

Lessons on opposition to the nazi regime



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Adolf-Hitler government was very popular with nearly all Germans. Many Germans actually believed that Hitler was an ideal or fine-leader, and they genuinely supported him. However, due to the execution and imprisonment of people without trial by the security service (SD) and the secret state police (Gestapo), a majority opted not to jeopardize their lives through speaking out. Although the SD and the Gestapo suppressed the open criticisms of the Nazi-regime, there existed some German resistance to the regimentation of the society and the Nazi-state which ensued through the Gleichschaltung- a coordination process that involved the alignment of institutions and individuals with Nazi goals. The use of propaganda combined with terror clearly shows why there was very little opposition.

Basically, there are several lessons that can be learnt on Nazism by studying the oppositions to the Nazi-regime. In essence, oppositions to the Nazi-regime ranged from the non compliance with the Nazi regulations to the witnessed efforts geared towards assassinating Hitler[1]. Amongst the

earliest oppositions and resistances to the regime were the political oppositions that were ideally organized by the leftist parties including the Germany Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party as well as the industrial workers unions (Hill 1981, 369-399). All these oppositions proved very ineffectual within Germany since sipo (the security police) compressed the existing leftist political organizations forcefully. Nevertheless, resistance and opposition against the Nazi-regime emerged from various large groups as discussed below.

2-1: Social Democratic opposition

Prior to 1933, the Social-Democratic-Party (SPD) was supported by five million voters and members who were primarily located in the working class areas. The SPD organized for anti-Nazi demonstration when Hitler gained power and they equally fearlessly voted against the law that gave Hitler the unlimited constitutional power- the Enabling Act. After the SPD funds were seized in May 1933, the party was disbanded forcefully with all legal opposition avenues closed off and the party leadership fled into exile (Peukert and Deveson 1989, 167). A very refined underground organization that resisted the Nazi-regime was quickly established by the SPD and it consisted of the newspapers, party activists along with the exiled leadership. Still, the leaders of the renowned resistance group dubbed as the Red Shock Troop became arrested and imprisoned in the concentration camps by the Nazi secret-police (Gestapo) in December 1933[2].

The Berlin's SPD regional committee still undertook various anti-Nazi-regime resistance activities between the years 1934 and 1937. The Gestapo arrested the SPD committee leaders in 1935 and by the year end 1938, the

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secret police successfully continued to find and arrest the underground SPD resistance groups. As a result, the exiled SPD leadership concluded that the underground resistance activities were too dangerous and it finally ended the making of the anti-Nazi newspapers and pamphlets. Therefore, the SPD opposition to the Nazi-regime was weak since from 1939, most Germans including the Social Democrats reluctantly supported the Nazi-regime and accepted it as a reality of life[3](O'Neill 1981, 368). Generally, the SDP accepted that there were absolutely no amicable ways of overthrowing a repressive and powerful totalitarian regime that enjoyed the support of most people and a burly police force by merely undertaking the subversive propaganda. The SPD leadership thereafter concluded that the strong Nazi-regime could possibly be overthrown by the Germany army coup.

After the SPD had failed, a petite fringe group called New Beginning became engaged in the resistance activities. The group secretly met in private flats and houses to discuss the German's politics future direction and concluded that a left wing alliance comprising of communists and social democrats was the best way to combat Nazism. The SPD leadership utterly dismissed the idea since they believed that the social democrats desired for an elected government that was based on free and fair election and this was irreconcilable with the communists' desires for proletariat dictatorship[4] (Rothfels 2007, 11). A wave of arrest and imprisonment made by the Gestapo decimated the New Beginning.

2-2: Communist resistance groups

The communist party and the various groups associated with it continued to lead underground opposition against the Nazi-regime and for the

communists who totally opposed Nazism, amass of dangers including death during the struggle were eminent[5].

Attack on the communist party (KPD) by the Nazi

After Hitler had been appointed the Chancellor in 1933, the communists led the prime street protests against his new Nazi regime. The KPD became the first party to fully experience the vigor of the Nazi terror whereby the Nazi-regime found the best excuse to intensify its persecution of the communists after the Reichstag was burnt. The KPD activities were declared illegal after the final democratic election had been held in Nazi-Germany. According to O'Neill (1981, 362), the Nazi-regime began to destroy the KPD as a strong political-force whereby the Nazi black-shirts set about a series of brutal and daring raids on the suburb of the working class mainly found in German's major cities. During this period, propaganda materials, typewriters and duplicating machines were seized in order to demoralize the communists and dissuade them from mounting any resistance.

Opposition imposed on the Nazi-regime by the communist led to the closing-down of the pro-communist newspapers and thousand of communists being carted off to the concentration camps (Hill 1981, 369). In fact, KPD members had expected brutality from the Nazi but the anticipation level was not believed could have reached that scale. Sooner, it became clear that Hitler through his Nazi-regime had evidently inflicted major defeat on the Germany's communism. The KPD leaders who escaped arrest by the Nazi were forced to go into exile. Therefore, after 1933, the KPD was obligated to change from the largest recognized party with over 360, 000 members to an underground anti-Nazi clandestine organization[6]. The communists who

bravely retorted to engage into the Nazi-regime resistance faced lonely, fruitless struggles that were followed by inevitable knocks at the doors from members of the Gestapo, detentions in the concentration camps, and more often, execution.

