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Manufacturing a Consensus: Nazi Propaganda and the Building of a 'National Community' (*Volksgemeinschaft*)

DAVID WELCH

The point has to be made at once that any attempt to quantify public reaction to Nazi propaganda is fraught with difficulties. Accurate measurement of the effectiveness of Nazi propaganda is weakened by the absence of public opinion surveys and the fact that, in a society that resorted so readily to coercions and terror, reported opinion did not necessarily reflect the true feelings and moods of the public, especially if these views were opposed to the regime. Nevertheless, to state that public opinion in the Third Reich ceased to exist is not strictly true. After the Nazi 'seizure of power' in 1933, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels stressed the importance of co-ordinating propaganda with other activities. In a dictatorship, propaganda must address itself to large masses of people and attempt to move them to a uniformity of opinion and action. But the Nazis also understood that propaganda is of little value in isolation. To some extent this explains why Goebbels impressed on all his staff at the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda the imperative necessity constantly to gauge public moods. Goebbels therefore regularly received (as did all the ruling élites) extraordinarily detailed reports from the Secret Police (SD reports) about the mood of the people and would frequently quote these in his diary. Hitler, too, was familiar with these reports, and his recorded determination to avoid increasing food prices at all costs for fear that this would undermine the regime's popularity suggests a political sensitivity to public opinion. To assure themselves of continued popular support was an unwavering concern of the Nazi leadership, and of Hitler and Goebbels in particular.

To this end, a number of different agencies were engaged in assessing the state of public opinion and the factors affecting public morale. The Secret Police (SD), the Gestapo, the Party, local government authorities and the judiciary all made it their business to gauge the mood and morale of the people. Their reports were based on information received from agents throughout the Reich who reported on their conversations with Party members or on conversations they had overheard. It has been estimated that by 1939 the SD alone had some 3,000 full-time officials and some 50,000 part-time agents.[1]

[1] Cf. M. Steinert, *Hitlers Krieg und die Deutschen. Stimmung und Haltung der deutschen Bevölkerung im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Düsseldorf: Econ. Verlag, 1970), 43–4.

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It would therefore be an over-simplification to think of the German public as a *tabula rasa* upon which the regime drew whatever picture it wished.[2] In any political system policy must be explained, and the public must either be convinced of the efficacy of government decisions – or at least remain indifferent to them. Nazi Germany was no exception, and as with any other political system, public opinion and propaganda remained inexorably linked. That is not to say that all major decisions taken in the Third Reich were influenced by public opinion. Such a statement is clearly absurd. Rather, decision-making, and the propaganda justifying policy, were conditioned by an awareness of how the public already felt about certain issues. Thus, the 'success' or 'failure' of propaganda was due not simply to the resources and skill of the Propaganda Ministry and its ability (or otherwise) to co-ordinate its campaigns, but also it depended on the prevailing opinions and prejudices of the German public. Too often in the past historians have been concerned only with the organisational techniques of Nazi propaganda and not with how it was received by the population, the assumption being that, simply because propaganda played such a disproportionate role in the Third Reich, by implication it *must* have been highly effective. Clearly Goebbels believed this, but the historian needs to be more sceptical. My aim is to provide a balanced picture between the different reactions of the public to propaganda in the context of the declared aims of that propaganda and the manner in which it was disseminated. By breaking down the aims of Nazi propaganda into specific themes it is possible to make an informed assessment of the differentiated reactions of the public to various leitmotivs. As a general statement it is fair to say that propaganda tended to be more effective when it was reinforcing existing values and prejudices than when it was attempting to manufacture a new value system or, indeed, when it was encountering some resistance.[3] This is an obvious point, but giving greater weight to a scheme of differentiation confirms yet again that the Nazi State was no monolith but a mosaic of conflicting authorities *and* affinities.

Recent studies have tended to confirm that National Socialist ideology was neither a hotchpotch of racial nonsense nor merely a means of securing an electoral victory prior to 1933. On the contrary, the Nazis saw their *Machtergreifung* (seizure of power) as more than simply a change of government: it represented the start of a revolution which would transform German society in accordance with their ideology. The so-called Nazi revolution was essentially a compound of three elements. First, the Nazis utilised the legal authority of the state and its machinery to legitimise their control over the civil service, policy, judiciary and armed forces. All those who were unwilling to submit to this new authority were either dismissed or liquidated. Secondly, there was the widespread use made of terror and coercion in the absence of law and order that allowed Nazi stormtroopers to seize persons and

[2] I have taken this phrase from J. Hiden and J. Farquharson, *Explaining Hitler's Germany* (London: Batsford, 1989), 52. However, I arrive at different conclusions than these authors.

[3] See I. Kershaw's excellent summary, 'How Effective was Nazi Propaganda?' (thereafter Kershaw, 'How Effective'), in D. Welch, ed., *Nazi Propaganda. The Power and the Limitations* (London: Routledge, 1983), 180–205.

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property at will. The pervasive fear of violence should not be under-estimated for it undoubtedly inhibited the forces of opposition. The menace of violence was, to some extent, counterbalanced by the positive image of Nazi society presented in the mass media on an unprecedented scale. Propaganda is thus the third element. A society that was still suffering from a deep sense of national humiliation and weakened by inflation, economic depression and mass unemployment, was perhaps not surprisingly attracted to a National Socialist revival that proclaimed that it could integrate disparate elements under the banner of national rebirth for Germany.

