

Introduction

The steps in the establishment of Hitler's dictatorship followed quickly on his appointment as Chancellor at the end of January 1933. He began as merely the head of a coalition government in a country riddled with political, economic, and social problems, and on top of that he immediately had to prepare for an election that was in the offing. None of this distracted his attention from ambitious plans, and only days after his appointment he was already talking to military leaders about how he wanted to end the 'cancer of democracy', to install the 'tightest authoritarian state leadership', and even to embark on the 'conquest of new living space in the east and its ruthless Germanization'.¹ At the end of February he took advantage of an arsonist's attack on the Reichstag to obtain an emergency measures act in the name of stopping an alleged Communist coup. Less than a month later, he secured the mandatory two-thirds majority in the Reichstag he needed for a constitutional change and an Enabling Law that in effect made it possible for him to become a law-giving dictator.² Although Hitler and the Nazis could not win the support of the majority of Germans in free elections, within a matter of months after his appointment as Chancellor, most citizens came to accept and then firmly to back him.

Hitler wanted to create a dictatorship, but he also wanted the support of the people. The most important thing he could do to win them over was to solve the massive unemployment problem. Although it is clear that his regime beat the Great Depression faster than any of the Western democracies, it still took time. In the short term, Hitler conveyed a sense of the strong leader who was in charge, and after the years of upheaval that marked the Weimar Republic, the German state took on an aura of 'normality' that harked back to the days prior to World War I. Weimar was identified with the lost war, humiliating peace, economic turmoil, and social chaos, and had been loved by almost no one in Germany. This attempt to establish democracy did not sink deep social roots, and it became relatively easy for people to turn away from it.

Hitler not only filled a power vacuum, but soon won patriotic acclaim for systematically tearing up the humiliating peace settlement of 1919 and for restoring, almost overnight, what many Germans felt was their 'rightful' place as the dominant power on the continent. He managed to do so almost without an army. As a reward for such accomplishments, and even though there were persistent pockets of negative opinion, rejection of Nazism, and even examples of resistance, the great majority of the German people soon became devoted to Hitler and they supported him to the bitter end in 1945.³

The new regime made no bones about using coercion in many forms against its declared enemies, but it also sought the consent and support of the people at every turn. As I try to show in the book, consent and coercion were inextricably entwined throughout the history of the Third Reich, partly because most of the coercion and terror was used against specific individuals, minorities, and social groups for whom the people had little sympathy.⁴ Coercion and terror were highly selective, and certainly did not rain down universally on the heads of the German people. Beginning in early 1933, the police and Nazi Storm Troopers started cracking heads, and new concentration camps were established, but not much more than a mini-wave of terror swept Germany. By and large, terror was not needed to force the majority or even significant minorities into line. By mid-1933, or the end of that year at the latest, power was already secured, and the brutalities and violence that are identified with the so-called Nazi 'seizure of power', began to wane.⁵ Terror itself does not adequately explain how the Third Reich came to be, nor account for its considerable staying power.⁶ As I will show, the regime continued to elicit popular support well into the war years.

The Nazis initially built on the popular mood in the country in early 1933. Most solid citizens, and not just the Nazis, were fed up with the failed Weimar experiment. They were also outraged by what they saw as evidence all around them of decadence, decay, and crime.⁷ Under the circumstances, there was an obvious political incentive for Hitler's regime to act decisively against democratic and liberal activities of all kinds, to outlaw opposition parties beginning with the Communists, and to combine that with a crackdown in the name of law and order. In March 1933 Hitler called for the 'moral purification' of the body politic. Whatever that might be taken to mean, it is clear that his personal convictions, Nazi ideology, and what he deemed to be the wishes and hopes of many people, came together in deciding where it would be politically most advantageous to begin creating what the Nazis termed a racially-based 'community of the people'.

The book begins in 1933 and traces the story to 1945, with the emphasis on what happened inside Nazi Germany. I show how and why a social consensus emerged in favour of Hitler and Nazism within months of Hitler's appointment as Chancellor. This consensus took many forms, and was fluid rather than firm, active rather than passive, differently constituted according to context and theme, and constantly in the process of being formed. I argue, however, that from 1933, consensus in favour of Hitler and increasingly also Nazism, was virtually never in doubt.

Although historians have tended to pay more attention to the first phase of the dictatorship, especially its foundation years, I trace how that system, including the new police and concentration camps, went through two additional and quite distinct phases. The first of these began with the coming of the war in 1938–9, and I argue that the war revolutionized the revolution. Nearly

everything about the dictatorship changed, with the police becoming more invasive, arbitrary, and murderous, and the system as a whole turning far more radically against its declared enemies at home and abroad. The final phase in the history of Hitler's dictatorship began as the prospects of invasion and defeat grew, so that the revolution was revolutionized once more. At the end of 1944 and into 1945, the dictatorship became more openly terroristic in an effort to stave off the inevitable. I try to show how the consensus broadly held through all three phases, what changed, and why some people began to seek a way out. As the home front also became the battlefield, for the first time, German-on-German terror became the order of the day.⁸

It is worth drawing attention to several other historians who have studied aspects of social consensus in the Third Reich, although they have adopted other perspectives and used different sources. I share some of the views expressed by Ian Kershaw and Detlev Peukert, who suggest that Hitler's own popularity provided one of the main foundations on which the regime was founded and built. Moreover, as Peukert has put it, popular acclaim for the Führer really 'articulated a certain basic consensus of the majority of the population for the system, a consensus that remained unaffected by outspoken expressions of criticisms on points of detail.'⁹ Workers were often thought immune to the appeals of Nazism, but Alf Lüdtke's recent study shows on the basis of soldiers' letters sent to their families back home, that in fact most people in the country 'readily accepted' Hitler, and they widely cheered the goals of "restoring" the grandeur of the Reich and "cleaning out" alleged "aliens" in politics and society.¹⁰ As a matter of fact, even to this day, when Germans look back they have fond memories of the dictatorship's 'accomplishments' in restoring social values, bringing back order, and instituting social harmony.¹¹

Women also were won over, and according to Ute Frevert most of them did not experience the Nazi era (even in comparison to the liberal Weimar years) as some kind of 'regression' into the dark days of discrimination. The 'relative rarity of deliberate acts of political resistance', Frevert suggests, can be taken to mean 'that women who satisfied the political, racial and social requirements—and the vast majority did—did not perceive the Third Reich as a woman's hell. Much of what it introduced was doubtless appealing, the rest one learned to accept.'¹² One well-spoken middle-class woman, wife of a prominent historian of Germany, neither of whom incidentally were Nazi Party members, stated in a recent interview how 'on the whole, everyone felt well'. She remembers how she 'wanted only to see the good' and the rest she 'simply shoved aside'. She feels even now that most Germans 'tried at the very least, even when they didn't agree one hundred per cent with the Third Reich or with National Socialism, to adapt themselves. And there were certainly eighty per cent who lived productively and positively throughout the time. . . . We also had good years. We had *wonderful* years.'¹³

The most controversial recent study of social consensus in the Third Reich, is Daniel Goldhagen's lengthy book, a popular success, but much criticized by professional historians. Unlike most historians, he emphasizes the role of long-term, and pre-Hitler 'eliminationist' antisemitism as the basic and essential element in the consensus. He claims that the murderous potential of this phobia was already there before 1933, and so tends to underestimate what changed beginning in 1933. Given this framework, he necessarily plays down Hitler's role, and concludes among other things that 'what Hitler and the Nazis actually did was to unshackle and thereby activate Germans' pre-existing, pent-up antisemitism'. What he calls the 'great success' in persecuting the Jews, resulted 'in the main' from 'the preexisting, demonological, racially based, eliminationist antisemitism of the German people, which Hitler essentially unleashed'.¹⁴

Daniel Goldhagen's study, for all of its problems brought a number of important issues up for debate and called out for investigation.¹⁵ However, I am inclined to the view that monocausal explanations of the kind he employs, do not hold up to scrutiny and that social agreement with or merely popular toleration of Hitler and the dictatorship was attained for many reasons, some of the most important of which had little or nothing to do with the persecution of the Jews.

Antisemitism was initially soft-pedalled, not only because depriving the Jews of making a living would hurt the economic recovery, but as I show in the book, also because most Germans in 1933 did not feel as strongly and as negatively about the Jews as did Hitler and the Nazis. Therefore, the first targets were not the Jews, but individuals and groups long regarded as threats to the social order (like the Communists) or to the moral universe, like criminals, 'asocials', and other 'problem cases'. As I make clear, during the first years of the new Reich, racist policies in general were formulated and implemented quite cautiously.

Thus, the Nazis did not act out of delusional or blind fanaticism in the beginning, but with their eyes wide open to the social and political realities around them. They developed their racist and repressive campaigns, by looking at German society, history, and traditions. The identification and treatment of political opponents and the persecution of social and racial outsiders illustrated the kind of populist dictatorship that developed under Hitler.

The book shows how antisemitism changed and slowly spread after 1933. Indeed, until the late 1930s, as many Jews who lived through those times have testified, antisemitism was not the primary concern of the public, most Germans were not rabidly antisemitic, and pushing out the Jews was not the top priority of the German state.¹⁶ At the start of the Third Reich, as many Jews who lived there have testified for years on end, they were not social outsiders, certainly not in comparison with pre-emancipation times, and things changed slowly for many of them.¹⁷ Jews in Germany were almost universally envied by

the Jews in central and eastern Europe, and throughout the Weimar years, and to some extent even earlier, they had more social opportunities (as judges and professors, for example) than most Jews enjoyed even in the United States. Since the legal emancipation of Germany's Jews in 1871, they had become increasingly well integrated as law-abiding citizens who adopted middle-class values of hard work, clean living, and solid family values. In the German context in which such behaviour was lauded, their way of life made it initially more difficult for the antisemitic Nazis to go after them. As the regime promulgated one discriminatory measure after the next, or turned a blind eye to radical Nazis at the grass roots, Jews were slowly transformed into social outsiders, but even that happened gradually for most of them.

