted the first *Maquis* in the Gard-Lozère area. They were welcomed by the local population, who helped with some provisions. Another group of Germans found a similar refuge in Buis les Baronnies, in the south of the Drôme.



Otto Kühne

The leadership of *Travail allemand* in Lyon decided that their complete lack of command of the French language made them unsuitable for work of infiltration, while their Spanish military experience would be useful to the *Maquis*. So, at the beginning of 1944, Otto Kühne and his comrades, accompanied by four Frenchmen including Louis Veylet, settled in the empty houses of the deserted hamlet of La Fare, in the upper valley of Gardon de Saint-Germain de Calberte, where they joined the *Maquis "Montaigne"* after the code-name of its leader, François Rouan, a French

International Brigade veteran. The *Montaigne Maquis* was composed of 28 Germans, three Austrians, one Luxembourger, two or three Spaniards, two Czechs, two Yugoslavs and four Frenchmen. Otto Kühne was appointed political officer under the military leadership of François Rouan. They were soon joined by Pierre Chaptal, a young Protestant pastor, of whom the Germans quipped that he had "A Bible in his hand and a revolver in his pocket".

However, he had a political lesson for them:

"Initially the Germans of the Maquis did not wish to have to fight against the French Milice. They wanted to fight against the Germans. I remember that I had some difficulty in making them understand that we did not only have Hitler's Germany as an enemy in France; that besides the German Nazis there were also French Nazis and that we could not thus make a distinction between French and Germans. And that fascism, basically, was the same disease here and there".

Their first weapons were supplied by local people, some old Mausers, souvenirs of the First World War that they had been using to hunt wild pigs. On 12 February 1944, they had to move following a firefight with a unit of 120 GMR (*Groupes mobiles de réserve*, Mobile Reserve Group), a special anti-partisan unit set up by Vichy. Shortly thereafter, they merged with a much larger and better equipped Gaullist *Maquis*, *Bir Hakeim*, led by Jean Capel, known as "Barot". He supplied them with more modern armaments in return for accepting his leadership, but along with the equipment came a dilemma.

At the national level, there were two very different ideas of "Resistance": on the one hand, the FTP, who wanted to immediately arm as many partisans as possible to allow them to carry out partisan actions and thereby reinforce other acts of resistance through armed struggle; on the other hand, the *Armée secrète* (AS), who were planning to arm the *Maquis* gradually, with the main aim of helping the Allied landing, subordinating themselves militarily to the Allied command. The British and US military commanders much preferred the AS approach and so we have the situation where the arms drops went mainly to the *attentistes* of the AS, who were not ready to use them, while the FTP, who were looking for immediate action, were starved of weapons. In order to get the weapons they needed, the Germans and their comrades of the FTP *Maquis* "*Montaigne*" had to, at least partially, accept an *attentiste* position.

As commander, Barot was in favour of waiting for an attack by the enemy and then defending themselves. The German antifascists disagreed and this resulted in some heated discussions, with many Germans arguing that they should just go their separate ways. Paul Hartmann and Martin Kalb, two of the German partisans

reported:

"Otto Kühne was completely in agreement in our desire for a quick separation from "Bir Hakeim", but argued that the moment did not seem right: the situation was particularly dangerous, and it seemed wrong that the group of German veterans from Spain should dissociate themselves from their comrades. If the commander and his group of young Frenchmen were victims of the large scale attack by the occupation forces, the German comrades of the Maquis would appear to be traitors in the eyes of the local population if they had left".

René Nicolas, one of the four Frenchmen in the FTP group, continued:

"It must be said that 'Bir Hakeim' and the 'Montaigne brigade' had different conceptions of tactics. For us it was guerrilla action: attack and disappear. They were looking for the hard blow: to provoke and wait. But we were not in a position to wait, lacking the necessary weapons to "receive" two thousand men".

Max Dankner added:

"Our criticisms focused mainly on their way of fighting spontaneously, unthinkingly, and without any preparation, which placed us in very worrying situations each time and made us run the risk of unnecessary losses. We did not appreciate fighting only on the defensive, with no other goal than to ensure our own protection. On the contrary, we would have liked to harass the German units and cut off their lines and means of communication, which was, in our view, the main task of partisans".