The 'revolutionary' aims of the Nazi regime highlight the remarkably ambitious nature of its propaganda. From the moment that the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda was established it set itself the task of re-educating the population for a new society based on National Socialist values. Although Nazism is often thought of as a temporary aberration in the history of a nation, it was in fact based upon various strands of intellectual thought that go back at least a century. This was the *völkisch* doctrine, which was essentially a product of late eighteenth-century romanticism.[4] The major themes that recur in Nazi propaganda during this period reflect the roots and antecedents of *völkisch* thought: *1*) appeal to national unity based upon the principle 'The community before the individual' (*Volksgemeinschaft*); *2*) the need for racial purity; *3*) a hatred of enemies which increasingly centred on Jews and Bolsheviks; and *4*) charismatic leadership (*Führerprinzip*). Both the original doctrine and the manner in which it was disseminated by Nazi propaganda led inexorably to the mobilisation of the German people for a future war. Once in war, these propaganda aims could then be extended in order to maintain the fighting morale of the military and the civil population.[5]

The central goal of Nazi propaganda was radically to restructure German society so that the prevailing class, religious and sectional loyalties would be replaced by a new heightened national awareness. A considerable degree of mysticism was involved in the displacement of such deeply held, yet conflicting, values by means of a 'national' or 'people's' community (*Volksgemeinschaft*). This desire for unity drew its strength from an idealised past rather than from the present. In an age of industrialisation and class conflict, man (it was argued) had to transform his feeling of alienation into one of belonging to a 'pure' community, or *Volk*. In modern times, this notion can be traced back to the *Burgfrieden*, or the myth of the 'spirit of August 1914', when the Kaiser declared that 'I recognise no parties, but only Germans'. By ending domestic political strife in the name of the *Burgfrieden* the nation was apparently united behind the banner of a fully justified war of self-

[4] For an analysis of *völkisch* thought still unsuperceded see G. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964). Cf. also J. Baird, *To Die for Germany. Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

[5] For a discussion of these issues see my contribution, 'Goebbels, Götterdammerung, and the Deutsche Wochenschauen', in K. Short and S. Dolezel, eds, *Hitler's Fall. The Newsreel Witness* (London: Routledge, 1988), 80–100.

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defence. In August 1914 it seemed that the war had created a new sense of solidarity in which class antagonisms were transcended by some entirely fictitious 'national community'. The *Burgfrieden* could not, however, survive a long war, just as the reconciliation of class tensions was dependent on a swift military victory. In reality the superficial harmony of 1914 was a far cry from the *Volksgemeinschaft* invoked by the Nazis. Nevertheless, the nationalist fervour of 1914, the spirit of a united nation ready and eager for a justifiable war, remained a potent force for the German Right throughout the interwar period and appeared to have found fruition in the 'fighting community' of 1933.

In order to manufacture a consensus where one did not previously exist, the Nazi propaganda machine would constantly urge the population to put 'the community before the individual' (*Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz*) and to place their faith in slogans like 'One People! One Reich! One Führer!'. To this end, the political function of propaganda was to co-ordinate the political will of the nation with the aims of the state – or, if this proved impossible with certain groups (for example, sections of the industrial working class and Bavarian Catholics), to establish at least passive acquiescence. Propaganda was intended to be the active force cementing the 'national community' together, and the mass media – indeed art in general – would be used to *instruct* the people about the Government's activities and why it required total support for the National Socialist State. In the years leading up to the war – partly as an antidote to the increasing use of coercion and for the subsequent loss of liberty – propaganda eulogised the achievements of the regime. The press, radio, newsreels and film documentaries concentrated on the more prominent schemes: the impact of Nazi welfare services, Strength through Joy (the Labour Front's agency for programmed leisure) and Winter Aid. Posters proclaimed the benefits of 'Socialism of the Deed', newsreels showed happy workers enjoying cruise holidays and visiting the 'people's theatre' for the first time, the radio bombarded the public's social conscience with charitable appeals, and the press stressed the value of belonging to a 'national community' and the need for self-sacrifice in the interests of the State. Cheap theatre and cinema tickets, along with cheap radio sets and the cheap 'people's car' (*Volkswagen*), were all intended to symbolise the achievements of the 'people's community'.

Propaganda presented an image of a society that had successfully manufactured a 'national community' by transcending social and class divisiveness. But was there a gap between the Nazi propaganda image and social reality? Recent works have suggested that there was, and indeed that the gap between social myth and social reality in the Third Reich grew ever wider. The argument suggests that propaganda of the 'national community' failed to break down objective class and social divisions and, more importantly, failed to destroy an awareness of these divisions.[6] Two sections in particular were singled out as 'resisting' the blandishments of 'national community' propaganda: the industrial working class and Catholics. I would like to concentrate on the relationship between the regime and the industrial working class

[6] Cf. Kershaw, 'How Effective', 189–91.

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and, by way of contrast, to look at the response from another important section of the 'community', German youth.