I suggest that it is important to show how antisemitism spread after 1933, and what changed and why, and especially how and why citizens began collaborating in the police and Nazi Party harassment and persecution of the Jews. As we will see in the book, the public inexorably became entangled in the discriminatory side of the dictatorship, including in the persecution of the Jews, and they did so for reasons that did not always include being explicitly racist. They went to the authorities and denounced the Jews and those who did not share official antisemitism. At times they were motivated by selfish reasons, often linked to active hatred and the profit motive. One effect of the persecution was to drive many Jews from the country, while those who remained were faced with the growing hostility of the authorities and what Ulrich Herbert has called the 'escalating indifference' of their fellow citizens.¹⁸

I began research for this book by addressing one of the major questions that has been raised since 1945, when we became aware of the concentration camps, namely, 'what did they know and when did they know it?' Did the Germans know about the secret police and the camps, the persecutions, the murders, and so on, and did they go along? Germans have defended themselves by saying they were unaware of, or poorly informed about, the camps, and were surprised by the revelations at the war's end. There was close to general agreement among historians for a long time, that the Nazis deliberately and systematically hid what they were doing, so it was possible that ordinary people really did not know.

This book challenges these views. It shows that a vast array of material on the police and the camps and various discriminatory campaigns was published in the media of the day. In the 1930s the regime made sure the concentration camps were reported in the press, held them up for praise, and proudly let it be known that the men and women in the camps were confined without trial on the orders of the police. The regime boasted openly of its new system of 'police justice' by which the Secret Police (Gestapo) and the Criminal Police (Kripo) could decide for themselves what the law was, and send people to the camps at will. The Nazis celebrated the police in week-long annual festivals across the country, and

proudly chalked up their many successes in the war on crime, immorality, and pornography. Judges also got into the act. They meted out harsh justice and used the death penalty on an unprecedented scale. Far from clothing such practices in secrecy, the regime played them up in the press and lauded the modernity and superiority of the Nazi system over all others.

I make extensive use of newspapers in this book, but what about censorship? The novelist Christa Wolf indicated some years ago, that anyone in Nazi Germany who wanted to find out about the Gestapo, concentration camps, and the campaigns of discrimination and persecution, need only read the newspapers.¹⁹ Nazi Germany was in fact a modern mass media society, and for its day was in the vanguard of modernity. Germans were both highly literate and voracious readers of newspapers, and moreover Hitler's regime did everything possible to put a radio in every home, and used newsreels and movies to get across their messages.²⁰ Movie-making was soon transformed into a system-friendly industry, and it proved remarkably easy to win over journalists. Even renowned middle-class and conservative newspapers demonstrated their agreement with Hitler's appointment or asked readers to give him a chance.²¹ Thereafter, the regime guided the press mainly by holding owners, editors, and journalists politically responsible for what they published. In time more formal methods, like press conferences and directives were used. Reporters and editors colluded with Hitler by virtue of what they wrote, and reached a point where they simply chose not to follow up leads about the murder of the Jews, and numerous other atrocities.²² Even when newspapers published death notices about the victims of euthanasia, reporters apparently made no enquiries.²³

Readers of the press in dictatorships do not read less because they know it is censored.²⁴ If anything, they read more attentively because it is so important to figure out what is going on. The emphasis in the book, at any rate, is not what the Nazis wanted to keep out of the media, but what they wanted to put in, and how they crafted their stories to appeal to the minds and hearts of the German people. I surveyed a number of German newspapers, and consulted several important collections of newspaper clippings.

I try to show that media reports and press stories were an essential dimension of life and death in Hitler's dictatorship. Not only did citizens pay avid attention, but most of them 'experienced' the Gestapo, the courts, and the camps via the media.²⁵ These media representations need to be taken seriously and studied from various angles in order to bring out the theme of coercion and publicity.²⁶ Not only did the Nazis publish many 'crime and punishment' stories, but they worked out a coherent, rational, and 'scientific' police and confinement theory. They put forward the idea of the boot-camp for delinquents, and a 'lock 'em up and throw away the key' approach to repeat offenders. Preventive arrests and the use of 'work therapy' on criminals, drunks, and

layabouts, supposedly led to crime-free streets, a return to good order, and restoration of tried-and-true German values. All these matters were played up in the press.

I argue that the rationalizations the Nazis provided the German public about why new forms of coercion and new laws were needed were an integral and essential part of the discrimination and persecution. Germans were informed of the new approach to crime that overcame the scruples of 'bleeding-heart' liberals and 'weak-willed' democrats. Brutal language in the press that described anyone deemed to be 'undesirable', became a characteristic feature of the era, and 'had a considerable impact upon the majority of the population.'²⁷ I have tried to decipher the glowing self-descriptions of Nazism as founded on a new theory of 'law and order' and as practising superior 'justice' against the social background of what was really happening in society at large as well as before the courts, in the prisons and concentration camps.

What about Hitler's role? This book is not a biography of Hitler, nor does it attempt to cover the entire history of the Third Reich. However, I have been struck by how often Hitler played a hands-on and a key role in the creation and operation of the coercive apparatus of the Third Reich. Where he did not give specific orders or instructions, his ideas, hate-filled speeches, and 'wishes' inspired police, justice, and SS leaders all along the line.²⁸

Readers interested in more details of Hitler's life and role in all spheres of domestic and foreign policy can now turn to Ian Kershaw's masterful new biography, the first volume of which covers the period from 1889 to 1936. It marks an important turning point in the study of Hitler and the Third Reich. In the last chapters, Kershaw skilfully studies Hitler's interventions in domestic and foreign policies, and shows how other leaders often 'carried the ball' because Hitler's unique decision-making style left them plenty of room to do so.²⁹ When his second volume is completed, this biography will become the new standard work on Hitler.

At relevant points, I will discuss Hitler's decision-making, but the main focus of this book is on the social and public sides of the dictatorship rather than what went on behind closed doors and in secret. Hitler and those who worked closely with him in the police establishment consistently favoured police prerogatives over the regular court system. The Gestapo employed these new powers to track down all kinds of (vaguely defined) political foes, while the Kripo used them to end what was perceived as a crime wave when the Nazis came to power. Both police forces were no longer hampered by traditional legal constraints. It was easy to lock up suspects, without even a hearing before a judge, never mind a trial. Soon the Gestapo took on a mission to stop all 'political criminality', and to harass the Jews, while the Kripo obtained extraordinary powers to deal with criminality as it had been traditionally defined. In time the distinctions between political and non-political crimes grew blurred. I study these developments,

including how the courts became entangled in a murderous competition with the police, and deal with the echoes heard in the public sphere.

A sense of how Germans responded positively to various waves of persecution and even to the spirit of Nazi 'justice', is conveyed on almost every page of Professor Victor Klemperer's recently published diary.³⁰ It represents the most detailed chronicle we have of the implementation of the repression, especially the measures aimed at the Jews. Klemperer recorded one telling conversation he had in late February 1935 with his last two students, whom he said were 'completely anti-Nazi'. The fact that they persisted in studying with this Jewish professor showed they had some civil courage. However, when their discussion turned to a recent newspaper story about the trial and execution of two young aristocratic women in Berlin, the students said they found the court's verdict 'totally appropriate'. They saw no fault in the procedures of the secret trial, nor were they troubled in the least that the accused had been denied essential legal rights. Klemperer concluded sadly that 'the sense of justice is being lost everywhere in Germany, is being systematically destroyed'.³¹ In this book I examine the background of such stories, explore how coercion and consent were entwined, and finally how and why the German people backed the Nazi dictatorship.

1

Turning Away from Weimar

The years leading up to 1933 were difficult ones for Germany. The Weimar Republic's parliament was divided into more than a dozen political parties, and from the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, German Chancellors had to rely increasingly on the President's emergency powers to pass legislation.¹ At the end of 1932, when the crisis facing the country deepened and government ground to a standstill, a group of influential conservatives advised President Paul von Hindenburg that Adolf Hitler's leadership would be a way to deal with mounting social, economic, and political crisis.² Hitler was appointed on 30 January 1933. At 43 years of age, he was relatively young for the post, and beyond leading his own party since 1920, had not previously held a position of political responsibility.

Those men around the President and the social elites with whom they had contact, favoured Hitler as an interim leader, or at least saw him as a necessary evil. They no doubt believed that, lacking political experience, he would not be able to assert himself too much, and that they would retain ultimate control. In fact, men like ex-Chancellor Franz von Papen, considered that Hitler's limited background in politics, when combined with his unusual ability to connect with the masses, presented a unique opportunity. Hitler had other advantages, including a passion to revise the Peace Treaty of 1919 and to build up the military, and he was a staunch opponent of Communism, who could provide the government with the kind of popular backing it needed.³ By January 1933 even some of the more reserved big businessmen came to see wisdom in Papen's project of 'yoking the Nazis to a conservative-dominated government'.⁴ The well-connected and experienced non-Nazis with whom the President stacked Hitler's own cabinet, would supposedly ensure that he was more a figurehead than a real leader with effective ideas and a programme of his own. They badly misjudged the situation. In less than six months the Nazis undermined the parliamentary system and had begun the destruction of justice by suspending civil and legal rights, which in turn opened the way for the creation of the Gestapo (Secret State Police) and the establishment of the first concentration camps.