Moreover, at the same time, and quite independently, the political leadership of the *Armée secrète* in the Cévennes were coming to increasingly disapprove of the behaviour of Barot which, in their eyes, amounted to needless provocation.

On 7 April, some of the *Bir Hakeim Maquis* ambushed a German military vehicle that was leaving their area and killed two *Feldgendarmes* and took two more prisoner, Two companies of *Ost-Legion* Armenians and a company of GMR came to the rescue but were easily beaten off. This provoked the local German commander in Mende to organise the massive raid that the German antifascists feared.

Barot and the majority of *Bir Hakeim*, reinforced by a dozen *Maquis Montaigne*, of whom seven were German and one Austrian, then set off on a provisioning raid, leaving 120 of his men and twenty-odd Germans to defend the base. On 12 April, the *Bir Hakeim* base was attacked by 2000 soldiers of the 9th Panzer division, while at the same time *Maquis Montaigne*, which was camped a short way off suffered an assault by a German motorised column 500 strong. The defenders succeeded in beating off the Germans, but the *Bir Hakeim* base was destroyed.

Otto Kühne decided that it would be suicidal to stay with *Bir Hakeim* any longer and they moved off and joined up with a group of Spanish *guerrilleros*, operating in the Cévennes. The main body of *Bir Hakeim* returned on 27 May and set up a new camp at La Borie-La Parade. However, this was attacked by a large force of German troops, who managed to surround the village without being seen. In the ensuing battle, most of *Bir Hakeim* were killed, including Barot, who was one of the first to die. Sixty-one *maquisards* were killed in total, including four Germans and an Austrian, only three of the German antifascists escaped. In this they were helped by some of the Armenian *Ost-Legionnaires* who saw them and simply looked the other way, a portent of things to come. Some of the French partisans surrendered having been promised to be treated as prisoners of war, but they were tortured and shot. The next day, 27 bodies were found by a shepherd in an open grave nearby.

The foreign partisans killed were: the Germans Max Frank, Anton Lindner, Heinz Johann and Fred Bucher, alongside an Austrian Karl Trenker, a Yugoslav called Misko and Joseph Skopa, who was Czech, as well as sixteen Spaniards whose names we do not know. A few managed to escape and rejoin the *Maquis Montaigne*: Max Dankner, André John and Karl Klausung, the Czech Paul Skovoda and two Frenchmen, René Nicolas and Jean René.

On 5 June, they received a request for help from the resistance group in the village of Collet-de-Dèze. A group of SS had come to the village to arrest the Mayor, a baker who had helped provision the *Maquis Montaigne*. He had fled and the SS threatened to return and burn the village if he was not handed over. The villagers, armed with their hunting rifles and reinforced by the German antifascists managed eventually to repel the SS raid.

The Normandy landings took place on the 6 June and thereafter the German occupation troops and their French collaborators avoided crossing the Cévennes. The German anti-fascists, joined by some deserters from the *Wehrmacht* and Armenian mutineers from the *Ost-Legion*, became Company 104 of the FFI, under the command of Martin Kalb.

Martin Kalb tells us:

"Afterwards we recruited a number of former members of the *Wehrmacht* who had deserted because they did not want to risk their skin for the Generals and become accomplices in their crimes".



Standing: Emil Franchet (KPD), Karl Penen (Wehrmacht deserter), Albert Rucktächel (KPD), Hans Reichel (KPD), Max Danker (KPD), Kneeling: Hans Scheifele (KPÖ), Unknown Austrian deserter

We have already seen the attitude of some of the Armenian *Ost-Legionnaires* from the Mende garrison who turned a blind eye to escaping partisans at La Borrie. Armenian members of the FTP-MOI managed to contact dissident elements among the Armenians. After two failed attempts at mutiny and desertion, on 4 July, 154 men slipped away to the *Maquis*, with smaller groups arrivinh on the following days. On 12 July, 118 deserted to the FTP with their personal armament, six heavy machine guns and two mortars.