The basis for the system of labour relations in force when the Nazis came to power in 1933 had been established during the first years of the Weimar Republic. The right of workers to join trade unions was incorporated in the Weimar Constitution of 1919, and in the same year a new law guaranteed workers a degree of participation in the running of factories by setting up works councils made up of both employers and workers. The divisions within the trade union movement had established itself within three separate areas: the Free Trade Unions, which were the largest and were closely associated with the Social Democratic Party; the predominantly Catholic Christian Trade Unions linked with the Centre Party and influential in the predominantly Catholic industrial areas; and the smaller Hirsch–Düncker unions, which traditionally aligned themselves with the Liberals.

Determined to control the organisation of labour without compromising, the destruction of the trade unions was carried out by the Nazis in various stages. The Free Trade Unions were the first to be 'co-ordinated' (*gleichgeschaltet*) on 2 May 1933. A few days later, the Hirsch–Düncker unions 'voluntarily' co-ordinated themselves, while the Christian Trade Unions were given a temporary reprieve since the new regime was in the middle of negotiating a concordat with the Vatican. Once this had been secured at the end of June, they, too, were disbanded. Meanwhile on 6 May, Dr Robert Ley, the head of the Political Organisation of the Party, had announced the creation of the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*) which not only provided a National Socialist substitute for the trade unions but also served to neutralise the radical Nazi Factory Cells Organisation (NSBO) which had been founded to enable the movement to defeat Marxism on the shop floor. The second phase began in December 1933, when the Labour Front (DAF) was re-organised to allow blue- and white-collar sections to be replaced by so-called Reich Plant Communities. The re-organisation of industrial relations was brought about by the 'Law for the Ordering of National Labour' of 20 January 1934 and the dissolution of the still autonomous economic interest organisations. The main aim of the new law which governed labour in the Third Reich was to establish a system of labour relations based on the concept of the 'plant community' (*Betriebsgemeinschaft*), formed by the 'plant leader' (employer) and his 'retinue' (employees) with Councils of Trust replacing the former works councils. The first clause of the new law stated: 'The employer works in the factory as leader of the plant, together with employees and workers who constitute his retinue, to further the aims of the plant and for the common benefit of the nation and State.' The intention was to replace industrial conflict with trust and co-operation based on the common ethic of *Volksgemeinschaft*. To this end, the DAF assumed an increasingly powerful role in the sphere of industrial relations and social policy. The DAF had initially been financed from the confiscated funds of trade unions, and although membership was in theory voluntary, by the late 1930s the vast bulk of the work force had been forced to join under pressures from the employers and the State.

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The Nazis viewed trade unions as a vehicle of the class struggle and were determined that they should be depoliticised. By 'co-ordinating' trade unions into the Labour Front they were transforming organised labour into an organ for vocational representation that placed strengthening the national economy above self-aggrandisement. The document enshrining the principles of the Labour Front stated that: 'Within it [DAF] workers will stand side by side with employers, no longer separated into groups which serve to maintain special economic or social distinctions or interests .... The high aim of the Labour Front is to educate all Germans who are at work to support the National Socialist State and to indoctrinate them in the National Socialist mentality.'[7] Moreover, by encompassing employers as well as workers, the DAF was intended to become the 'symbol of the nation', to act, in Hitler's own words, as an 'honest broker' between the classes. It was referred to by a decree of 24 October 1934 as 'the organisation of creative Germans of brain and fist'.

In order to sell the *Volksgemeinschaft* as an ideological drawing-card where no labour policy existed, the Nazis chose to appeal to abstract emotions like pride and patriotism and to focus less on the worker and more on the enobling aspects of work itself. Slogans proclaimed that 'work enobles' (*Arbeit ardelt*) and, more grotesquely, 'labour liberates' (*Arbeit macht frei*). An idealised image of the worker was invoked in an attempt to raise the status of the worker (if not his wages) and fulfil the psychological assimilation of the 'the worker' into the life of the nation. In pursuit of this Hitler himself took the lead. The following question and answer was part of an 'ideological' catechism: 'What professions has Adolf Hitler had?' 'Adolf Hitler was a construction worker, an artist and a student.' In the numerous publicity films and posters produced by the *Propagandaamt* of the DAF to advertise the 'victory of the battle for work', Hitler was referred to as the 'first worker of the nation'. May Day was transformed from a traditional Socialist celebration of working-class solidarity into the 'National Day of Labour', a reaffirmation of the national community when employers and workers would parade side by side throughout Germany and listen to a speech from Hitler. To demonstrate further the Third Reich's esteem for its working population the press, under the rubric 'workers of the head and hand' (*Arbeiter der Stirn und der Faust*), would celebrate the 'peerage of hard jobs' (*Adel der schweren Arbeit*), where 'unfashionable' workers such as rubbish collectors would be interviewed in a positive way. The whole notion of the *Volksgemeinschaft* implied that every 'pure' German had some claim to equality, regardless of his social background or occupational position. This sometimes rested uneasily with other notions like *Leistungsgemeinschaft* (from each according to his ability) which inferred that equality of status was to extend to equality of opportunity. The DAF and the press were only too eager to extol the virtues of merit, highlighting workers who had advanced from humble beginnings. 'The worker is

[7] The agreement which was signed on 27 Nov. 1933 by Ley, Seldte (Ministry of Labour), Schmitt (Economics) and Hitler's representative for economic affairs, Keppler, can be found in J. Noakes and G. Pridham, *Nazism 1919–1945. A Documentary Reader* (thereafter Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*) (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1984), ii. 338–9.

