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Germany, socialism and nationalism

John M. Cox

Led by Adolf Hitler, the National Socialist, or Nazi, Party took power in Germany in January 1933, promising a "thousand-year empire." Twelve years later, Germany and most of Europe lay in ruins, German Nazism having been subdued by the armies of the Soviet Union and the Western Allies, led by the United States and Britain. But while outside forces were required to bring down Hitler's tyranny, the Nazi dictatorship was never free from domestic opposition. The Third Reich, as the Nazi government was called, found its most persistent and numerous enemies in the remnants of Germany's left-wing parties, which Hitler had ruthlessly suppressed upon taking power. Although many thousands of German workers and socialists undertook anti-Nazi resistance activity, their story has been overshadowed, in Germany and elsewhere, by an attempt on Hitler's life organized by opponents within the military elite in July 1944. This conservative military resistance is often inaccurately designated *the* German resistance. However, the resistance of Germany's socialists and communists began in the first days of the dictatorship and only ended with its defeat.

Socialist and Communist Parties Before Hitler

By 1914 the Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) (SPD) was the largest socialist party in the world, with a membership of nearly 1.1 million. Its associated trade unions grew in membership from less than a quarter million in 1893 to 2.5 million by 1913. The party's strength was reflected in its electoral successes; the SPD received 34.7 percent of the national vote in 1912, giving the socialists the largest delegation in the Reichstag, the German legislature. The SPD commanded the allegiance of most German workers, and through its numerous mass organizations – including sporting, cultural, youth, and women's clubs – the party built a thriving social and cultural milieu.

For many years the SPD contained competing factions, including a far-left wing, a steadily growing right wing, and a large "left center." The issue of support for the German military effort precipitated a split within the Social Democratic Party. On the eve of the war in July 1914, the SPD's leadership instructed the party's Reichstag delegation to vote for the war budget – a decision that was deeply unpopular among the party's rank and file.

The war greatly compounded the party's internal divisions and by 1917 open factions had appeared, competing for control of local organizations and of the party's formidable press apparatus. In April 1917 the left wing formed its own party, the Independent Social Democrats (Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) (USPD). The USPD was, however, not simply a product of dissension within the SPD leadership; it also reflected the explosive social conditions of 1917 resulting from labor protests and a deepening popular abhorrence of the war.

Shortages and austerity combined with war-weariness to produce widespread discontent, culminating in massive strikes and civil unrest in April 1917 and a general strike in January 1918. This upsurge in working-class militancy gave further impetus to the left wing of German socialism. Meanwhile, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, in October 1917, promoted the growth of communist and left-wing socialist parties and movements throughout Europe. This influence was both direct – through the efforts of the Communist International (Comintern), founded in March 1919 – and indirect, through the inspiration that the Russian Revolution initially provided to many thousands of workers and intellectuals.

Revolution broke out in Germany in November 1918, the same month World War I ended, and swept away the centuries-old Hohenzollern monarchy. When navy leaders ordered an attack on the British at the end of October, sailors in Kiel rose up in protest, and within a few days a generalized mutiny erupted. The sailors' grievances intersected with those of large sectors of German society, and sailors, soldiers, and workers quickly established revolutionary councils. Kaiser Wilhelm II fled Berlin, and then the country, and on November 9 SPD leaders Friedrich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann proclaimed a republic.

By this time the Independent Social Democrats had grown to more than 100,000 members, a figure that would increase several-fold in subsequent months. The USPD was strong in some

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of the industrial centers, most importantly Berlin, which had always been a bastion of left social democracy. The new USPD's far-left wing adopted the name "Spartacus League" in homage to the anti-Roman slave rebellion. The Sparticists, a small minority, abandoned the USPD at the end of the year, meeting on December 30 to form the Communist Party (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands) (KPD).