Signs of Crisis and Support for Hitler

Hitler was able to make the transition from rabble-rousing political speaker, into the deeply beloved Führer of the German people in a remarkably short

time. He recognized that most men and women wanted radical steps taken to deal with the wide-ranging crisis facing the country, and even if not everyone yearned for a specifically Nazi leader, most were weary of the Weimar experiment in democracy, with the endless elections, the countless demonstrations and lawlessness in the streets, the long lines before the welfare offices, and the scale of the social chaos.⁵ The German people, despising Weimar politicians who had utterly failed to reach out to them, found themselves ready to place their trust and understanding in someone who could re-connect them to what they felt were the sounder elements of German traditions. Hitler was able to scheme behind the scenes, and to manoeuvre himself into that position of trust and understanding.

There was a sense of hopelessness in the country on the eve of Hitler's appointment, and it was reflected in suicide rates for 1932 that were more than four times higher than those in Britain at the time, and nearly double what they were in the United States.⁶ There was a broad perception that the country was experiencing a breakdown of cultural and moral values. Large families were becoming a thing of the past and more women were going to work; abortions were thought to be reaching alarming proportions; and prostitution, sexual deviancy, and venereal diseases were presumed to be spreading.⁷

Women had the vote and equality in law since 1919, but once the Depression hit, the virtues of the modern 'new woman' and emancipation were questioned, especially when issues arose about abortion, working wives (the so-called double-earners), and the falling birth rate. Although historians do not agree that the 'new woman' really existed in Weimar and tend to think she was an alarming myth constructed in the mass media of the time, Cornelia Osborne, for one, shows convincingly that there were enough such people to cause anxieties among social conservatives, who worried about upholding traditional marriage, gender roles, and morality. Many contemporaries saw the young, mainly middle- and lower middle-class 'new women' as sexual anarchists out to destroy social order, and threatening nothing less than 'racial suicide' by refusing to perform what traditionalists regarded as their 'biological duty'.⁸

Women on the left of the political spectrum no doubt were appalled at the prospect of a Hitler government, but there were many others, including even politically active women, who were not at all displeased. One of them remarked in mid-1932, that the social trend was 'away from liberalism, toward obligations; away from the career woman, toward the housewife and mother'.⁹ Conservative, Catholic, and even liberal women by and large shared the point of view advocated by the Nazis, as to a 'naturally' determined sexual division of labour, and that it was important to reconstruct a 'community of the people' in which they would be involved primarily as wives and mothers, and 'not be forced to compete with men for scarce jobs and political influence'.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, therefore, women voted almost at the same rate as men for Hitler and his party,

and for its promise to restore some semblance of the 'normality' for which they longed.¹¹

The general sense of crisis was reinforced by massive unemployment, which in turn fuelled discontent in all social classes, even those not threatened directly. When Hitler came to power, six million were officially unemployed, but in addition as many as two million more were the 'hidden' unemployed, people who gave up even registering for a job. With a corrected total of up to eight million unemployed, nearly 40 per cent of Germany's blue- and white-collar workers were without work, and in addition, an estimated three million more were underemployed. In the face of these numbers, the state clawed back social welfare measures, like the unemployment insurance that was granted in July 1927 when Weimar was at the height of its 'stable' period.¹² There were three categories of state assistance for the unemployed, and the trend was for them all to decline into the lowest level, where bare survival was an issue.¹³

Political violence in the streets literally became an everyday experience in many parts of the country.¹⁴ Most of the fighting was among the paramilitary organizations associated with various political parties, and involving millions of men, but the Nazis and the Communists were the most active.¹⁵ Pitched battles broke out and innocent passers-by were killed when caught in the cross fire, as happened when sixteen people were killed on 'Bloody Sunday' (17 July 1932) in Hamburg-Altona: two more died later. The police intervened to break up the fighting, but as often happened, they came down in favour of the Nazis. Although most fatalities were non-Nazis, apparently shot by the police and security forces, such events were given an anti-Red interpretation in official reports and in the press with claims that Communist snipers were on the roofs.¹⁶

The anti-Communist tendencies of the German police were well known elsewhere. For example, eight days before Hitler was appointed, Berlin police shot several demonstrators and arrested nearly seventy more in the name of stopping a Communist demonstration against the Nazis.¹⁷

What made the general situation grave in the eyes of many middle-class Germans, was that support for the Communist Party (KPD) grew once the Depression hit. Indeed, in all three of the elections before Hitler's appointment, the KPD invariably came third, and its vote kept on rising.¹⁸ The more moderate Social Democrats (SPD) usually came second, so that from a liberal or conservative perspective, a majority of people were voting for Marxist parties. Conservative newspapers asked: 'Who could effectively counter the Marxist threat?'¹⁹ Alongside other factors, the growing sympathy in the extensive right-wing press helped Hitler into power.²⁰

In the last elections before 1933, the Nazi vote also rose, but it dropped slightly in November 1932. However, there was no viable right-wing alternative to Hitler, with most middle-class parties already gone, so that for many property owners in Germany, the relentless rise of unemployment and the KPD would

most likely have soon led them back to Hitler, even if he had not been appointed Chancellor in January 1933.²¹ By the time Hitler became Chancellor, his support was far from unravelling, because 'the Nazis were the only acceptable party for the non-Marxist and non-Catholic voters who constituted the majority of German voters'.²² There was no obvious alternative by 1933, and soon many Catholic voters would come into the fold.

Even at the time of Hitler's appointment, the Nazis were not doing as poorly in the elections as some historians have suggested. In the last two elections before 1933 they were denied a majority, but still won more votes than any party had received in any federal election since 1920. Hitler even challenged Hindenburg in the presidential elections of 1932, and though he did not win, this young 'corporal' took 37 per cent of the vote in the second round against the distinguished old Field Marshal's 53 per cent. The anti-democratic mood in the country can be gathered from the fact that the other candidate in the run-off presidential election was the Communist Ernst Thälmann, who won 10 per cent. The last pre-dictatorship elections showed that a majority of voters (men and women) supported the anti-Republican parties (namely, the Nazis, the Communists, and the Nationalists), all of whom wanted to get rid of parliamentary democracy.²³

Hitler's appointment as Chancellor on 30 January 1933 was followed next day by the dissolution of the Reichstag. His slogan for the elections called for 5 March, 'Attack on Marxism', was bound to appeal to solid citizens and property owners. Hermann Göring, one of the few Nazis in Hitler's Cabinet, took immediate steps to introduce emergency police measures.²⁴ Over the next weeks the Nazis did not need to use the kind of massive violence associated with modern takeovers like the Russian Revolution. There was little or no organized opposition, and historian Golo Mann said of those times that 'it was the feeling that Hitler was historically right which made a large part of the nation ignore the horrors of the Nazi takeover. . . . People were ready for it'.²⁵ To the extent that terror was used, it was selective, and it was initially aimed mainly at Communists and other (loosely defined) opposition individuals who were portrayed as the 'enemies of the people'.

Hitler certainly was interested in more than just solving a momentary crisis, even one he could drag out as a continuing Communist plot. He wanted to formalize his position as law-giving dictator, and to outlaw all political parties but his own. During the stormy days of February and March 1933, a federal election campaign was under way in which the Nazis pulled out all the stops, trashed their opponents without mercy, and won tremendous support. For all that, in the elections of 11 March, Hitler was denied an outright majority. We should not exaggerate the significance of that fact, as he got the vote of just over seventeen million people (or 43.9 per cent of the votes cast). The outcome gave the Nazis a slim majority of seats in the Reichstag when combined with those of their

Nationalist partners. Hitler proved a master of the situation, and just as importantly, over the next months, the majority of Germans quickly made clear that they supported him.

Hitler convened the newly elected Reichstag in the famous Potsdam Church on 21 March, the first day of Spring, to signal a new beginning. On 'Potsdam Day', several innovations were introduced on the initiative of the Justice Ministry to show that the courts and judges would play their part. The vain hope of some of the 'legalists' was that if new Special Courts and a new decree against 'malicious attacks' on the government, could protect the regime from any criticism, and judges would mete out swift justice, then the dictatorship would return to the rule of law. Hitler took these concessions, but wanted much more. He needed two-thirds of the Reichstag to vote for a constitutional change that would enable him to pass laws through the Cabinet, and not just through the Reichstag. Hitler got this constitutional change on 23 March, when the deputies—except for the Socialists (and Communists who were not allowed to take their seats)—obliged him by voting for the so-called Enabling Law. Prior to the vote, Hitler gave a government declaration in which he signalled that he had a social and political agenda that went beyond suppressing Communism, getting people back to work, and restoring Germany's position in Europe. His stated goals now included creating a 'real community of the people' and he alluded to the need for 'the moral purification of the body politic'.²⁶

The combination of Reichstag Fire Decree and Enabling Act gave the Nazi Revolution a veneer of legality and made it easier for citizens to accept the dictatorship. Hitler could claim to be the lawful head of government (by mid-1934 he was also the head of state), and anyone who wanted to resist was in the difficult position of having to act illegally. Soon even verbal criticism of the government was criminalized.²⁷

Hitler's fate initially was tied to dealing with Communism and unemployment. The first part was easy, given the kinds of forces the Nazis could mobilize, the extent of popular anti-Communism, and the small numbers of militant Communists. But curing Germany's massive economic problems represented a formidable challenge. The 'Battle for Jobs' in time showed victories, and these were played up in the media for all they were worth. The 'war' on unemployment was hard-won, but even so, by 1936 reached a point where labour shortages were reported. The return to full employment was not the overnight 'miracle' some Germans remembered who lived through these times, but was more like a knock-down dragged-out struggle.²⁸