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even more aware', a functionary of the Labour Front announced on the sixth anniversary of Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, 'that he has the opportunity to reach the highest levels in his plant commensurate with his merit.'[8]

By assimilating workers into first the 'factory community' and then the 'national community', the Labour Front was able to boast that it had successfully overcome both the alienation and the exploitation felt by many modern industrial workers and provided at the same time an opportunity for advancement based on performance and not social background. The DAF's problem, however, was that in view of the priority of concentrating the nation's resources into rearmament, strict limits were imposed on wage increases, which was the obvious way of attempting to win (or bribe) the support of the working class. Therefore inducements of a different kind were sought, and when the DAF was re-organised on 27 November 1933, two new organisations were established within its ambit: 'Beauty of Labour' (*Schönheit der Arbeit*) and 'Strength through Joy' (*Kraft durch Freude*). Both can be seen as an attempt to improve status and working conditions as a substitute for wage increases. 'Beauty of Labour' initiated a series of propaganda campaigns with slogans coined to publicise good working practices such as 'Fight against Noise', 'Good ventilation in the work place', 'Clean people in a clean plant'. These were designed to persuade employers to improve working conditions and they would be backed up by official government figures showing, for the benefit of the workers, the increased number of factory inspections and the way in which this had led to improved facilities within the work place.

Called at first 'After Work', 'Strength through Joy' was to organise the leisure time and activities of the German labour force. Intended to compensate for the loss of trade union rights, the inadequacy of wage increases and the increasing regimentation of life, 'Strength through Joy' prescribed in detail the correct methods, time and content of leisure for the one purpose of enhancing the worker's productivity. Typical was the annual efficiency competition for young apprentices. Furthermore, plants developing the most successful vocational training schemes received from Dr Ley an 'efficiency' medal. The design was a cog-wheel enclosing a swastika above a hammer with the initials DAF and, below, the words 'recognised vocational plant'.[9] Such awards were also used to encourage a sense of community spirit. The reduction of leisure to a mere auxiliary of work was the official philosophy of the Labour Front, although it preferred, of course, to concentrate on the achievements of organisations like 'Strength through Joy' in allowing ordinary workers to participate in a wide range of sporting activities and in luxury pursuits such as sea cruises and the prospect of owning one of the new 'people's cars' (*Volkswagen*). Posters urged workers to 'Save five marks a week and get your own car'. Workers

[8] Quoted in D. Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution. Class and Status in Nazi Germany* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 82.

[9] According to Nazi figures, in 1938 the Strength through Joy theatres were attended by 14 million, libraries numbered 5,260, sporting activities were attended by 22.5 million, and 10 million took advantage of State excursions. Quoted in F. Neumann, *Behemoth. The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (London: Victor Gollanz, 1942), 426, n. 43.

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responded enthusiastically and payed in millions of marks to the saving scheme to buy a Volkswagen, but they received no cars. Nevertheless, in 1940 a Party official felt confident enough to write: 'It is no exaggeration to say that for millions of Germans 'Strength through Joy' has made the world beautiful again and life worth living again . . . the idea of 'Beauty of Labour' has ensured that the factories are once more worthy of a human being. This, too, has a deeper significance. People can produce more in clean, airy and bright workplaces . . .'.[10]

These, then, are some of the measures implemented to secure the loyalty or acquiescence of the industrial working class. How did workers respond to these programmes? Tim Mason has suggested that Nazi social propaganda was an unmitigated failure among industrial workers. Ian Kershaw, in his detailed analysis of Bavaria, has persuasively argued that the 'national community' idea had little impact on changing behavioural patterns which continued to be determined by material considerations.[11] But historians like Mason and Kershaw may be giving too much weight to the claims that the Nazis themselves made about their propaganda successes. For while 'national community' propaganda did not achieve its 'revolutionary' goal of destroying class and religious loyalties, there is evidence to suggest that it did have some success (by default, in many instances) in creating a new heightened national awareness – and that this was in itself sufficient to secure for the regime a considerable degree of stability and social integration. Many sections of the community, particularly the petty bourgeoisie and those that were formerly unemployed, viewed the *Volksgemeinschaft* not necessarily in terms of a radical restructuring of society involving fundamental social change but more as an acceptable insurance policy against the alternative, Marxist-Leninism.

Reports from the *Sopade*, the Social Democrats' exile organisation, reveal a mixed response to community propaganda and the Nazis' social welfare measures. Workers were clearly aware of the many contradictions that existed. Reports show the social facilities like factory sports fields and swimming baths offered by the DAF had some impact on working-class perceptions of the regime, yet at the same time workers complained that very often they were 'compelled to build these facilities in their spare time without pay'.[12] The 'Beauty of Labour' was seen by many as simply a continuation of paternalistic German business practices and the vogue in the 1920s to increase productivity through modern 'scientific management' techniques. Similarly, for many workers, increased real wages could only be earned through large amounts of overtime. *Sopade* reported that this had an impact on productivity and on morale which in turn led to rising absenteeism and sickness

[10] G. Starcke, *Die Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (Berlin, 1940), 124, quoted in Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, 350.