The SPD, now the governing party, enlisted the aid of right-wing paramilitary forces to suppress the communists and other revolutionary forces in Berlin, Munich, and elsewhere during the first months of 1919. The memory of the short-lived revolution – and of the moderating and even counterrevolutionary role of the SPD in those dramatic days – would far outlive the 1918–19 German Revolution, causing bitter recriminations on the left and, for conservatives and rightists, stoking fears of workers' revolution.

German Socialism During the Weimar Republic

The Weimar Republic was the German government and political system that originated in a February 1919 National Assembly meeting in the town of Weimar. Throughout most of its 14 years, the republic was governed by a "grand coalition" comprising the SPD and two centrist parties. The SPD's leading role in a government that was beset by severe economic problems, forged alliances with discredited business and bureaucratic elites, and sought pacification in its first months through the excesses of right-wing military forces drove large numbers of workers out of the political center and into the ranks of the socialist left in 1919. The radicalization of large sections of the industrial workforce aided the USPD first and foremost. The USPD's membership increased from approximately 300,000 to 750,000 during 1919 and continued to grow at a more modest pace for the first few months of 1920.

But the Independent Socialists would soon be overtaken by the Communists as the second-largest party in German socialism. Despite ill-conceived communist uprisings in 1921 and 1923 – each of which was met with harsh repression – the KPD established itself as a major political force throughout the Weimar years. The USPD disappeared in the early 1920s, much of its membership joining the KPD, which by the end of the decade began to rival the Social Democrats. In the midst of a generalized polarization and radicalization, the KPD's membership burgeoned from 117,000 in 1929 to approximately 360,000 by 1932. The party's strength was demonstrated in the November 1932 elections – the last election before the Nazi takeover – in which the Communists drew 16.9 percent of the overall vote and 38 percent in Berlin. By 1933 the KPD was the largest communist party in the world outside the Soviet Union.

The KPD's increasing numerical strength was accompanied, however, by its political degeneration. Under the influence of changes in the Soviet Union – where the consolidation of power by Josef Stalin and his supporters signified the abandonment of anything resembling democratic and socialist values – the KPD became in many ways an appendage of the Soviet party, which handpicked its leaders and dictated its political line. These problems were compounded by the Comintern's imposition since 1928 of a bizarre doctrine known as the "third period" theory. Under this theory, capitalism had supposedly entered a third and terminal stage by the late 1920s, and the communist parties should assume leadership of the coming revolution by attacking their "opponents" in the workers' movement, primarily the Social Democrats. Thus the KPD lost considerable time and energy in Weimar's final years denouncing and trying to outmaneuver the SPD, rather than preparing for its real enemy, the ever-growing far-right and Nazi movements.

Rise of the Nazi Party

The left was not the only political force to gain sustenance from Germany's deepening economic and political turmoil. Initially a minor grouping in the spectrum of nationalist and racist organizations, the National Socialist German Workers Party or Nazi Party (Nationalsozialistische deutsche Arbeiterpartei or NSDAP) drew German nationalists, anti-Semites, and other right-wingers under its banner during the Weimar years. Founded as the German Workers Party in early 1918, the party adopted its full name in early 1920, a few months after a 30-year-old demobilized army veteran from Austria, Adolf Hitler, found his way into its ranks.

In the early 1920s the Nazis were based in Munich, the site of their ill-fated 1923 Beerhall Putsch, which led to the deaths of a few members

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and Hitler's conviction and imprisonment. A sympathetic criminal justice system ensured that Hitler served less than one year of his five-year sentence. While in jail he composed his magnum opus, the 700-page collection of diatribes and malicious outbursts that would be published as *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle). The NSDAP languished in the political wilderness for a few more years after Hitler's release from prison, but gained greater support as well as converts at the end of the 1920s. The Nazi Party quadrupled its membership in the second half of the decade, from 25,000 to 100,000, although this was still not a large number on the landscape of German politics.