Jobs and incomes bounced back and hope was restored, especially among the young men and women, who were also offered shiny state-sponsored programmes (like 'Landhelp', 'Landyear', and 'Labour Service'), that provided work experience in the countryside. Such projects were also designed to cement the 'community of the people' by bringing together youths with diverse

backgrounds. The reintroduction of conscription in 1935, drew off large numbers of working-age men from the labour market, and so helped reduce the unemployment rolls.²⁹ Other government measures combined economics and ideology, like the introduction of marriage loans for medically fit and 'racially correct' couples. The loans were offered as part of a law on the reduction of unemployment (1 June 1933). Women were of central interest to the regime, not merely as potential mothers as they were in Fascist Italy, but as mothers of the race. Thus, not only was a fairly generous marriage loan provided on condition that the female spouse leave her job, but she also had to pass medical tests. To encourage her also to have children, the regime almost immediately decreed that repayments would be reduced by one-quarter on the birth of each new child.³⁰

In Alison Owings's oral history of women in the Third Reich, nearly all of them point to Hitler's success in curing unemployment. It does not matter that the work creation programmes were the initiatives of leaders out in the provinces. Even some opponents of Nazism remembered the sources of Hitler's popularity to be the work creation programme; getting the drunks off the street and the youth in order again; introducing a 'work duty' programme and new road construction. The daughter of a nobleman, who was anything but sympathetic to Nazism, remembered that even her father was impressed by the 'accomplishments' of the regime. 'He was satisfied that order reigned again, that people had work, that the economy was going forward, and that Germany again enjoyed a certain respect.'³¹

Where persuasion failed, coercion was used to get the unwilling to take up low-paying jobs they did not want.³² Grumbling did not go away, of course, and working-class family consumption in 1937 was lower than it had been in 1927; they drank less than half as much beer as they had a decade earlier. They also ate less meat, fish, tropical fruit, bacon and eggs, and wheat bread.³³

Hitler also reached out to opponents, like the Catholics, by signing a Concordat with the Vatican on 8 July 1933. Until then, Catholic voters were loyal to their Centre Party, and it was they who were mainly responsible for denying the Nazis their electoral majorities. Catholics soon adjusted to the dictatorship. Protestants, however, were more sympathetic to Nazism all along. In their church elections of 1933, two-thirds of the voters supported the German Christian sect that wanted to integrate Nazism and Christianity, and to expel Jews who had converted to Protestantism.³⁴ Hitler made a brief radio appeal to Protestants on the eve of these church elections, and asked them to show their support for Nazi policies. He could not have been disappointed by the pro-Nazi results.³⁵

Although the Communist and Socialist working class had been firmly against the Nazis up to 1933, in the Third Reich activists who were willing and able to resist were soon overwhelmed. The Communists were more active and held out

longest, but even so, at the outside no more than 150,000 of them were touched directly by some form of persecution. If we presume they were all 'resisting', some more than others, we are left to conclude that Communist resisters, among a population of between sixty and seventy million, represented a small minority, and we know that even fewer members of the other working-class party were 'persecuted'.³⁶ It is clear that large sections of the working class were won over, especially by the return of full employment, so that by the mid-1930s they, too, contributed to the formation of a 'pro-National Socialist consensus'.³⁷ Even when workers were less than overwhelmed by appeals to become part of the 'community of the people', they nevertheless were impressed that the Nazis took seriously their everyday concerns on the shop floor. Workers 'did not keep their distance from the cheering masses' on occasions like the Nazi May Day of 'national labour', nor when Hitler spoke on the radio and especially when he gained one success after the next on the foreign policy front.³⁸

We are used to ignoring the subsequent elections and plebiscites under Hitler's dictatorship, but they tend to show that a pro-Nazi consensus formed and grew. In October 1933 Hitler withdrew Germany from the League of Nations and called a national plebiscite to ask Germans if they agreed. The results were 95 per cent in favour. Hardly less spectacular were the results of the election he called for November, held along with the plebiscite. The results were that Hitler and his party received almost forty million votes (92.2 per cent of the total). Hardly less remarkable was the turnout of 95.2 per cent of those eligible.³⁹ We can hardly take the election at face value, because all other political parties were outlawed. Nearly three and a half million people spoiled their ballot, presumably to show their opposition. Still, the vast majority voted in favour of Nazism, and in spite of what they could read in the press and hear by word of mouth about the secret police, the concentration camps, official antisemitism, and so on. The plebiscite and election have rightly been called 'a genuine triumph for Hitler', and 'even allowing for manipulation and lack of freedom', there is no getting away from the fact that at that moment 'the vast majority of the German people backed him'.⁴⁰

Citizens were asked to express themselves once more on 19 August 1934 in a plebiscite on the issue of uniting the offices of head of state (after President Hindenburg died), with that of the head of government (Chancellor Hitler). Again around 90 per cent supported Hitler. These results disappointed opponents, who kept waiting for the people to see the light.⁴¹ The Nazis were clear in their own minds about their popular backing, and Hitler was fond of saying that henceforth the struggle was for the support of the last 10 per cent.⁴² According to the Reichstag elections held on 29 March 1936, the Nazis were well on the way to getting that support, because they received no less than 99.9 per cent of the vote. Certainly, by then the elections were heavily tilted in favour of the government, which counted spoiled ballots or those left blank, as a 'yes'. At times entire

communities were reported to have voted 100 per cent for Hitler, when that clearly was not the case. There is little doubt, however, that an overwhelming majority of the German people did vote 'yes'. The government obtained the same outcome on 10 April 1938 in a plebiscite when Germans and Austrians were asked whether they agreed with what was called the 'reunification' of Austria and Germany. Even the Socialists in exile noted that 'the great majority' of the people agreed with the question put to them.⁴³

The undoubted swing of Germans towards support for Hitler's dictatorship can be illustrated in many other ways, such as how many rushed to join the Nazi movement. Whereas in 1930 there were 129,583 members in the Nazi Party, the registration jumped in early 1933 to 849,009. In order to control the influx, the Party itself called a (temporary) halt in May 1933 and would accept no new members. Once the ban was lifted a stream of people from all classes signed on, and by the early war years, there were more than five million card-carrying members.⁴⁴ There was a flood of joiners to the other Nazi mass organizations, such as to the ranks of the brown-shirted Storm Troopers (SA). In early 1931 there were around 77,000 members in the organization, and that increased to nearly half a million in August 1932; exactly two years later membership approached three million.⁴⁵

Women also became part of the movement, and joined the Party's organization for them, the 'National Socialist Womanhood' (NS-Frauenschaft, NSF). At the end of 1932, the NSF as a kind of elite group for Nazi women already boasted a membership of 110,000. It grew to almost 850,000 a year later, and increased to over 1.5 million in the course of 1934. In addition, the mass-oriented 'German Women's Enterprise' (Deutsches Frauenwerk, DFW), founded in September 1933 as an umbrella organization to take the place of women's organizations that had been 'coordinated' or eliminated by the Nazis, gained a membership of 2.7 million by 1935, and that number grew by 1938 to 'around four million' and thereby became the largest non-compulsory organization in the country.⁴⁶ Several scholars have suggested, as does Adelheid von Saldern, that 'by and large, these women, and especially those who were leaders, accepted the role allotted to them by the Nazi system. Many were more or less positively inclined to National Socialism. Although there was some grumbling and criticism in certain areas, this did not usually amount to serious (political) opposition.'⁴⁷ Tim Mason concluded that 'a variety of different sources convey the impression that in the later 1930s the Third Reich enjoyed a large measure of active and passive support among women, a larger measure than it gained from among men'.⁴⁸

The ease of the Nazi takeover and the emergence of a pro-Hitler and pro-Nazi consensus suggests that the majority had abandoned any hopes they might have had for democracy, and especially with the recovery from the Great Depression, they found it easy to support an authoritarian dictatorship.

Practising 'German Law'

Immediately on the heels of Hitler's appointment, Nazi newspapers made it seem that bloodthirsty Communists were fomenting revolution in the streets.⁴⁹ As early as 4 February 1933, in the name of stopping such activities, a presidential decree was promulgated 'for the protection of the German people'. Although mild by later standards, it restricted freedom of expression, permitted certain forms of censorship, banned publications, and outlawed meetings and demonstrations when the police judged that they constituted a 'direct danger to public security'.⁵⁰

These measures were heralded in press reports as showing that Hitler was providing police with 'extensive powers to carry out the work of construction'.⁵¹ Newspapers were full of stories of the ongoing battle in the streets between Nazis and Communists.⁵² Placed alongside these accounts were reports that some local heads of police were cracking down on the Reds and purging the police of anyone accused of being a Marxist or Marxist sympathizer.⁵³

Newspapers reported, without blinking an eye, that a number of senior police officials in Prussia were dismissed as unreliable.⁵⁴ By mid-February 1933, Göring gave numerous chiefs of police across Prussia their 'leave' merely because they belonged to the SPD or Catholic Centre Party.⁵⁵ Replacements were applauded for saying they would 'practise German law', and do 'everything for Germany'.⁵⁶

On 17 February 1933, Göring, who was Hitler's right-hand man in the National Cabinet and also the new Prussian Minister of the Interior, issued a decree to all Prussian police. Published to make his intentions perfectly clear, he instructed police to avoid the impression they were ill-disposed towards 'national organizations', that is, especially the Nazis, but to use their 'sharpest methods' against 'treasonous organizations' and 'Communistic acts of terror and violence'.⁵⁷

Göring cooperated with Dr Rudolf Diels, a career policeman, to get rid of politically unreliable officials, and Diels stated in one story that he wanted only those policemen to stay who could devote 'body and soul' to their work. As for Diels himself, the public was told of his experience in 'the struggle against, and observation of, the Communist movement'.⁵⁸ The announcement of changes to Prussia's political police, out of which the Gestapo was created, emphasized that the new police was designed mainly to eliminate Bolshevism and to deal with treasonous activities.⁵⁹