[11] See T. W. Mason, *Arbeitklasse und Volksgemeinschaft* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1975); *idem, Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1977); *idem*, 'Labour in the Third Reich', *Past and Present*, Vol. 33 (1966), 112–41; *idem*, 'The Workers' Opposition in Nazi Germany', *History Workshop Journal*, No. 11 (Spring 1981), 120–37. Cf. with Kershaw's work on Bavaria, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent. Bavaria 1933–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

[12] *Deutschland – Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschland* 1934–1940 (thereafter *Sopade–Berichte*), 7 vols (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1980), Vol. 5 (Feb. 1938), 175.

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rates.[13] On the other hand, *Sopade* was acknowledging in 1939 that 'Strength through Joy' was very popular: 'It cleverly appeals to the petty bourgeois inclination of the unpolitical workers who want to participate in the pleasures of the "top people".'[14] Although few workers could afford to go on the prestigious foreign cruises to Madeira and Scandinavia, by introducing cheap package tours, 'Strength through Joy' skilfully exploited a latent consumerism and won a good measure of approval in the process. Similarly, reports suggested that the decision to build a 'people's car' and the setting up of the Volkswagen saving scheme met with an enthusiastic response and had the dual advantage of overcoming the problem of restricted consumerism, first, by removing money that might otherwise be spent on goods that could not be supplied, and secondly, by achieving a clever diversionary tactic in the sphere of domestic politics: 'This car psychosis, which has been cleverly induced by the Propaganda Ministry, keeps the masses from becoming preoccupied with a depressing situation.'[15]

For many workers, then, 'national community' propaganda represented a cosmetic exercise. While perhaps recognising the cynical intentions behind the propaganda, workers were none the less prepared to take advantage of the various schemes and benefits and, moreover, to give the regime some credit for introducing them. On the whole, the *Sopade* reports in the period leading up to the Second World War lend support to the work of the Cambridge economist, C. W. Guillebaud, who visited Germany and emphasised the significance of social welfare in the Third Reich, claiming that notions like *Volksgemeinschaft* strengthened support for the regime among the working class.[16] Guillebaud emphasised the solid economic achievements of the regime in solving the twin problems of mass unemployment and economic stagnation. In 1933 well over one-third of the working population was unemployed, a figure reduced to 74,000 by the summer of 1939, by which time there were over a million job vacancies. On coming to power in 1933, the national income had fallen by 40 per cent during the previous three years and total industrial production only slightly less. Wholesale prices had fallen by between 15 and 35 per cent, and the real incomes of those who had retained their jobs had fallen by 10 to 15 per cent. The Nazis approached the 'Battle for Work', as it was called, as a political rather than an economic problem. In order to restore confidence and give the impression that something positive was being done, priority was given to reducing the number of unemployed. The first step during the course of 1933 was a cynical bookkeeping manoeuvre which allowed the Nazis to strike nearly a million engaged in voluntary or temporary works schemes from the unemployed register. By the autumn of 1933 the real programme of government-financed work creation was started, albeit on a modest scale. Of the £200 million

[13] *Ibid.*, Vol. 6 (July 1939), 757–78.

[14] *Ibid.* (Feb. 1938), 172.

[15] *Ibid.* (Apr. 1939), 489. For students who cannot read German, a very useful source is Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, who quote extensively from *Sopade* reports.

[16] C. W. Guillebaud, *The Economic Recovery of Nazi Germany 1933–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939). Cf. also, Guillebaud, *The Social Policy of Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1941).

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spent on public works until the end of 1934, over half of this figure had been agreed by Hitler's predecessors. The increasing expenditure on armaments, together with the general recovery of the world economy, combined to bring down the number of registered unemployed to 1.7 million in August 1935. The 'Battle for Work' was won after a fashion and business confidence, as a result of Schacht's economic and fiscal measures, was gradually restored. That is not to say that such a 'victory' could not have been won more quickly and efficiently.[17] Nevertheless, the experience of the Depression had shaped the minds of a generation of workers, and the continuing provision of full employment, and the manner in which it was celebrated in the mass media, continued to offset many of the negative features of the regime. Moreover, despite Göring's attempts to impose a wage freeze in 1938, real incomes generally increased in the period leading up to the outbreak of war, although workers' experiences varied markedly between individual sectors of the economy.