The Nazis combined radical-sounding populism with ultra-nationalism and extreme anti-communism and anti-Semitism. Their paramilitary outfits and penchant for street battles with leftists appealed to wayward youths, and they benefited from a broader upsurge in nationalist sentiment. While most of the Nazis' vote, as well as membership, came from lower-middle-class Germans, by the early 1930s they received significant support from workers as well.

The worldwide economic depression brought about the collapse of Weimar's governing coalition. The centrist parties were pushed to the sidelines by the far right and far left, whose parties made significant electoral gains in the early 1930s, and in July 1932 the Nazis gained the largest share in federal elections. Those elections registered the severe polarization of German politics, which was now embodied in the spectacle of 100 uniformed KPD deputies and 196 brownshirted Nazi deputies sitting in the Reichstag. By this point a growing number of Germany's landowning and industrial elites had come to see the Nazis, whose hooliganism and overheated rhetoric they had earlier disdained, as their best defense against the far more frightening specter of revolution from the left.

Meanwhile, the left was paralyzed. The Social Democrats, committed to legalism and a program of gradual reform, believed that the institutions of state and society would withstand the Nazi threat, while the Communists failed to recognize the extraordinary nature of the Nazi menace, seeing in Hitler simply another pawn of big business, barely distinguishable from other bourgeois politicians. Both parties issued hollow threats of more resolute action, such as a general strike, but as Weimar democracy collapsed and the Nazis moved to fill the void, there was still no unified action.

1933: Disaster for the Working-Class Movements

After going through three chancellors in less than three years, in January 1933 President Paul von Hindenburg and other ruling conservatives appointed Adolf Hitler to the post, mistakenly believing they could thereby rein in the Nazis. The traditional conservative elite would be grossly mistaken. Hitler and his movement consolidated its hold over the next year and a half.

While each of the two large working-class parties underestimated the danger, the Communists were particularly short-sighted in their disastrous refusal to unite with the Social Democrats in the hour of greatest need. The KPD tirelessly attacked the Social Democrats as "social fascists" and went so far as to label them the "major enemy," a greater menace to the working class than the true fascists. Communist leaders simultaneously preached that Hitler's gang would only last a short time, and that the Nazi government would simply exacerbate the crisis of bourgeois rule, paving the way for a KPD victory. "First the Nazis, then the Communists!" went the KPD slogan, though as it turned out most Communists would be in exile, jail, or the grave well before the year was out.

Hitler had declared in *Mein Kampf* his belief that the "elimination of the Marxist poison from our national body" should be the "very first task of a truly nationalist government," and his regime wasted little time achieving this goal. The burning of the Reichstag by a 24-year-old Dutch immigrant at the end of Hitler's first month in power provided a handy pretext for the Nazis. The manifold repressive agencies of the state and party unleashed a fearsome terror on the working-class movements; thousands of communists, including as many as 1,500 in Berlin alone, were arrested immediately. By the end of Hitler's first year tens of thousands of KPD members were under arrest, many of them subjected to that feature of Nazism that would come to define its rule throughout Europe, the concentration camp. Approximately half the KPD's 1933 membership would be subjected to Hitler's extensive, ghastly jail and camp system, and some 20,000 communists perished under the Third Reich. Among them was Ernst Thälmann,

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leader of the KPD since 1925, who would die in Buchenwald concentration camp in 1944. The Social Democratic Party also suffered greatly under this reign of terror. Thousands of its members were arrested, and the government banned the party in June 1933. The Nazis had already destroyed the SPD-led trade union movement and confiscated its funds.

Beginning of Leftist Resistance

But the socialists and communists were not simply passive victims of Nazism. From the moment of Hitler's appointment as chancellor in 1933, they energetically resisted the regime. Communist activists engaged Nazis in street battles on the day the Hitler Cabinet was announced, and in working-class districts of several cities the KPD staged public demonstrations against the new government. Working-class and socialist resistance would take many forms in subsequent years, and indeed "resistance" is still a difficult concept to define. Today, many historians and other commentators acknowledge that acts of nonconformity, passive and moral resistance, refusal to submit to the Nazis' social and political policies – in short, anything that consciously undermined the goals of the regime – should be included in any appraisal of resistance.