On 23 August, several companies of FFI, including the Germans of 104 Company, managed to sneak into Nîmes in a freight train and seized the town from the defending *Wehrmacht* forces. On 4 September, 104 Company took part in the ceremony to mark the liberation of Nîmes, with Norbert Beisäcker carrying the French Flag. Otto Kühne did not take part in the battle for Nîmes. By then, he had made contact with the FTP-MOI leadership and was given military responsibility of the FTP-MOI in the Lozère, the Gard and the Ardèche. In June 1944, he was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel in the FFI with more than 2,000 FTP fighters under his command, including many of the Armenian deserters.¹²

¹² Brès, Éveline & Yvan, 1987, *Un maquis d'antifascistes allemands en France (1942-1944)*, Montpellier: les Presses du Languedoc;
Dankner, Max, « Das Massaker von La Parade » in Schaul Dora (ed.), 1973, *Résistance-Erinnerungen deutscher Antifaschisten*, Berlin: Dietz, pp. 195-106.



104 Company, Nîmes, Liberation Day parade, Martin Kalb, front row left,

Chapter 6 - A Historiographical Battlefield

The historiography of the French resistance has always been a battleground. All nation states have their foundation myths and, just as the United Kingdom has the mythology of the "Blitz" and the "Dunkirk Spirit", so the post-war French republics have had "*La Résistance*". The role of such foundation myths is to reinforce nationalism and promote loyalty to the state, so foreign fighters are always a problem, doubly so when one is considering the so-called "traitors" of the enemy nation.

Of course, if the German volunteers who fought in France are a problem for French historiography, then they are doubly difficult for a nationalist reading of German history. Add the fact that a large number of these antifascists were of Jewish heritage while practically all of them were either communists or anarchists and one can see why it has been easier to ignore them or, at the very least, deny their importance.

There was a real possibility that the US government would consider that the Vichy regime under Pétain had been the legal government and, given that Vichy France had been an ally of Nazi Germany, the USA would consider itself entitled to administer France via an "Allied Military Government for Occupied Territories" (AMGOT), the form of military rule administered by Allied forces during and after World War II within European territories they occupied.¹ This was known to be President Roosevelt's preferred option.²

Any possibility of this was prevented by the uprising in Paris as part of the *Insurrection nationale* and the arrival in Paris of the French 2nd Armoured Division (*2e Division Blindée, 2e DB*), commanded by General Philippe Leclerc. Nevertheless, it was of great importance for the legitimacy of the new Republic that Charles de Gaulle's words became carved in stone: "Paris - liberated by itself, liberated by its people, with the support of the armies of France, with the backing of the whole of France, of the true France, of eternal France". Foreign antifascists do not sit well in such a narrative. This also presented a problem for the French Communist Party.

The PCF had become part of the nationalist coalition, while their fighters had been the most combative sections of the resistance. The Gaullists offered to the PCF leadership the role of junior partner in the post-war consensus with Charles Tillon, overall leader of the FTP, as Minister of Aviation. In return, the communist party bought in to the nationalist narrative and downplayed the role of the FTP-MOI for short-lived political advantage. Rapprochement with the Gaullists lasted only until 1947, when Cold War pressures and the Marshall Plan forced a break. Thereafter, the

¹ Huddle, F P, 1943, *Military Government of Occupied Territory*. Editorial Research Reports 1943 (Vol. II), Washington, DC: CQ Press.

² Robertson, Charles, 2011, *When Roosevelt Planned to Govern France*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

PCF wanted it both ways: to be part of the French national project, which required acceptance of de Gaulle's assertion that "France Liberated itself", as well as claiming credit for any foreign fighters involved. Thus, for example, Florimond Bonte, Editor of *L'Humanité* and author of *Les antifascistes allemands dans la Résistance française* (1969), claims that Thomas Helmut fought in the International Brigades when, in fact, he left the KPD in 1935 to join the German Anarcho-Syndicalists (DAS), then went to Barcelona in 1936 where he joined the CNT and fought in the Durrutti Column and sided with the anarchists and the POUM in May 1937.³