Closely linked to the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was the regime's desire to mantain social conformity. By creating a new series of public rituals to celebrate important days in the Nazi calendar, 'national comrades' (*Volksgenossen*) were expected to attend parades and speeches and show their enthusiasm by hanging out flags. To integrate the people more fully into the community required positive and active devices that expressed publicly to Germans themselves, and to the outside world, the national community in being. To this end the Nazis initiated the 'Winter Help' (*Winterhilfe*) programme for collecting money, food and clothing for distressed families who had suffered as a result of mass unemployment. The reports suggest that, during the first year of the regime, *Winterhilfe* not only brought genuine relief to many, it also functioned as a means of social integration by encouraging the more affluent members of society to aid the poor on the grounds of national and racial affinity. Similarly, the *Eintopf* (one pot) meal encouraged families once a month during the winter to have only one dish for their Sunday lunch and donate what they had saved to collectors who came to the door. Propaganda posters referred to the *Eintopf* as 'the meal of sacrifice for the Reich' and urged all *Volksgenossen* to increase the size of their donations as a sign of their gratitude to the Führer. Rituals like 'Winter Help' and the 'one pot' meal were intended to represent a vivid expression of the newly created 'national community' and proof of loyalty to the regime. Increasingly, however, as unemployment ceased to be a problem and 'voluntary' donations were diverted to pay for welfare measures and the rearmament programme, these compulsory gestures of conformity and 'political reliability' met with widespread resentment to which the authorities responded

[17] For a penetrating empirical study of the relationship between capitalism and fascism see H. A. Turner, *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). An excellent account of the effects of the economic crisis on Nazi economic theory can be found in H. James, *The German Slump. Politics and Economics 1924–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). On the 'primacy of politics' approach to the Nazi economy see T. Mason, 'The Primacy of Politics – Politics and Economics in National Socialist Germany', in H. A. Turner, ed., *Nazism and the Third Reich* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 175–200. More general surveys can be found in A. Milward, *The German Economy at War* (London: Athlone Press, 1965); R. Overy, *The Nazi Economic Recovery 1932–38* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

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with tough measures. Later in the war, on the occasion of his anniversary address on 30 January 1942, Hitler referred to the collection campaigns as a 'plebiscite', adding: 'While others talk about democracy, this *is* true democracy.' On 23 December 1942, after defeat at Stalingrad, Hitler issued an order threatening execution to all those who 'enriched themselves by means of articles collected or intended for collection'.

As the war dragged on, with no apparent end in sight, the tendency of the authorities to resort to threats and coercion substantiates (to some extent) the argument put forward by historians who stress the limited effectiveness of Nazi propaganda and the collapse of any form of consensus in Germany. Historians like Mason and Kershaw are surely right when they highlight the failure of the Nazis to achieve complete social conformity. The evidence from the various public opinion-gathering agencies suggests that Germans were not automatically persuaded to put the community before their own self-interests – or at least not all the time. Equally, however, by looking for examples of grumblings about and resistance to 'national community' propaganda, it may be that historians are applying different criteria when analysing the bases of consent and resistance in the Third Reich than to other European societies of the period. During the 1930s and 1940s, such discontent can be found in all the modern industrial nations and was certainly not unique to National Socialist Germany. The obvious danger of citing examples of social dissent (as opposed to resistance) is that this may be at the expense of stressing the significance of *Volksgemeinschaft* in terms of integration and stability. As we have seen, the response of the industrial working class to the implementation of the 'national community' and the manner in which it was portrayed in the media was both varied and complex.

One section of the population which proved particularly receptive to the notion of a 'national community' was German youth. The assault on the individual, so characteristic of the regime, was directed primarily at youth, with the intention of enveloping the individual at every stage of development within a single organisation by subjecting him to a planned course of indoctrination. Addressing the Nuremberg Party rally in September 1935, Hitler proclaimed: 'What we look for from our German youth is different from what people wanted in the past. In our eyes the German youth of the future must be slim and slender, swift as the greyhound, tough as leather, and hard as Krupp steel. We must educate a new type of man so that our people is not ruined by the symptoms of degeneracy of our day . . .'.[18] To this end the teaching profession represented one of the most politically reliable sections of the population and from a very early stage was justly regarded by the NSDAP as a vanguard for its propaganda. Party control over the teaching profession was initially secured through the Führer Decree of 24 September 1935 which allowed political vetting by the Nazis of all Civil Service appointments. Teachers were also mobilised and controlled by means of their own professional association, the National Socialist Teachers' League (NSLB), which had been established as early as 1929. The NSLB provided political references for all appoint-

[18] *Völkischer Beobachter*, 15 Sept. 1935.

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ments and promotions within the teaching profession and generally attempted to maintain the political reliability of teachers through a process of ideological indoctrination. By 1937, the NSLB claimed a membership of over 95 per cent of all teachers.[19]

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler laid great stress on organisation and this included the organisation of leisure time as well. Indoctrination in schools was therefore reinforced by the 'new comradeship' of the Hitler Youth (*Hitlerjugend*) and its female counterpart, the League of German Girls (*Bund deutscher Mädel*). Writing in 1937, the historian Stephen Roberts, who had spent over a year in Germany observing the system, referred to the 'triumph of Nazi propaganda over teaching':

> Again and again in Germany, even in Catholic Bavaria and the Black Forest, I found cases of children whose Roman Catholic parents tried to keep them in the few struggling Church societies that still exist for children. In every case the children wanted to join the *Hitler Jugend*. To be outside Hitler's organisation was the worst form of punishment. The resultant worship was too distressing. Their attitude of mind is absolutely uncritical. They do not see in Hitler a statesman with good and bad points; to them he is more than a demigod . . . . It is this utter lack of any objective or critical attitude on the part of youth, even with the university students, that made me fear most for the future of Germany. They are nothing but vessels for State propaganda . . . .[20]

Such contemporary impressions were certainly encouraged by the German Government. However, the belief that the Hitler Youth had successfully mobilised all young people is clearly an exaggeration. There is considerable evidence to suggest that by the late 1930s the regimental nature of the Hitler Youth was alienating some young people who were forming independent gangs. The two most documented 'non-conformist' groups who rejected the Hitler Youth, though for different reasons, were the 'Swing Youth' (*Swing-Jugend*) and the 'Edelweiss Pirates' (*Edelweisspiraten*).