Communist Underground Resistance

In the first weeks and months of the dictatorship, communist resistance primarily consisted of illicit production and distribution of leaflets, newspapers, and other literature. The KPD managed to publish its main newspaper, *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag), until 1935. The party also sometimes organized public actions. Communists also held secret May Day celebrations, which helped to maintain morale and a fighting spirit. In addition, KPD members organized a charitable endeavor called Red Aid, which collected money for family members of political prisoners. The heavy hand of the state took its toll over the first two years of the regime, though, and by the end of 1935 the KPD underground had greatly reduced its activity. The Gestapo, the German secret police, successfully employed double agents within the communist underground and gathered additional information through torture, threats, and other such techniques. The entire leadership of the Berlin KPD was arrested in March 1935.

The Nazis never succeeded in completely destroying the communist resistance, however, as KPD members organized in smaller units, increasingly isolated from one another and from the party's exiled leadership. Many of the KPD's leaders – those fortunate enough to have eluded the mass arrests of 1933 – fled the country for the relative safety of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and other locales. Under the excessively strict guidance of the Soviet party, the KPD leadership sent directives to its German members as best it could, often proposing sharp reversals or shifts in policy. In 1935, for example, German communists were instructed to abandon the counterproductive hostility toward the Social Democrats they had cultivated for many years, and to seek alliances with underground socialists and other anti-fascists. This shift came a few years too late to have presented a threat to Nazism, and at any rate the new-found friendliness of KPD members toward Social Democrats was often met with understandable confusion and suspicion. Nevertheless, KPD members were able to initiate and participate in some common anti-Nazi activity with non-communists throughout the remaining years of the Nazi period.

The German communist resistance was continually buffeted by such unpredictable shifts of Soviet diplomacy and politics. For rank-and-file German communists, the August 1939 Soviet German Non-Aggression Pact (or Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, named after its respective foreign ministers) between Stalin and Hitler was especially disorienting. The two dictatorships agreed to refrain from aggression against one another and secretly divided parts of eastern and northern Europe into spheres of influence. The pact was accompanied by a trade agreement. For more than six years the KPD had energetically denounced the Hitler regime and, within their means, worked to undermine it. The August 1939 agreements implied a new, unforeseen friendship between Moscow and Berlin – or at the very least, a cessation in political and diplomatic hostility – and the KPD's subservience to Moscow placed the German communists in an untenable position.

The KPD leadership, however, heartily promoted this treaty that had so dismayed much of the party's membership. No longer was communist criticism directed at Hitler. England, France, and the United States were now the "enemies of peace," and KPD literature began speaking in vague terms about the responsibility

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of international imperialism for the world war. German communists were now instructed to laud the pact with Hitler, thereby alienating any allies they may have established among non-communist resisters. Compounding this, the KPD wasted little time renewing its tirades against the Social Democrats, this time dubbing them "agents in the pay of English and French imperialism." Communist leaders falsely believed that the non-aggression treaty would offer their members more political freedom within Germany – some even fantasized that perhaps Hitler would legalize their party. Despite Stalin's overtures – draping the Kremlin in the swastika flag to welcome Nazi diplomats, for example – there was never any possibility that Hitler would mitigate his hatred of communism, the unholy twin brother of Judaism in his fevered imagination.

Marking another reversal, the KPD resumed a more energetic resistance following Germany's June 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union, which rudely disabused Stalin of his misplaced faith in the pact with Hitler. Now almost completely cut off from their external leadership, local communist networks organized smaller and more isolated units, and in some cases collaborated with people of other political persuasions.