During February 1933, the atmosphere in Germany was at fever pitch. To capitalize on the situation, deputy police were created, with men drawn from organizations like the Nazi Storm Troopers (SA) and Himmler's SS. News stories said that steps had to be taken to protect public security and private property against Communism.⁶⁰ The deputized SA took the law into their own

hands and carried off helpless victims who were beaten in temporary prisons and private torture chambers. The novelist Georg Glaser, a Communist militant, recalled that after Hitler was named Chancellor, soon 'dead bodies were found in the surrounding forests, and no one dared to know anything about them. People disappeared without a sound, and their best friends did not have the courage to ask where they had gone. Only very rarely did a scream, a gruesome rumour . . . make itself heard; they were paid less notice than everyday traffic accidents.'⁶¹

There was no need for the Nazis to 'purge' the police, because most police found it easy to adjust. Reports submitted to Hitler in early 1934 showed that more than 98 per cent of Prussia's uniformed police, and more than 90 per cent of its officers, were allowed to stay on.⁶² In places such as Leipzig, where some members of the old political police were not up to Nazi expectations, they were transferred out and replaced by trained policemen, none of whom were in the Nazi movement before 1933.⁶³ Not just the little guys in uniform were allowed to stay, but so were most of the detectives in the Criminal Police (Kripo). The Nazis purged only 1.5 per cent of the Prussian Kripo in 1933 and more than 11,500 detectives across Germany kept their jobs.⁶⁴ The number of detectives in the Kripo was reduced in the early years of the dictatorship, but only because they were transferred to the Gestapo where their professional training and experience counted more than their past politics. The limited 'purge' of the police as a whole, such as it was, focused on the senior ranks and more public figures, such as the Police Presidents in the big cities. Many in the police and justice establishment favoured the Nazi approach and were pleased to be part of a regime that wanted to fight crime and give the police more power to operate as they saw fit.⁶⁵

Nothing short of an anti-Communist hysteria was in swing during February 1933, and it was given a shot in the arm on the night of 27 February, when a lone arsonist tried to burn down the Reichstag. Even though Marinus van der Lubbe, a Dutchman with no particular ties to the Communists, was caught, Hitler immediately blamed all Communists, and demanded that KPD members of parliament be hanged that very night. Rudolf Diels recorded the outburst and further quoted Hitler as shouting in the glow of the fire, that of course the Marxists had miscalculated: 'These sub-humans do not understand how the people stand at our side. In their mouse-holes, out of which they now want to come, of course they hear nothing of the cheering from the masses.'⁶⁶

Göring ordered the arrest of leading Communists, and Hitler prevailed upon President Hindenburg the next day on 28 February, to declare a state of emergency. Hitler insisted on 'the presidential decree for the protection of people and state', or the so-called Reichstag Fire Decree, the opening lines of which were phrased to appeal to the anti-Communist majority in Germany. It claimed that measures were needed 'in defence against Communistic violence endangering the state'.⁶⁷ The decree suspended 'until further notice' the constitutional

guarantees of personal liberty; made it possible for police to arrest and detain anyone they saw fit; and to impose restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and association. Police were allowed to exceed all previous legal limits on house searches and could intercept mail and tap telephones. Anyone found guilty of crimes relating to attempts at revolution or social unrest would be subject to heavy prison sentences and even the death penalty. The Reichstag Fire Decree also made it possible for the federal government to extend its authority over the individual states.⁶⁸

In the name of stopping 'bloody red terror', police actions were mounted against the KPD, with thousands arrested.⁶⁹ Round-ups of Communists swept the country, at times on the basis of lists prepared by the Weimar police before Hitler's appointment.⁷⁰ Throughout March, the public was informed of one police success after the next, with no attempt to hide the fact that those arrested were sent without trial to concentration camps.⁷¹ Reports in the non-Nazi press emphasized that the main prisoners in camps like the one that opened in Dachau, were Communist and other Marxist leaders who temporarily were held in the camp because regular prisons were filled to overflowing.⁷²

Most Germans, especially anyone close to the Nazi Party, accepted the official version of events about the attempted Communist insurrection and the need to take radical measures.⁷³ Ian Kershaw concludes that the violence and repression that took place, far from damaging Hitler's reputation 'were widely popular'.⁷⁴ More than 200 telegrams were sent to the Ministry of Justice demanding the death penalty for the culprit who burnt down the Reichstag, and many volunteered for the position of executioner.⁷⁵

By early May Göring was boasting that the number of people killed during political battles in the street was down from what it had been, but he made no mention of those killed inside the new camps. Nevertheless, the obvious intention of such stories was to play on citizens' desire for the pacification of the streets.⁷⁶

Whole groups of Communists were tried and sentenced to death, as happened to four men in Altona in August 1933; nine more met the same fate in Düsseldorf in September, when four others were put on trial for their lives in Hagen; and six people were sentenced to death in Cologne in December. The sensationalized stories of these events and the background to them in the press, above and beyond news published about the stream of people sent to concentration camps, provided an obvious lesson to any potential opponents. For good citizens, of course, these stories showed the new regime in the best light.⁷⁷ Jews were disturbed by all the talk about the death penalty,⁷⁸ and already were vulnerable to dismissal as judges, attorneys general, and so on.⁷⁹

The inequality before the law that was an essential feature of justice under Hitler's dictatorship was made clear when Special Courts, created on 21 March 1933, were justified in the name of the anti-Communist crusade.⁸⁰ Soon, however,

anyone suspected of widely defined political crimes was brought before them.⁸¹ A new measure outlawed all (vaguely defined) ‘malicious gossip’, that is, it criminalized all criticism. Justice officials offered it to Hitler originally for what it really was, namely an ‘ordinance against discrediting the national government’.⁸² The accused were tried before the Special Courts, where their rights, including the right to appeal a verdict, were reduced or eliminated.⁸³ Another new law (29 March 1933) retroactively made crimes such as the attempt to burn down the Reichstag into a capital offence and broadened the applicability of the death penalty to cover other crimes.⁸⁴ Just over a year later (on 24 April 1934) more laws expanded the meaning of treason and set up a People’s Court to mete out justice to offenders.⁸⁵

The government insisted it was responding to a revolutionary threat that called for emergency measures on a short-term basis. It kept assuring the public that, once the crisis passed, Germany’s rule of law and all freedoms would be restored. It was obvious, however, even at the time when such vague promises were made, that the innovations introduced were going to be permanent features of Hitler’s dictatorship.

Political Police

When Germans voted increasingly for Hitler, and especially when they voiced their support for the dictatorship, they accepted that their country would have a secret police. The process of creating this kind of political police, by no means new in Germany, but going back well before 1914, was bound to be accelerated in a country run by a man like Hitler, who left no doubt about his ideas on law and order before he was appointed. Germany was quickly transformed from a liberal state ruled by law, into what has been termed a ‘prerogative state’, that is, one regulated increasingly by arbitrary measures.⁸⁶ The new regime shifted the scales of justice away from the rights of citizens, in favour of the powers of the police in one German state after the next.

The Nazis informed Prussians that establishing the secret police or Gestapo, was part of the programme to reorganize the police, and its mission was defined ‘to track down and to combat all political efforts to destroy the state’.⁸⁷ In order to fulfil its tasks, the new organization set up regional offices. Personnel were recruited not from loyal Nazis, but from the professionally trained police with the necessary expertise. Men who claimed to be ‘idealists’ relished the thought of working for the new Gestapo and hurried to join in hopes of helping to restore ‘law and order’ as they understood it at the time.⁸⁸

A law of 30 November 1933 effectively freed the Gestapo from all outside interference. As needed, they could call on the cooperation of all other police, including the local uniformed city police and rural gendarmerie.⁸⁹ The Gestapo

was also given a preventive mission, charged with stopping political crime before it took place, and permitted to detain suspects in a concentration camp or elsewhere without a hearing before a judge.

Gestapo-like police were soon established in all other German states. It is not necessary here to examine each in detail, but what happened in Bavaria under Heinrich Himmler deserves attention, as he was head of the SS and became Chief of the German police. In an interview on 14 March 1933, after he was appointed provisional head of the Munich Metropolitan Police, Himmler was asked if a purge of the police was in the offing. He answered that it was not, and said that henceforth it would be easier for them to do their duty. He was pleased that the police were functioning smoothly with the assistance of the SA and SS as deputy police, and together they were tracking down many Communists and other Marxists. House searches turned up numerous weapons, illegal printing presses, and large quantities of suspicious writings. He also offered one of the first justifications for the new concentration camps. The reasoning behind the camps was meant to appeal to traditional German social values, as well as antisemitism:

The state protects the life of all citizens. Unfortunately, it is only possible to provide such protection for certain individuals, and those involved have to be taken into protective custody under the direct protection of the police. The individuals involved, who are often of the Jewish faith, have through behaviour towards the national Germany, such as through offending nationalist feelings, and so on, made themselves so unloved among the people, that they would be exposed to the anger of the people unless the police stepped in.⁹⁰

Less than a week later, Himmler gave instructions to open a concentration camp at Dachau.⁹¹ In claiming that 'protective custody' was designed to protect individuals from the wrath of the mob, he made it easy for Germans to construct stories of their own in which supposedly endangered persons were picked up for their own good. Not only that, but according to Himmler 'often' the alleged culprits who outraged the national feelings of citizens were Jews, a statement which opened the possibility for citizens, even those who were not antisemitic, to conclude that it was good to have such 'enemies' off the streets. The comforting thought was that most prisoners in concentration camps were not at all like 'good citizens'.