The 'Swing Youth' were certainly not anti-Fascist. They tended to be the offspring of the urban middle class with the money and status to reject *völkisch* music and listen instead to jazz and swing music which the authorities labelled as American-influenced '*Unkultur*' and later banned. The Hitler Youth Reports were concerned less with what was invariably referred to as 'negro music' but with sexual promiscuity, lack of parental discipline and general cult of 'sleaziness' that surrounded these groups. The 'Swing Youth' cultivated a somewhat élitist culture that rejected the strident nationalism of the Hitler Youth but was none the less politically indifferent to National Socialism. The Nazis for their part viewed them as a minor irritant.

The 'Edelweiss Pirates', on the other hand, represented a more serious challenge to the social conformity that the Hitler Youth attempted to instil. The first

[19] For further details of the Nazis' control of teachers and schools see R. Eilers, *Die nationalsozialistische Schulpolitik. Ein Studie zur Funktion der Erziehung im totalitären Staat*. Staat und Politik, Vol. 4 (Cologne, 1963), and W. Feiten, *Der nationalsozialistische Lehrbund. Entwicklung und Organisation* (Weinheim: Beltz, 1981).

[20] S. Roberts, *The House that Hitler Built* (London: Methuen, 1937), 208. Cf. A Heck, *A Child of Hitler: Germany in the Days when God Wore a Swastika* (Colorado: Renaissance House, 1985).

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'Edelweiss Pirates' sprang up spontaneously towards the end of the 1930s in western Germany. Consisting mainly of young people between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, individual groups were closely associated with different regions but were identifiable by a common style of dress with their own edelweiss badge and a general oppositional attitude towards what they saw as the increasingly paramilitary obligations of the Hitler Youth. However, although they rejected the authoritarian and hierarchical lifestyle of the Nazis, their nonconformist behaviour tended to be restricted to petty provocation. Fourteen- to eighteen-year-olds could hardly be expected to pose a serious political threat or, indeed, to offer a political alternative. Nevertheless, they represent a very small group of youth who rebelled against regimented leisure and who remained unimpressed by the propaganda eulogising a *Volksgemeinshaft*.[21]

For the vast mass of German youth Nazi propaganda offered comradeship and a pioneering role: the ideology of National Socialism represented the triumph of a rejuvenated Germany, liberated from outdated fallacies of bourgeois liberalism or Marxist class war. After all, it was to be this generation that would instil the Nazi *Weltanschauung* in their 'national comrades' and lay the foundations for the New Order in Europe. As Hans Schemm, the leader of the Nazis Teachers' League, put it: 'Those who have youth on their side control the future.' In a celebrated speech of 6 November 1933 Hitler declared: 'When an opponent says, "I will not come over to your side", I calmly say, "Your child belongs to us already . . . you will pass on. Your descendants, however, now stand in the new camp. In a short time they will know nothing else but this new community."'

Although, as we have seen, the growing regimentation and militarism of the youth organisations isolated some young Germans, the *Sopade* reports of the 1930s tend to concede that the opportunities for participation, the comradeship and enthusiasm, together with its anti-intellectualism, generally attracted the support of young people.[22] While some parents and teachers complained about the brutalising effects of the *Hitler Jugend* (HJ), *Sopade* acknowledged that the contempt for the intellect cultivated by the HJ was a potent drawing card to youth itself: 'The new generation has never had much use for education and reading. Now nothing is demanded of them; on the contrary, knowledge is publicly condemned.' Fired by nationalist rhetoric, Nazi education stressed the importance of 'character building' and the value of 'experience' (*Erlebnis*) to the development of the individual rather than the acquisition of 'knowledge'.[23] Slogans like 'youth must be led by youth'

[21] For a detailed account of the 'Edelweiss Pirates' see D. Peukert, *Die Edelweisspiraten Protestbewegungen jugendlicher Arbeiter im Dritten Reich* (Cologne: Bund Verlag, 1980); for a brief general discussion see *idem*, 'Youth in the Third Reich', in R. Bessel, ed., *Life in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 25–40. See also A. Klönne, *Jugend im Dritten Reich. Die Hitler-Jugend und ihre Gegner* (Dusseldorf: Diederichs, 1982).

[22] Cf. *Sopade–Berichte*, Vol. 1 (1934), 117–18; Vol. 2 (1935), 1374–6; vol. 5 (1938), 27.