During the anti-Nazi opposition, the communists engaged in an underground distribution of the anti-Nazi literatures. Communist newspapers and leaflets were circulated in the working class work place areas and in the beer halls. The Red-Flag which was deemed as the communist leading newspaper was printed and distributed extensively throughout Germany between 1933 and 1935. Much of this literature basically cracked down on the atrocious acts of terror committed by the Nazi government against the working class members[7](Peukert and Deveson 1989, 177). A part from the circulation of the leaflets and newspapers, the KPD tried to maintain an underground network but this required major organizational efforts. The key posts created within the opposing communists were filled by the paid party activists who had the support of unlawful subscriptions collected from the working class areas and factories. These communist activists had to use forged papers and false names and their main aim was to go some steps ahead of Gestapo[8]. This attested to be a difficult task because most communist activists could not evade the Gestapo for over six months.

While Hitler advanced from triumph to triumph in foreign policy amidst falling in the unemployment levels in the late 1930's, most employees became halfheartedly resigned to accept the Nazi rule as a reality of life. Large sections of working classes had totally not been enticed by the Hitler's rule but had been successfully neutralized to survive the Nazi's regime real

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danger (Peukert and Deveson 1989, 167). Whilst KPD resolute to rethink of new resistance tactics in 1939, its policies suffered severe setbacks when the Communist Soviet Union (CSU) under Stalin's leadership signed a non-belligerence deal with the Hitler's Nazi Germany[9].

The communist resistance only revived in 1941 periods after the Soviet Union invasion. During this period, quite a number of significant underground communists groups that were not officially linked with KPD but proved to be very concerned towards it embarked on resistance activities. Further, the Uhrig group that was piloted by Robert Uhrig operated in Berlin between 1941 and 1942. The group was purposely formed to defend the Soviet Union from the Nazi's aggressions. It urged workforce to engage in disruptions in order to weaken the German-community support for the conflict against Soviet -nion (Hill 1981, 371). Unfortunately, the communist resistance suffered a severe blow in Berlin area when Uhrig together with over 200 supporters were arrested by Gestapo in 1942, and about 100 people were subsequently executed. Despite that, sixty seven separate factory groups that were closely linked with Uhrig group persistently engaged in various resistance activities.

The onslaught against the KPD figures increased further after Hitler's bomb-attack in 1944. On the 18th August 1944, the KPD leader by the name Ernst-Thamann together with twenty four former communists Reichstag assistants were executed in the Bunchenwald concentration camp[10]. Even at the latter war stages, the Gestapo still hunted down the communist resistance members, arrested and executed quite a number. The communist resistance members facing denunciation by fellow citizens actually had nowhere to hide

or even run due to the Gestapo searchlights. It is ideally in the current years when the Cold War came to an end that full acclamation is being finally given to the brave heroines and heroes of the communists' opposition against Nazism (Rothfels 2007, 11). Despite all the eminent dangers, the communists' resistance never stopped inside the Nazi Germany and that was a proof to the self forfeit communists who were eager to endure in the desire to purge Germany of the Nazi tyranny.

2-3: Resistance by industrial workers

There also existed various industrial workers resistance which included sabotaging the industrial machinery, absenteeism from work, refusal to serve in Germany army and not giving the Hitler salute. The most notable attempt to overthrow the Nazi-rule was undertaken by an individual worker called Georg Elser who joined the workforce from Wurttemberg[11]. He planted a bomb in a beer hall where Hitler was to give a speech but unfortunately Hitler's plane delayed (O'Neill 1981, 367). Elser got arrested and was subsequently executed for an attempt to kill the Nazi-leader. Other resistance groups like the anti fascists workers group and the Mannheim group stabilized in Germany but finally most of their members got arrested and executed in a series of secret police raids in 1944.

2-4: Youth, church and military opposition

Despite being made compulsory for the young people to join the Hitler youth organization, not the entire Germany youths were won successfully by the Nazi-regime. In fact, there were some youths who sturdily objected the rigid discipline and indoctrination, preferring to form the nonconformist gangs and youth groups who engaged in the acts of defiance and protests against the

Nazi-regime. Edelweiss Pirates and Swing Youth were the most large youth groups witnessed in Germany throughout the Nazi-era. As the 2nd world war came to an end, most Edelweiss pirates fearlessly joined other resistance fighters particularly the communists and shielded army deserters to engage in serious acts of industrial impair ((Hill 1981, 3673). The activities revealed how the youth rebellion increasingly developed into dynamic opposition against the Hitler's Nazi-regime[12]. However, the Gestapo initiated crackdown on the youth groups and most of their leaders were openly hanged in 1944 so as to deter young natives from joining these groups.

The Nazi-regime equally saw many Catholic groups suppressed in order to insult the church via a series of demonstrated trials dubbed as the priests' trials. Although formally silent about the Jews persecution, the church significantly played its role in opposing the killing of the physically or mentally disabled individuals[13]. Individual clergymen sought after protecting and helping the Jews but a majority of the contestants faced trials and persecution. Furthermore, a group of university students also formed a resistance group called the white rose opposition group. The leaders of this group were arrested in 1963 and got executed in the same year for circulating the anti-Nazi leaflets (Schlabrendorff 2005, 7). The conservative military-diplomats and officers were not left in forming anti-Nazi revolt.

Actually Hitler's violent death forced a military officer by the name Stauffenberg to make an attempt of assassinating him on 20th July, 1944 by leaving a bomb in a briefcase close to Hitler during military briefing. When the coup d'état attempt failed, those implicated in that plot were convicted and executed in prison.

3-0: Conclusion

Hitler dealt with any opposition very efficiently. All other existing political parties got banned after Enabling Law was passed. The communists were banned following the Reichstag Fire whereas most opposition leaders were thrown into the concentration camps and executed. Freedom of speech was subsequently stopped by the Nazi-regime amidst using effective modes to spread propaganda. Further, the Hitler's Gestapo and SS amicably dealt with the opposition through using terror and intimidation while more concentration camps were built for the opponents. Indeed Germany was a police state since everything was controlled under the Nazis. It became extremely dangerous to openly and bravely oppose Hitler.