The Jews were not the main Nazi targets during 1933, when the camps were created, but some were attacked because they were in the Communist Party, or belonged to opposition groups.⁹² For the most part during the early days, the new police, like the old one, was against illegal 'excesses', including actions of Nazi hotheads against the Jews. Once the regime was established, however, the Gestapo became the most determined enforcers of officially condoned and inspired antisemitism.⁹³

Himmler ended his first major interview by assuring citizens that there were proper guidelines for the future work of the police, and said that good citizens had nothing to worry about. He expressed determination to 'eliminate all criminals', and talked of the need to re-educate, strengthen, and support the people as a whole to a German way of thinking, because, so he claimed, many people had lost sight of these values during the previous years of an allegedly corrupt democratic system. He said that when and where necessary 'police measures' would be 'hard, just, and without any sentimentality'.⁹⁴

By 15 March 1933 Himmler was in charge of a new Bavarian Political Police (BPP) that formed the basis of a Gestapo-like organization there. He chose as his key assistant, the young and ambitious Reinhard Heydrich. On 1 April 1933, Himmler became Political Police Commander (BPP) for all of Bavaria, and he also had control of the concentration camps, which were still in their infancy.⁹⁵ The BPP immediately used new powers granted under the Reichstag Fire Decree to destroy all left-wing groups. It is no accident that some Weimar police officials, like Heinrich Müller, with experience in tracking Communists, were in demand by the new police bosses. Such men were particularly anxious to please once it became clear they were not going to lose their prized jobs to Nazi Party or SS 'amateurs'.⁹⁶

The police and judicial authorities, frustrated by Weimar's rule of law, soon introduced policies and plans formulated well before 1933 to deal with all kinds of criminals. Those plans had been left on the drawing board, but now police were allowed to use methods that diverged sharply from anything permitted in Germany before.⁹⁷ Serving the dictatorship 'came naturally to conservative-nationalist detectives'.⁹⁸

Throughout 1933, the political police, backed by armed bands of Nazis, did what they could to repress the KPD. Although some Communists were released from the camps, the press stated that it was 'obvious' some would be kept under arrest.⁹⁹ Members of the Socialist Party (SPD) also were picked up, and in May and June they were followed by selected members of liberal, conservative, and, especially in Bavaria, Catholic parties.¹⁰⁰ Press reports said that while many were released, others would be kept in the camps.¹⁰¹

Even as Himmler created a police empire, he also was head of the black-shirts, the notorious SS.¹⁰² Most of the men in the SS, as well as those in the Nazi Party and the SA, were civilians; most did not become state employees during the period down to the war. However, opportunities were given members of both the Gestapo and Kripo to join the SS.¹⁰³ Even so, according to historian Robert Koehl, at the outbreak of war 'the SS and Police were still two very separate entities' and the bulk of the members in the Gestapo and Kripo remained 'professional police officials'.¹⁰⁴ The fusion of the police into the SS was underway in the late 1930s, but as Himmler explained to the regular police (Orpo) at meetings

in May 1937, only in the future would leaders of the police be recruited exclusively from the leadership schools of the SS.¹⁰⁵

The influence of the SS on Hitler's dictatorship in the early years was summed up in a published article by Werner Best in 1936, shortly before Himmler was named Chief of the German Police. According to Best, by attaining that appointment Himmler would finally connect the 'unified ability of the German police with the unbending fighting will and the ideological consistency of the SS'.¹⁰⁶ For Reinhard Heydrich, writing at the same time, the hope was to have the Gestapo trained as police specialists who were imbued with National Socialist ideas.¹⁰⁷

What filtered down to Gestapo officials over time, regardless of whether they formally joined the SS or some other Party organization, were Nazi teachings on law and order. Nazi ideology (of which there were many variants) could readily be grafted onto traditional demands of police for more power to fight criminals; for a reduction of the rights of the accused; and for a campaign to clean up the country from what many in the police regarded as criminal, or just immoral practices. From the early years of Hitler's dictatorship, there was a systematic and sustained effort 'to school' all police in Nazi teachings, and by the mid-1930s, a branch of the SS provided the leaders and the lecturers. Himmler issued detailed orders on how to spread Nazi propaganda through weekly and monthly sessions, and in June 1940, the 'educational' sessions were sometimes carried out on a daily basis.¹⁰⁸ This 'schooling', in case any policemen needed it, was intended to turn them into good Nazis, and appears to have been carried out on a regular basis from the beginning to the end of the regime.¹⁰⁹ Nazi ideology also was reinforced by everyday experiences during which the police were empowered as never before.¹¹⁰

Alongside 'cool' police actions, the Nazi revolution was carried forward by an army of 'hot' activists, especially those in the paramilitary SA. Beginning in February 1933 the millions-strong organization indulged in vigilante acts of violence that totally ignored the law. Across many parts of the country they let loose an 'elemental, increasingly uncontrollable outbreak of violence'.¹¹¹ By early March a social upheaval of sorts was under way in Germany, unlike anything seen since the revolutionary days of 1918.¹¹² In April, Bavarian Minister of Justice Hans Frank listed other complaints that arose in the course of taking some 5,000 people into 'protective custody'. He said he wanted to put a stop to the unacceptable practices whereby 'simple denunciations and arbitrary arrests of subordinate organizations' landed people in custody. He felt that real opponents should be charged or released; their security should be guaranteed; they should be given an opportunity to lodge complaints about their treatment; and their claims should be investigated.¹¹³ In addition to Justice Minister Frank, other Bavarian Nazi leaders tried to insist on proper procedures, but like most such efforts, this one had no lasting effect.

Removing Legal Protections from the Jews

Part of what happened when Germans turned away from Weimar and embraced or accepted dictatorship, was that they left themselves open to the influences of Hitler's ideas, one of the most important of which was his virulent hatred of the Jews. In early 1933 it was unclear what the Nazis would do to implement their antisemitism. German Jews, who were better integrated in Germany than anywhere in Europe, were proud of their country, and many were staunch nationalists. The Jews were a small minority in Germany and in January 1933, statisticians reported that only approximately 525,000 'believing Jews' lived in the country.¹¹⁴ These Jews were less than 1 per cent of the German population, and had been declining well before Hitler came to power. More vigilant racists, like those in the German Christian movement, a new religious organization that strove to unite Christianity and Nazism, noticed that the published statistics missed 300,000 or more 'Jews' who did not practise their faith, and who were not counted as Jews by the statisticians. At the very least, the German Christians wanted to expel them from Protestantism. The Ministry of the Interior's document from April 1935 to which the German Christians alluded with alarm, also recorded that there were an additional 750,000 'Jewish-Germans' of mixed race in the country.¹¹⁵ The latter figure was in fact exaggerated, for in 1939—even allowing that emigration had reduced their number—there were just under 85,000 people who were officially classified as 'mixed race' in Germany.¹¹⁶ Although such people were not subjected to the full scope of Nazi antisemitism, many suffered discrimination and lived in fear.¹¹⁷ When they applied for and were granted special legal and racial certification to show they were not 'Jews' as defined in the laws, it often entailed the destruction of their family or at least of their relationship to their Jewish parent. Regardless of the outcome of their quest, their lives remained precarious, not least because decisions about ancestry could always be reversed.¹¹⁸

Antisemitism had not been a top priority issue for the Nazis in the last elections of the Weimar Republic. On propaganda posters used in the various elections leading up to 1933, the main 'enemy groups' were political parties identified with defeat and revolution in 1918, and with the Weimar system. Only 6 of the 124 Nazi posters from these elections pointed to the Jews as the main enemy.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, in the presidential elections of 1932, the Nazis used posters to suggest that 'good Germans' should support Hitler, because Hindenburg was the candidate of the Jews.¹²⁰

The Nazis did not need to make much of their antisemitism in those last elections, as by then their stance was already well known, and they could emphasize other aspects of the platform to win respectability and votes.¹²¹ At the local level,

the Nazis used violence against the Jews and anyone who they thought even 'looked Jewish', and these actions continued well into 1933.

Even during 1933 and 1934, Hitler's public statements on the Jews were if anything notable by their absence.¹²² After his appointment, government-ordered steps against the Jews moved forward slowly, because the priority was to solve the unemployment problem. The Nazis even backed away from one of their oldest election promises, namely to close the department stores owned by the Jews, because it might increase unemployment when the 'Aryan' employees lost their jobs. Initially, anti-Jewish actions that could disrupt the economy were avoided, and there was concern about international public opinion, and the potential of an anti-German boycott in countries like the United States.

Nonetheless, antisemitism was important for Hitler and other Nazis, and in 1933 and 1934 'quiet' persecutions took place, as well as so-called 'individual actions', all of them officially disavowed and discouraged by leaders in Berlin.¹²³ This first wave of antisemitism came as an enormous shock to German Jews. After the March 1933 elections, the Nazi Party organized attacks against the Jews, such as boycotting or damaging their shops and businesses. On occasion Jews were openly assaulted, but that was more the exception than the rule.¹²⁴

The first step taken by the German government to put legal pressure on the Jews as a group was a law of 7 April 1933, which made it possible to purge Jews and others from the civil service. Cleverly called the 'Law for the Restoration of a Professional Civil Service' to avoid the impression that the Nazis were tampering, this law had enormous implications.¹²⁵ It applied not just to the federal civil service, but to the entire corps of officials all the way down to the village level, including judges, the police, university professors, and school-teachers. The public was told that the law aimed at 'the elimination of Jewish and Marxist elements'.¹²⁶

Millions of people were affected by the notorious questionnaires that were part of the law, and when follow-up investigations dragged on, they guaranteed lots of snooping. Informers rushed in to settle old scores or to gain personal advantages from the process.¹²⁷ Above and beyond the considerable direct effects these proceedings had on Jews and/or on people with some association with 'Marxism', the process undoubtedly made the entire civil service aware of the new rules of the game, and, in case anyone did not yet know, it was guaranteed to spread the word that official antisemitism was now government policy.