The relatively large Robert Uhrig network organized several hundred resisters in Berlin and had cells in several of the city's factories, including as many as 80 members in one armaments plant alone. Uhrig was a toolmaker and communist who, like many of the resisters in the network he started in 1940, had spent time in prison for his political activities in the 1930s. His network also attracted some Social Democrats as well as other youths who had never been in the orbit of the KPD. Uhrig expanded his operations substantially after the German invasion of the Soviet Union and united his groups with those of Beppo Römer, whose background was quite different from Uhrig's. A former captain in the German army, Römer had been a leader of the Nazi Party in the 1920s, but later traveled in communist circles and eventually joined a group of leftist intellectuals, which led to his arrest in 1933 and 1934 and a five-year incarceration at Dachau concentration camp.

In short, the Uhrig network bore little resemblance, in organization and in social and political composition, to the communist underground of the first years of the Third Reich, which were homogenous and tightly controlled by the party leadership. This was characteristic of the KPD-related underground in the last years of the war and dictatorship: the isolation of individual communists from their exiled leaders allowed them to develop new, more imaginative units and political tactics. At the same time, though, the war-weary, terrorized population was less receptive than ever to resisters' appeals for even more sacrifice and danger than was already the lot of the German people.

Other important communist-led resistance circles during World War II included those of Bernhard Bästlein and Franz Jacob in Hamburg, Berlin's Saefkow-Jacob group, and a group led by Wilhelm Knöchel, also in Berlin. These groups continued to produce clandestine leaflets, undermine industrial production by holding work slowdowns, and assist families of working-class prisoners, among other activities. The Saefkow-Jacob group was similar to Uhrig's network in its composition – it included large numbers of Social Democrats and other workers – and was able to establish large cells in several Berlin factories, including armaments plants, where the Saefkow-Jacob members worked to sabotage production. Wilhelm Knöchel, a member of the KPD's central committee, returned to Berlin from exile and established an underground network in 1942 that published an anti-war newspaper and distributed plastered stickers and posters in factories and working-class neighborhoods denouncing the regime. The group was broken up by the arrests and execution of Knöchel and two dozen of his comrades in 1944.

The Red Orchestra was another particularly intriguing resistance operation which organized wide-ranging political discussions, produced and distributed literature, and gathered intelligence on Nazi military activities and atrocities. This group originated in a large intellectual and political circle around Harro Schulze-Boysen, a German intelligence officer, and Arvid Harnack, who worked in the Economic Ministry. Their loose network was based principally upon personal relations, and comprised similarly well-educated, middle-class, left-leaning Germans of all ages. The Red Orchestra (a title invented by the Gestapo, but not used by the group) included a few communists, most importantly Hans and Hilde Coppi. Schulze-Boysen and Harnack had contact with the Soviet embassy during the period of the Non-Aggression Pact, but had little success in keeping this contact open after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. German

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army decoders deciphered a radio broadcast from Moscow that led them to Schulze-Boysen in August 1942, and over the next several months the police rounded up 126 resisters who were connected to the Red Orchestra – and four dozen, including the central leaders, were executed.

Intersections of Leftist and Jewish Resistance

Other KPD-related groups are harder to categorize. Berlin's Herbert Baum groups, for example, were led by a veteran of the KPD (Baum), but included an assortment of Jewish youth activists, socialists, communists, and others. Many of Baum's comrades were too young to have been members of the KPD or the SPD and felt an allegiance to socialist ideals rather than to any particular party or ideology.

Herbert Baum, who had been a leader of the KPD's youth organization before Hitler's rise to power, acted as the coordinator of this network of groups, which originated in the late 1920s and persevered until 1942. The Baum groups are notable for their large number of young Jews – Baum's groups conducted many of the same activities as other leftists: nighttime leafleting or "graffiti-actions," distribution of newspapers, gathering and conveying news from outside Germany, and so on. They also placed great importance on study groups, with members secretly gathering in groups of seven or eight at an apartment for lengthy and passionate discussions of literature, political texts, and music. These sessions buoyed the morale of the members and lent cohesion to the groups.