[23] After 1945, British educationalists undertook a critical assessment of the Weimar education system and came to the conclusion that, due to the lack of reconstruction on democratic principles, a strong class structure remained along nineteenth-century lines. It recognised that the *Volksgemeinschaft* had tried to pull down class barriers and that efforts had been made to curb extreme academic bias in favour of 'character building'. Had it not been for the indoctrination of a perverse and unacceptable

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appealed to the desire of youth to be independent and to challenge traditional authority figures in the name of the Nazi social 'revolution'. To this end, concepts like the *Volksgemeinschaft* provided a vehicle for the ambitions of a younger generation which had grown frustrated with a discredited establishment that had failed to solve Germany's national problems. The 'battle for work' and the Nazi welfare schemes appeared to extend opportunities for social advancement which had previously been denied to large sections of the youth population. Although the six months that students were obliged to undertake in the Labour Service were in reality a means of reducing overcrowding in the universities (and providing cheap labour) it served, none the less, to heighten an awareness of the needs of the national community. Furthermore, the constant stress on achievement and competition within the youth movement (behind which lay the glorification of the heroic fighter) served to harness and channel young people's enthusiasm and project participation as a dynamic involvement. Nazi feature films, for example, depicted a German society in which class barriers were rapidly being broken down. Typical of the way in which this message was disseminated under the guise of film 'entertainment' was the apparently innocuous comedy film (*Der Stammbaum des Dr Pistorius* (*Dr Pistorius' Family Tree*, 1939). The film centres on the activities of the new German youth and the outmoded reactions of parents. A public official and his wife have to learn to accept a daughter-in-law from a craftsman's family (cobbler). The father is heard to exclaim: 'Youth today does not know what class consciousness is.' The Nazis had no qualms about criticising social rank, provided such criticism was not too divisive. *Der Stammbaum des Dr Pistorius* ends with the same parents looking out at the Hitler Youth marching in the streets to the song 'Hearts are ready, fists are clenched, ready for the battles ahead', their recognition coupled with a new respect for the fact that 'A new generation is coming – it is different from ours . . . . Youth today is marching, it is stronger than we are.' In this sense, youth gave a lead to the rest of the nation. *Sopade* reported: 'The young people follow the instructions of the HJ and demand from their parents that they become good Nazis, that they give up Marxism, reactionism, and contact with Jews. It is the young men who bring home enthusiasm for the Nazis. Old men no longer make any impression . . . the secret of National Socialism is the secret of its youth.'[24]

To the question 'did Nazi social propaganda successfully displace traditional political and religious loyalties by means of a "national" or "people's" community', the answer must be that it 'failed' ultimately to achieve this objective. But the 'success' or 'failure' of the *Volksgemeinschaft* should not necessarily be seen in terms of its ability, or otherwise, to destroy old loyalties. On a more limited basis, it was enough to suspend such allegiances with the ethos of a Nazi *Weltanschauung* that urged the population to put the 'community before the individual'. That is not to

ideology (and for the establishment of a new arrogant élite) the *principles* of the Nazi social revolution would have found favour with British educational reformers. See my contribution, 'Priming the Pump of German Democracy: "Re-education" Policy in Germany after the Second World War', in I. Turner, ed., *Reconstruction in Post-War Germany* (Oxford: Berg and St Martin's Press, 1989), 215–39.

[24] *Sopade–Berichte*, Vol. 1 (June 1934), 117.

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say that 'national community' propaganda sustained a heightened commitment to such a radical concept. The outbreak of war did eventually produce a decline in the standing of the Party (although not Hitler), but German society did not fragment or disintegrate. Schemes like 'Strength through Joy', 'Winter Help' and the 'one pot' meal could not be maintained indefinitely without resentment setting in. Equally, the *Volksgemeinschaft* did not bring an end to people's grievances; they continued throughout the twelve years of the Third Reich, many of them the result of cleavages that existed *before* 1933. However, the implementation of a 'people's community' was widely seen in positive terms that would continue to guarantee at least passive support for the regime. It may not have been recognised as a true 'people's community' in the way in which it was eulogised in the mass media, but it was apparently tolerable to wide sections of the population. In the sense that it was attempting to disseminate the idea of social and national harmony as the ideological obverse of class conflict, it can be said to have succeeded by default.[25] By turning large sections of the population into passive consumers, the Nazi technique of organisation and atomisation led to a gradual process of depoliticisation which effectively achieved the desired consent. The monopoly of organisations, whether it was the Labour Front, or Strength through Joy, or the *Hitlerjugend*, served the same purpose: compulsorily 'involve' the 'national comrades' so completely that individuals were no longer left to themselves or, ultimately, left to think for themselves. Even anti-Nazi sources such as the pre-war *Sopade* reports testify gloomily to the widespread political indifference of the population 'who have been persuaded to leave politics to the men at the top.'[26]

[25] One of the striking features to emerge from the oral history project directed by Lutz Niethammer on the experiences of the Ruhr workers was the stress on 'normality' and the manner in which even opponents of Nazism looked back favourably on 'Strength through Joy' and the planned leisure activities as positive, compensatory, features of the Nazi regime. L. Niethammer, ed., *'Die Jahre weiss man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll.' Faschismuserfahrungen im Ruhrgebeit* (Berlin: Dietz, 1986).

[26] *Sopade–Berichte*, Vol. 3 (1936), 683–4. Cf. *ibid.*, Vol. 5 (1938), 697–8.

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