One attempt to undermine the FTP-MOI was Serge Mosco's 1985 film, *Des Terroristes à la Retraite*. Using interviews with survivors of the Paris FTP-MOI, the film implied that, in 1943, the clandestine leadership of the FTP sent the immigrant fighters of the FTP-MOI into the most dangerous operations, such as attacks on German patrols, and then abandoned them. Interviews with surviving veterans of the Jewish resistance indicate that they realised they had nothing to lose and desperately wanted revenge for their murdered families and friends. They operated with relative autonomy from the PCF and most seemed to have joined the FTP-MOI because it gave them the opportunity to kill their enemies. An example of this is Herbert Herz, who came from a Zionist background and became an active Zionist after the war, but who joined the FTP-MOI in Grenoble because it was the only organisation that gave him the immediate opportunity to kill his enemies.⁴

As one of the Jewish FTP-MOI veterans said at the end of *Des Terroristes à la Retraite*:

"This does not disturb my sleep, because if there were still Nazis today I would kill them with pleasure, without remorse. The Nazis deported, murdered, my brother, my mother, my two sisters, my grandmother, my aunt, my uncle, my little cousin who was 3 years old. Today it is a hatred that still has not left me and never will".

The PCF leadership may have tried to claim too much credit for the actions of their immigrant fighters, but there is no evidence at all that they betrayed the Paris FTP-MOI.⁵ That, I would argue, is a scandalous calumny designed to undermine the importance of militant organisation of immigrant workers in the fight against fascism, an increasing need in today's worsening political climate.

The decision by the PCF to form the MOI was an unusually far-sighted act of political internationalism that contributed significantly to the fight against fascism. It

³ see Chapter 2, above.

⁴ see Chapter 5, above.

⁵ Courtois, Stéphane, Denis Peschanski, Adam Rayski, 1989, *Le sang de l'étranger. Les immigrés de la MOI dans la Résistance*. Fayard, Paris

is extremely rare in working class history anywhere in the world that an organisation has taken the task of organising immigrant workers so seriously. Small wonder that there has been such a concerted attempt to undermine this legacy.⁶

A very high proportion of the German and Austrian antifascist activists that we have investigated were of Jewish heritage, although the majority would have identified with the self-description of a prominent Jewish French resistance militant, Daniel Mayer: "*Je suis socialiste, puis français, enfin juif*".⁷

However, as Robert Gildea put it in his recent *Fighters in the Shadows*: "The story of Jews as heroes was soon eclipsed by that of Jews as victims of the Holocaust, which came to occupy centre stage in the representation of the Second World War". Nevertheless, the most militant and effective of the foreign volunteers in the French resistance were Jewish; they had little to lose and were, in many ways, "Dead men on Leave", to appropriate a phrase used by Eugen Leviné, murdered by forerunners of the Nazis during the 1919 German revolution when he was leader of the Munich Soviet. Yet, one of the tropes of 1950s antisemitism in Britain was the question: Why did the Jews go to the gas chambers without fighting? This has been proved completely false by the long historiographic struggle to reclaim the story of the Jewish antifascist fighters, starting from the history of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. In France, the work of David Diamant, Jacques Ravine and Annie Latour played a vital role in rescuing the struggle by resistance fighters of Jewish heritage.

But whatever their heritage, the principal contribution of these antifascist activists is to undermine the idea of a citizen's loyalty to the Nation as their primary duty. Pasteur Pierre Chaptal, who fought alongside the German antifascist *Maquis* in the Cévennes, said:

"So I said to these Germans: 'But how can you, Germans, situate yourself in relation to the German youth in uniform? How can you fight against your country?'"⁸

Their answer was given in practice, rifles in hand.

⁶ see Chapter 1

⁷ "I am a socialist, then I am French, finally I am a Jew" - Grynberg, Anne (ed.), 1985, *Les Juifs dans la Résistance et la Libération*, Paris, Scribe, p.53

⁸ Brès, Éveline & Yvan, 1991, "Des maquisards allemands dans les Cévennes", in: *Hommes et Migrations*, n°1148, p.33

Some Concluding Thoughts

by Merilyn Moos and Steve Cushion

Although history does not repeat itself, the present political conjuncture in the UK includes some frightening similarities with final period of the Weimar Republic. The vote for the Brexit Party and its predecessor, UKIP, suggests a level of disenchantment with the two major political parties, which resembles the growing disenchantment and disillusionment with Weimar from both left and right.