The Baum groups are known to history primarily for a spectacular attack they engineered in May 1942. Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels had staged an exhibition ironically titled "The Soviet Paradise," depicting the deprivations of daily life in Russia in exaggerated and lurid detail. Anti-Semitism was a prominent feature of the Soviet Paradise, which was staged in Berlin's central Lustgarten square. Herbert Baum and several of his colleagues decided to sabotage the offending exhibition, and on the evening of May 18 placed firebombs in two locations of the Soviet Paradise, damaging a portion of the show. This is among the very few semi-military actions undertaken against the Nazis within Germany, and was particularly bold given that most of the perpetrators were Jewish. The Gestapo reacted swiftly, arresting Baum and most of his comrades within a few days. More than thirty members of the Baum groups were eventually executed, and the Nazis murdered an additional 500 Jewish citizens of Berlin in reprisal.

The Baum groups are often cited as an example of "Jewish resistance," while others label them "Communist resisters." Neither categorization captures the heterogeneity and ever-changing character of the Baum groups, which evolved over the decade of their existence. But clearly the Baum groups exemplify the courageous resistance of the most threatened and oppressed segment of Hitler's Germany. Jews resisted their tormentors in large numbers and in multiple ways throughout Nazi-occupied Europe – from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Lithuanian forests, in partisan armies in Poland and the Soviet Union, by participating in Western European resistance outfits, fighting in the Spanish Civil War and in the ranks of Allied armies, and organizing uprisings in concentration and death camps – and also through their work in groups like Baum's in the heart of the Nazi empire.

Socialist Anti-Nazi Resistance in Germany and Exile

The communist-inspired resistance was supplemented by an equally substantial resistance of Social Democrats and other socialists. The non-KPD socialist underground encompassed the SPD as well as numerous small groups whose origins and politics placed them in the socialist or anti-Stalinist tradition. The Social Democrats withstood their initial losses and regrouped in order to fight the Nazi tyranny. Underground SPD groups were stronger than the KPD in many industrial areas, owing to the party's considerable support among industrial workers throughout the Weimar Republic. Socialists produced leaflets and distributed them in factories where they worked and put up posters under cover of the night in large cities like Berlin and even in Munich, the bastion of Nazism since the early 1920s.

Socialist resisters developed an intricate system of courier transport to smuggle illegal literature into the country from exile bases in Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Holland, and Denmark. Socialists disguised anti-Nazi literature with fake covers and mixed it with titles by Schiller, Goethe, and other traditional German authors. Underground activists devised elaborate methods to distribute their literature while

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avoiding arrest. A device called the jumping jack (*Knallfrosch*), for example, was used to propel leaflets from atop buildings or in rail stations. The SPD's executive committee (Sopade), based in Prague, maintained contact with the German membership, gathering reports on public opinion that provided realistic assessments to the exiled leadership, and in later years would prove useful to historians.

Resistance of Smaller Leftist Groups

The fragmentation and dispersal of the two large parties – the KPD and the SPD – gave rise to smaller leftist groups in the first months and years of the Third Reich in the 1930s. Numerous smaller groups had already split off from the communists and socialists in previous years, and new organizations emerged as well. These groups usually comprised many former members of the KPD and SPD, had youthful memberships, and created new forms and strategies to combat Nazism. Their anti-Stalinist character places them within the rubric of socialist, rather than communist, resistance.

With the exception of the SPD, the Socialist Workers Party (SAP) was the largest of the non-Stalinist left organizations throughout most of the 1930s. The SAP was strongest in Berlin, and had a membership of about 17,000 at the time of Hitler's rise to power in 1933. The SAP barely managed to survive the suppression of the left, with most members arrested, driven into exile, or discouraged from political activity. The SAP maintained a diminished presence on the domestic front, operating three regional organizations in the late 1930s. The group continued its struggle outside Germany, establishing a leadership unit in Paris, where it collaborated with other exiled anti-Nazis. Many SAP activists fought in the Spanish Civil War in the militias of the left-socialist Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista) (POUM).