The subsequent purges of the Jews took their cue from this law, and, for example, led to the dismissal of Jews from the arts and the press, and even from the free professions. Such steps were justified as necessary—according to press reports—to placate the 'outrage of the entire German-blooded population'.¹²⁸ The announcement about what would happen to Jews in the Prussian justice system in the hitherto liberal and quite famous *Berliner Morgenpost* of 1 April

1933, dripped with antisemitism. The Prussian Ministry of Justice stated that during 'the great defensive struggle of the German people against the all-Jewish atrocity propaganda', all Jewish judges and other court officials should either leave or be forced out.¹²⁹

Nazi hotheads out in the provinces continued their uncoordinated, and often violent attacks against the Jews and their property, kept up unofficial boycotts of businesses and so on. In the weeks following Hitler's appointment, leaders in Berlin tried to get a hold on the situation and to coordinate what was happening as best they could. Having fanned the flames of antisemitism for so long, and being radically antisemitic himself, Hitler could hardly back away from a confrontation with the Jews. However, German public opinion was not happy with violence in the streets, and there was a threat from the USA to carry out a boycott of German goods in response to the Nazis' violent attacks on the Jews. On 26 March Hitler, whose hand was to some extent forced by radical Nazis 'from below', opted for a national boycott of all Jewish businesses.¹³⁰

Although Hitler just had been given dictatorial powers by way of an Enabling Law, he did not use the powers of the state or the police to enforce the boycott, but gave that mission to a Central Committee of the Nazi Party led by the notorious Julius Streicher. Local action committees were created 'for the practical, systematic implementation of the boycott of Jewish businesses, goods, doctors, lawyers'. The boycott was supposed to reach beyond the cities, into the countryside and 'down to the smallest village'.¹³¹ Nothing like it had happened before and it heralded the waves of discrimination, violence, and terror to come.

The boycott was called for Saturday, 1 April, and the major theme in the press leading up to it was that it was a 'counter-measure' of the Party against the 'atrocity propaganda' allegedly spread by Jews abroad, including those in the Socialist and Communist movements.¹³² Nazi organizations mobilized women to discourage others from buying from Jews.¹³³ The boycott was justified in a radio speech by Goebbels on Friday evening, and heavily publicized to begin promptly at 10:00 a.m. on 1 April and to continue until the Nazi Party leaders called it off.¹³⁴ Hitler gave his blessing, and remarked in an interview that the action must avoid taking 'undesired forms'.¹³⁵

During the week leading up to the event, newspapers were full of stories about the activities of Jews at home and abroad as a build-up to Saturday. Detailed guidelines were issued about how to proceed against Jewish businesses and professionals, including even the kinds of signs and the slogans that should be used on the banners across the streets and held in front of stores.¹³⁶ In the big cities, the boycott was directed particularly at department stores, many of them owned by Jews. In Stuttgart, as elsewhere, the SA already had the names and addresses of Jewish firms and the buildings containing the offices of Jewish professionals and others, and within minutes of the beginning of the action, they plastered the word 'Jew' to the name signs of the entrances.¹³⁷

The SA, some of them armed, stood at the doorways of shops, and tried, not always successfully, to discourage anyone from entering. The boycott was carried into smaller towns and out into the countryside, at least where Jews could be found and be demonstrably boycotted. Accounts in the press played up the success of the actions and made much of the evidence that could be found when non-Nazis also showed signs of agreement with what was happening.¹³⁸

In addition to slogans for the boycott, such as 'Don't buy in Jewish department stores' or 'Avoid Jewish doctors', far cruder ones were used. A stranger from another country walking the streets would have concluded that the Jews were not just hated, but in danger for their lives.

In fact violence was used on a wide scale, several Jews were murdered, and some Jews fought back. Hans Schumm, a Jewish lawyer in Kiel, shot one of the Nazis trying to break up his sister's wedding. He was arrested and when rumours spread (as it turned out they were false) that the Nazi had died of his wounds, comrades broke into the prison—which is to say, they were allowed in by the police—and murdered Schumm in his prison cell.¹³⁹ In Chemnitz, another lawyer and head of the Jewish Veterans' Association there, was carried off to a nearby forest and shot by members of the SS; in Plauen a Jewish merchant was killed.¹⁴⁰ Jews were also taken into 'protective custody' with great public fanfare and shipped to concentration camps.

In most areas, people did not respond as positively as the Nazis hoped, and in bigger cities there were those who made a point of shopping at Jewish stores. In Frankfurt am Main, most of the larger stores did not open and so robbed the Nazis of the chance to make a big fuss. Soon even the smaller ones closed.¹⁴¹ All in all, most historians argue that the boycott failed as a public relations event with ordinary Germans, and have suggested that behind the scenes the Nazis themselves considered it a propaganda failure because of the public's aversion to such methods.¹⁴² At least on the day of the boycott, most citizens certainly did not demonstrate anything like the antisemitic zeal of their leaders. Germany had an antisemitic tradition, but it would take some time for the Nazis to radicalize it.

Already on the afternoon of the boycott a temporary 'pause' was ordered by Goebbels until the following Wednesday to see, as he put it, if the 'atrocious propaganda' against Germany would cease.¹⁴³ Of course, the tactic was a way of avoiding a political defeat if, as happened, the boycott won less than whole-hearted popular support.¹⁴⁴ What the event did, was to present the regime's stand on the Jews. The hate-filled message was that Jews were over-represented in certain professions and trades and their influence had to be broken.¹⁴⁵ No one could doubt that, whether or not antisemitism was soft-pedalled by the Nazis before, now it was clearly of central importance.

Jews who loved Germany felt they were being turned into social outsiders. Many German Jews were proudly nationalistic, and for that reason were more

than cool to the appeals of the early Zionist movement. Some now began to think that a violent pogrom was in the offing and for the first time in their lives started to feel more like hostages than equal citizens.¹⁴⁶ The boycott was the first nationally organized and condoned antisemitic event, and it forced even staunchly nationalistic Jews to conclude that they had been sadly mistaken about their beloved Germany.

Some Jews fought back as much as they could under the circumstances. Edwin Landau, at the time of the boycott a store owner in a small West Prussian town, refused to give in. He donned his war medals, visited other Jewish shops, and confronted the Nazis posted at his shop door. Customers (particularly Catholics) came to offer sympathy and, as in other places in Germany, showed their disapproval of the action. The overall effect of everything Landau experienced on that day—particularly the crude expressions of young Nazis—left him ‘inwardly broken’. He soon joined the Zionist movement and by November 1934 had left Germany for Palestine.¹⁴⁷ The Nazis hoped for such a turn of events, and what they called a ‘joyous rise’ in Jewish emigration.¹⁴⁸ Evidently showing their devotion to Germany by displaying their war medals represented a form of resistance used by many Jewish shopkeepers across Germany, with some in Berlin even painting their distinguished war records on the shop windows.¹⁴⁹

Professor Victor Klemperer, soon forced out of his university post because of his Jewish background, recorded in his diary on 25 April 1933 that he considered Germans as a whole to be not particularly antisemitic. He felt the Nazis were making a mistake in the early days by raising the issue so high on the banner. Klemperer was not merely a witness, but a self-conscious and critical one. He confided in his diary ‘that the fate of the Hitler Movement unquestionably lies in the Jewish thing. I do not understand why they have made this point of the programme so central. It will go to ruin on that. We likely along with it.’¹⁵⁰

Historian Richard Bessel maintains that the early antisemitism and the boycott, unlike the campaign against the Left, ‘appears to have aroused widespread misgivings among the public and created difficulties for the Nazi leadership without offering compensating political dividends.’¹⁵¹ Perhaps so, but one can find plenty of evidence that at least non-violent forms of antisemitism gained Hitler’s dictatorship more support than it lost.¹⁵²

The Jews were turned into social outsiders and their legal emancipation was slowly reversed. They were pressured in business, but soon driven from the professions, and it appears beyond doubt that their expulsion was popular. In March 1933 the SA invaded courts and took out their spite on Jewish judges and attorneys. Some of the Jews were marched through the streets, like the one in Munich who was trying to get his client released from ‘protective custody’. He was dragged into the street and, with his trouser legs cut above the knee for comic effect, paraded through the streets with a sign around his neck which said, ‘I am an insolent Jew and I will never complain again.’ In another city (Breslau)

at about the same time, the SA forced their way into the court buildings, and, while shouting 'Jews out!', chased and beat Jewish judges, lawyers, and anyone they even thought might be a Jew. The Higher Court President informed all judges and attorneys that it was necessary to curtail the activities of Jewish lawyers in order to bring about what he called 'a calming of the population and an easing of the general situation'.¹⁵³

The response of local police, otherwise prone to being supersensitive about any public disturbance, was to do nothing about the violence, as happened when 500 to 600 demonstrators entered the higher court building in Frankfurt am Main in June, and when 200 students forced their way into the courts in the same city in July. The attitude of judicial authorities on the spot was that it would be better if Jewish lawyers simply ceased to appear, and that Jewish judges retire to avoid provocation. However, if the Jews did not leave on their own, it was made clear they would be forbidden to practise law in the courts.¹⁵⁴

The universities dismissed nearly all Jewish professors in one fell swoop thanks to the Civil Service Law of 7 April. German university students, long prone to antisemitism and needing little prompting from above, pushed ahead with various actions against both Jewish students and professors.¹⁵⁵ The government introduced a 'numbers clause' on 25 April—a long-time demand of the Nazis—to restrict the percentage of Jewish students who could attend university. On some local campuses, students demonstrated against Jewish professors or took advantage of the situation to make mischief by writing letters of complaint against those to whom they bore a grudge.¹⁵⁶ These acts opened up places for students and jobs for professors, and was popular at a time of high academic unemployment.¹⁵⁷

In March and April 1933, Jewish professionals not already affected by discrimination were pressured, for instance by leaders of German medicine. In early April Hitler promised nothing less than 'purging of the nation and particularly of the intellectual classes of influences of foreign origin and racially foreign infiltration'. He stated before representatives of the educated German elite 'that immediate eradication of the majority of Jewish intellectuals from the cultural and intellectual life of Germany had to be carried out to assure Germany's obvious right to the intellectual leadership of its own kind'. He was fully aware of problems faced by young doctors in an overcrowded profession, he said, and reassured them that 'precisely for this German youth, living space and employment opportunities must be created by thoroughly repulsing racially foreign elements'.¹⁵⁸