The extreme right talked of a political crisis and criticized the judiciary for its political involvement. The use of the expression "Traitors" as a term of abuse was used indiscriminately while nationalism and racism took an ever greater hold. The Brexit vote should not simply be reduced to xenophobia and racism but, nevertheless, does suggest an increasing cultural and political desire for a national homogeneity. The influence of anti-immigrant sentiment in producing the result of the referendum cannot be ignored.

On the left, Weimar was seen as having failed in part because a conservative leadership undermined Weimar's democratic processes. The *Reichstag* intermittently ceased to carry out its legislative function. The most infamous illustration of this occurred in 1930 when Hindenburg, the President, appointed a cabinet accountable only to himself and in July authorised Chancellor Brüning to dissolve the *Reichstag* and rule by decree. In November 1932, Hindenburg deposed Brüning, a member of the German Centre Party and appointed von Papen, from the right wing Catholic Centre Party, as Chancellor. Von Papen, with Hindenburg's agreement, then appointed Hitler as Chancellor in January 1933.

Although Britain has not yet experienced anything like the hyper-inflation in Germany of 1923, followed by fiscal restraint to restore credibility, nor suffered the subsequent mass unemployment which increasingly encouraged the idea of a strong leader to restore Germany's economic strength, Britain is experiencing an ever more divided society where the employment figures disguise the real level of precarious employment. Moreover, inequality is increasing. Meanwhile the UK's exit from Europe is undermining the pound which, in turn, is likely to lead to inflationary pressures.

There was a growing acceptance of eugenics before the Nazis took power. Although such ideas have been discredited, the growing legitimacy of a foetus's right to life, for example, indicate a right-wing shift in attitudes to moral issues, especially when applied to women, which remind us of the abhorrent eugenicist practices under

the Nazis.

There are of course differences though these may not be as permanent as we might like. One crucial difference is that the UK has not experienced anything like the failed revolutions of 1918/19 in Bavaria and Berlin, nor the consequent impetus to extreme-right counter-revolutionary violence.

Antisemitism was not much evident in German society outside the ultra-right up till 1933; it was much more prevalent in France and Poland. Arguably, Islamophobia is much more pervasive in the UK today than was antisemitism in Germany during the Weimar Republic. Meanwhile, the pro-business wing of the Labour Party has done all it could to undermine the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, including the use of wildly exaggerated and generally unsubstantiated claims of antisemitism. They are playing with fire.

Crucially, there is presently no equivalent to the Nazi storm troopers without whom Nazism would not have triumphed. There are no serious fascist street gangs on British streets, beating up and killing left wing activists, which was one key characteristic of Nazism, though not of all forms of fascism. While there have been a small number of deplorable incidents of people being killed and beaten up by the ultra-right, Britain is not facing civil war on its streets. And yet, that is in part because of the weakness of the left, the supine attitude of most of the trade union bureaucracy and the lack of a fightback against the government's austerity offensive from the rank and file. Although the SPD and the KPD were fatally split, at least both were mass organisations, rooted to varying degrees in the German working class. This is not the case for the Labour Party, while the British Communist Party now hardly exists. So there is less need for the ultra-right to gang up on antifascists. The unprecedented attack on Steve Hedley, Deputy General Secretary of the RMT (the Railway and Maritime Trade Union), a senior official in one of the few trade unions still actively fighting to defend its members' wages, jobs and conditions, by a gang of hooligans after an extreme right-wing rally at which the right outnumbered the left-wing counter demonstration by five to one, stands as a warning to us.

We make these comparisons not to be alarmist, but to sound a warning of the possible dangers of the current confused political situation in Britain. Meanwhile in Europe, the far right is also on the rise. For example, the *Alternative für Deutschland*, (AfD) is the largest opposition party in the German Federal Parliament. The Polish and Hungarian governments are not only pursuing aggressively anti-immigrant policies, they are also intent in downplaying Polish and Hungarian involvement in the Holocaust. Denying the crimes of the past is one way to prepare for the crimes of the future.

Now is an opportune moment to look again at what went wrong in the 1930s. We shall make our own mistakes, but at least let us not repeat the errors of the past. But above all let us be inspired by the courage and determination of the German Anti-Nazis. The most important lesson we can learn from the history of their struggles is that resistance is always possible, even under the most grim of circumstances.

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