The International Socialist Combat League (Internationale sozialistische Kampfbund) (ISK) combined various left-wing traditions and philosophical ideas in its distinctive character. The group, which was founded in the mid-1920s, was based in Göttingen in central Germany. The ISK anticipated the massive repression that a Nazi government would unleash, and, by dissolving itself at the beginning of the dictatorship, many of its members avoided the dragnets of 1933. The ISK reorganized into six regional outfits and for cover used such venues as vegetarian restaurants and a bread store. These fronts provided some funds for the group's production of illegal leaflets and other literature, and the ISK managed to distribute a monthly newspaper up to the end of 1937, when the organization was virtually destroyed by arrests.

A variety of even smaller socialist groups carried out anti-Nazi activities in the mid-1930s. The Socialist Front, based in Hannover, distributed hundreds of its newspapers until the summer of 1936. A wave of Gestapo arrests led to the convictions of about 250 members, effectively dismantling the group. A left-socialist group, called the Red Shock Troop, included students, workers, and others and maintained contact not only with Social Democrats and Communists but with Quakers and other opponents of the regime. The Shock Troop distributed thousands of newspapers in Berlin and collected aid for Hitler's leftist prisoners, but the organization was broken up quickly by arrests and internment. Approximately 200 of its members were sent to prisons and concentration camps in 1933; a few members kept the group's spirit alive by carrying out anti-Nazi activity until the last days of the Third Reich.

The Org: Anti-Stalinist Intellectuals and Workers

The Org was a particularly significant socialist group that originated in the left wings of the KPD as well as the SPD. Walter Loewenheim, a member of the KPD's left wing, and a few close associates founded the Org (short for its original name, the Leninist Organization) in 1929, in Berlin. A one-time leader of the Communist Party, he became disenchanted with the KPD's politics by the mid-1920s and began to take an interest in Leon Trotsky's critique of Soviet domestic and foreign policies. Loewenheim resigned from the KPD in 1927, and began recruiting such people to his own group at the end of the 1920s in Berlin, soon establishing contacts in a few other cities as well.

The Org began small, numbering about 100 members at the time of Hitler's victory in 1933, but it grew in the first months of the Nazi dictatorship to approximately 500. The Org had many members and contacts among Berlin's working-class population, and recruited several dozen trade-union leaders and functionaries. The

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group maintained a full-time staff of about twenty people that included a secretariat, archivists, and couriers. In addition, Loewenheim – or Miles, as he was known in the underground – was a skilled and charismatic organizer. The Org also cultivated an extensive network of sympathizers, who included the underground leaders of the railroad workers' union and leaders of the Religious Socialists, a group of about a hundred people based in Berlin.

In 1933 Walter Loewenheim wrote a pamphlet entitled *Neu Beginnen* (New Beginnings), a name by which the group would often be known after the war. *Neu Beginnen* was subtitled "Fascism or Socialism: A Basis for Discussion among Germany's Socialists," and it succeeded in provoking debate, creating a stir among leftists beyond the Org's periphery, as well as among exiled German socialists and communists, even inspiring some socialists to form study groups to discuss the pamphlet.

As was the case with the other sections of the left-wing and working-class German resistance, the oppressive Nazi state prevented the group from achieving anything resembling mass action. Its main task was distribution of a newspaper, *Sozialistische Aktion*, which was printed by exiled members and smuggled into Germany through a complicated courier system. The group distributed 27,000 copies of the paper in 1935, and more than 5,000 of the paper's final edition in 1938. The Org also produced and distributed anti-Nazi leaflets and raised funds to support political prisoners. And, like members of other oppositional networks, Org activists maintained their spirits by combining the personal and social with the political.