With Chancellor Hitler setting this tone, national and local medical associations felt comfortable in compelling Jews to resign. Some municipalities and regional administrations, acting illegally and anticipating anti-Jewish legislation yet to come, barred Jewish physicians who were in public employ.¹⁵⁹ Physicians' organizations were Nazified by dissolving them and putting a

Nazi-dominated one in their place. Although doctors may have found themselves more regimented than they might have wished in the new Germany, there was virtually no opposition to what happened. Doctor-patient confidentiality was routinely compromised as doctors were given the opportunity (already by the Sterilization Law of 14 July 1933) to report evidence of hereditary diseases and their suspicions about illegal acts (like abortions). There was no mention that doctors were forced to inform on a patient in the original law, but a supplementary decree of 5 December 1933 stated that when physicians learned that patients suffered from what were termed hereditary diseases or chronic alcoholism, the doctor had a duty to inform the medical authorities.¹⁶⁰ A new Physicians' Ordinance in 1935, while claiming to protect the Hippocratic Oath, stated that all medical secrets could be revealed if doctors thought that 'wholesome popular sentiment'—an obviously subjective criterion—demanded that they do so.¹⁶¹ Soon statutes with the force of law were issued by a new Reich Physicians' Chamber, in place by 6 April 1936, that helped to infuse the medical profession with Nazi ideology. Many sections of the profession already were prone to racial thinking, and the more radical Nazi doctors were not only anti-semitic, but demanded that medicine work in the service of purifying Germans' own racial stock by weeding out impurities.¹⁶²

Doctors were told to report genetic illnesses, just as they would births and deaths, and patients as a result were sterilized, usually against their will. In that sense many doctors were instrumental in extending the eyes and ears of the dictatorship into their own practices.¹⁶³ They did so also in new roles in the much expanded and reorganized public health system. For example, doctors played a crucial part as examiners and counsellors at what has been sarcastically called the new 'biological headquarters', that is, the 739 public health offices the Nazis established across the country by 1939.¹⁶⁴

The new antisemitism had particularly devastating effects on Jewish school-teachers and pupils. Jewish children were picked on by students or teachers, some were paraded before school assembly and used as models to demonstrate how students should be able to recognize Jews.¹⁶⁵ Teachers were obliged to open classes with the Hitler greeting, a salutation that was bound to bring home their precarious situation to Jewish students. If not all teachers and students jumped on the bandwagon, the negative psychological effects on Jewish children can easily be imagined.

In the event that Germans did not witness antisemitism personally, they could read a great deal about it in any newspaper. All of Germany's papers, and not just the Nazi ones, were full of negatives stories about the Jews, and there were too many to be missed.¹⁶⁶

Worries about disrupting the economy and international opinion gave Hitler's government pause about proceeding against the Jews. In the wake of the boycott in 1933, Nazi radicals out in the provinces continued their 'individual

actions' against the Jews on an uncoordinated basis. The SA were particularly active, and on 2 August 1933, in an effort to clip the wings of the SA and to exert some control, Prussia dissolved the 'deputy police', and thereby put an end to the SA's role in the police. The same step was soon taken elsewhere.¹⁶⁷

Some local SA leaders, however, persisted in their attacks on Jews, as happened in March 1934 in Gunzhausen. That town, in Middle Franconia, Bavaria, had a history of antisemitism, so that when a mob of between 1,000 and 1,500 gathered on Palm Sunday and set upon the Jews, it included not just Nazis, but non-Nazi townspeople as well. Several Jews were severely mistreated, and two of them died as a result. Instructively for the way 'law and order' changed and how Jews could no longer look to the law for protection, the main culprits were charged and brought to court, but their sentences were quashed on appeal. Only one of them, Kurt Bär, got 10 months, and even he does not seem to have served time in prison.¹⁶⁸ But unlike what we might expect from a dictatorship, such violence was not ordered from on high.

According to Marion Kaplan, on the whole, Jewish women seemed to sense the danger signals first, or at least were more inclined to leave Germany than were their menfolk.¹⁶⁹ All Jews watched the situation closely, and many no doubt hoped the storm would pass. In addition, precisely because Hitler's new government did not act across the board, many Jews decided to stay on, also because in an era marked by antisemitism internationally, not many countries were prepared to accept Jewish refugees. Their hopes in Germany were fuelled because there was no definitive 'law' or decree that regulated the 'Jewish question'. Instead literally thousands of separate 'measures' were brought in to govern their every move. Jews like Peter Gay and his family in Berlin concluded from the mixed messages sent by the dictatorship, that it was safe enough for them to remain.¹⁷⁰

'Germany Prefers Hitler to the Communists'

By the end of 1933, there was so much support for the dictatorship, and so few enemies left, that the Nazis toyed with the idea of getting rid of the Gestapo.¹⁷¹ Some newspaper accounts hinted that the concentration camps and a secret police were becoming superfluous.¹⁷² Instead, Göring's new law on the Prussian Gestapo (30 November 1933) and follow-up instructions (in March 1934) established the autonomy of the Gestapo, made it free of all outside administrative tampering, and brought it under his authority as Prime Minister of Prussia.¹⁷³ To some extent, this move was an attempt to hold on to the Gestapo in Prussia, which was Göring's only power base, and to resist the centralization trend. The inexorable rise of Heinrich Himmler could not be stopped, and the justification given to the public for his taking over as head of the police in one state after the

next was the persistent need to fight the Communists.¹⁷⁴ Himmler's new role was said to be 'in the interests of the unified work of the entire political police of the German Reich'.¹⁷⁵ Perhaps recognizing the inevitability of Himmler's ascendancy, Göring soon said that he 'saw himself compelled for organizational reasons' to ask Himmler to take over.¹⁷⁶

Such vague phrases have led to debate about why Himmler emerged as Germany's supreme political policeman.¹⁷⁷ Was he merely a better schemer? Perhaps, but there is no question he had Hitler's implicit or explicit support, and in late 1933 and into 1934, he ploughed ahead, taking over the political police in one German state after the next. He did this at a time when the press was reporting that there was growing political tranquillity everywhere in Germany.

Given the authoritarian tendencies that Hitler frequently expressed, and his desire to centralize the country and to undermine states' rights, the chances of success were good for anyone like Himmler who was a keen centralizer. That the police should be removed from the jurisdiction of the individual German states was only a matter of time in a Hitlerian dictatorial system. The trend towards centralizing the political police took a major step forward on 20 April 1934, when Himmler was made head of the Prussian Gestapo. At that moment, the leadership of the political police in Germany was, in a much used phrase of the time, 'unified in one hand'.

At the ceremony where Göring passed over leadership and gave his blessing, he made the point that the change was welcomed by Hitler. Himmler's remarks were intended not only to lift the spirits of the police he addressed directly, but were part of his continuing effort to provide information out of which loyal citizens were supposed to figure out what the Gestapo was all about. He mentioned his favourite theme about the new Nazi police, whose officials, he remarked, took up their duties with the dedication of soldiers. He appealed to the hatred of everything the Weimar Republic stood for, by charging that 'the police suffered a terrible reputation during the 14 years of the Marxist system because the officials were misused'. He insisted that would change, and that 'in Germany, it must again become the highest honour and distinction to be allowed to belong to the political police'.

Why the need for such a police when, as Himmler himself made clear, 'millions of people with good heart' had come to support the new system? The reason was, he claimed, that there were 'still thousands, even tens of thousands' who remained enemies 'even when they raise their arm' in the Hitler salute. Appearances could be deceiving, and enemies were organizing worldwide. Even so, he expressed confidence in the ability of the new police to master the difficult mission.¹⁷⁸

Himmler's appointment as head of the (Prussian) Gestapo came on Hitler's birthday in 1934, and we can surmise that this step happened on that day as a sign, either that it was done at Hitler's express wish, or to please him as a kind of

birthday present. Himmler became Germany's most important policeman at the age of 34; at that time he also was head of the SS and was busily organizing a concentration camp system. Whether or not there was social peace in the country, it was clear that the foundations of the new system were in place.

The autonomy of the constituent German states themselves was undermined through a series of new laws in 1933 and 1934 in favour of rule from Berlin. As one of these laws put it, the elections of 12 November 1933 'have proven that the German people have overcome all domestic boundaries and conflicts, and have united in an indissoluble inner unity'.¹⁷⁹ It was reported that 'on Hitler's insistence', and in order to avoid the 'dangers of a particularistic power build-up' in the provinces, the new position of the Reich Governor for each state was created already on 7 April 1933.¹⁸⁰ Hitler thus extended Berlin's domination over the individual German states whose parliaments were abolished.¹⁸¹

By 1 January 1935 the administration of justice was made uniform across Germany, and the Ministries of Justice of the individual states were brought under central control.¹⁸² Thus, Himmler's drive to strengthen and centralize the police, with its headquarters in Berlin, was completely in keeping with Hitler's wishes and with the entire spirit of the Nazi revolution. The trend was especially pronounced with regard to the police. On 17 June 1936 Himmler was made Chief of the German Police, and was thereby head of the newly nationalized Gestapo as well as the Kripo and regular uniformed police.

As Germans watched these events unfold, they believed that the Communists had attempted to seize power illegally and were grateful the Nazis stopped them. Victor Klemperer noted in his diary about the elections of late 1933, that an overwhelming majority voted in favour of the Nazis, because in the final analysis 'all Germany prefers Hitler to the Communists'.¹⁸³ In spite or rather because of all the changes wrought by Hitler or by others in his name, he was more popular than ever, and support for his dictatorship was growing by the minute. We move now to examine other parts of Hitler's 'experiment' in popular dictatorship.