The Org eventually succumbed to a combination of state repression and internal division. Loewenheim left Germany in 1935, and many of his adherents left the group or fled the country. An opposing faction retained the name "Org" and, even after arrests claimed about one-third of its members in late 1935 and early 1936, had a brief revival in 1937. By the end of 1938, though, arrests and attrition had taken their toll, and the Org was no longer able to sustain its operations in Berlin, which had always been the group's nexus. Once captured, Org members – like many other political prisoners – attempted to carry out resistance activities in the camps and prisons. The Org maintained a network in exile – with members in Paris, Prague, London, and New York – and only formally disbanded after the fall of Nazi Germany. After World War II, many Org veterans attained prominence in academies and politics in both parts of Germany, as well as the United States.

Other Arenas of Resistance

Alongside other Germans, communists and socialists also resisted the Third Reich by sheltering Jews from the Nazis' genocidal policies. An intriguing but little-known group that called itself the Community for Peace and Construction (Gemeinschaft für Frieden und Aufbau) coalesced in 1944 through highly unusual circumstances. The resistance activities of a Berlin Jew named Werner Scharff, an electrician born in Poland in 1912, began in 1941 when he was ordered to install lighting at a deportation assembly point located in a synagogue. He obtained work with the administration of the deportation center during the initial round-ups of German Jews in order to help those targeted for transportation to the prison-like Lodz Ghetto. Scharff aided some in relatively small ways – returning property stolen by the German guards, for example – and others in much larger ways, enabling some Jews to avoid being transported eastward by recording their names as "deported" rather than "to be deported."

Scharff went into hiding in June 1943, but was soon arrested and deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto in August 1943. While in transit to Theresienstadt, Scharff learned about a non-Jewish Berliner, Hans Winkler, who helped hide and protect Jews. Scharff escaped and returned to Berlin, where he located Winkler. The two started the Gemeinschaft and rapidly attracted approximately thirty people, including Communists and Social Democrats. Some of their literature emphasized the destruction wrought upon Germany by Hitler's war, while other leaflets publicized, for example, the atrocities that the German army had visited upon Poland and other countries overrun by the Wehrmacht, the German armed forces. A wave of arrests disbanded the Gemeinschaft in October and December 1944. Although Scharff perished in the Sachsenhausen camp, most of the other Jewish members survived the war, saved by the advancing Red Army. Their trial, scheduled for April 23, 1945 – a week before Hitler's suicide – never took place, as the government and its institutions were already collapsing.

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Effects and Legacies of Resistance

The Nazis' leftist enemies never threatened to overthrow the Third Reich and had little influence on public opinion in Germany. Yet the success or failure of any form of resistance cannot be measured in an empirical, immediate sense. Seemingly humble and non-threatening actions – cultural activities and self-education, for example – thwarted the Nazi ambition to dehumanize and crush its victims. Collections for families of political prisoners and food-distribution operations could not topple Hitler or the Nazi Party, but they prevented the dictatorship from corrupting its victims morally and spiritually, another of its goals. Leaflet and graffiti actions, and the rare spectacular act, alerted some portion of the public that not everyone had submitted, and that it was possible to resist.

It is also impossible to evaluate or appreciate the significance of the leftist opposition to Hitler by only examining the years of the Third Reich, 1933–45. Despite the great losses and immense suffering of much of the memberships of the left-wing parties, they ultimately outlasted the Nazi regime. The tenacity and courage of the socialist resistance helped to preserve democratic traditions and human ideals, and contributed to the moral and political rebuilding of West Germany after the war. The legacy of anti-Nazi resistance was more complicated in East Germany, where communists transformed their earlier opposition to Hitler into a state ideology that sought to legitimize a new, if less brutal and aggressive, dictatorship. In both West and East Germany, the Cold War made it difficult to accurately assess and place in context the efforts of Hitler's leftist opponents, which were downplayed in the West while simplified and exaggerated in the East. It is now easier to appreciate the extent and significance of this resistance, which deepens our understanding of life in Nazi Germany in all its complexities.

SEE ALSO: German Revolution, 1918–1923; Germany, Resistance to Nazism; Hitler, Adolf (1889–1945) and German Nazism; Hitler, Assassination Plot of July 20, 1944; *Mein Kampf*; Reichstag Fire of 1933

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