

**THE HISTORY OF THE
GERMAN
RESISTANCE
1933-1945**

T H I R D E D I T I O N

PETER HOFFMANN

*The History of the
German Resistance 1933–1945*

This page intentionally left blank

THE HISTORY OF THE GERMAN RESISTANCE 1933–1945

Peter Hoffmann

Translated from the German by

RICHARD BARRY

Third English Edition

McGill-Queen's University Press
Montreal & Kingston · London · Ithaca

© Peter Hoffmann 1996
ISBN 0-7735-1531-3

Legal deposit fourth quarter 1996
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec

Published in West Germany in 1969 by R. Piper
& Co. under the title *Widerstand, Staatsstreich,
Attentat*; fourth revised edition 1985.
First English edition, Macdonald and Jane's 1977,
MIT Press 1977; second edition, MIT Press 1979.

Printed in Canada on acid-free paper
Reprinted 2001

McGill-Queen's University Press acknowledges the
financial support of the Government of Canada
through the Book Publishing Industry Development
Program (BPIDP) for its activities. It also acknowledges
the support of the Canada Council for the Arts for its
publishing program.

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Hoffmann, Peter

The history of the German resistance, 1933-1945,
3rd English ed.
Translation of: *Widerstand, Staatsstreich,
Attentat*. Includes bibliographical references and
index.

ISBN 0-7735-1531-3

1. Anti-Nazi movement 2. Hitler, Adolf, 1889.

1945 - Assassination attempt, 1944 (July 20).

I. Title.

FC256.3.H613 1996

943086

C96-900478-8

Contents

| | | |
|------------------------------|--|-----|
| Author's Foreword | ix | |
| Preface to the Third Edition | xiii | |
| PART I | THE BACKGROUND | |
| 1 | The Year 1933 | 3 |
| 2 | Forms of Resistance | 18 |
| 3 | Top-Level Crisis | 36 |
| PART II | THE SUDETEN CRISIS AND THE ATTEMPTED COUP OF 1938 | |
| 4 | Operation 'Green' | 49 |
| 5 | Foreign Policy and Resistance | 54 |
| 6 | Beck's Plans | 69 |
| 7 | Halder's Plans | 81 |
| PART III | PLANS FOR A COUP 1939-1940 | |
| 8 | Before the Outbreak of War | 99 |
| 9 | Plans, Probings and Memoranda | 113 |
| 10 | Halder's New Plan | 128 |
| 11 | Further Efforts | 145 |
| 12 | Soundings Abroad | 153 |
| PART IV | INTERNAL POLITICAL PLANS | |
| 13 | Schmid Noerr | 175 |
| 14 | Hassell | 178 |
| 15 | Popitz | 180 |
| 16 | Goerdeler | 184 |
| 17 | The Kreisau Circle | 192 |
| 18 | Socialists | 198 |
| PART V | CONTACTS WITH THE ENEMY 1940-1944 | |
| 19 | Albrecht Haushofer 1940-1941 | 205 |
| 20 | Hassell 1941-1942 | 211 |
| 21 | Lochner 1941-1942 | 214 |
| 22 | Trott, Bonhoeffer, Schönfeld 1942 | 216 |
| 23 | Moltke 1943 | 225 |
| 24 | Trott 1943-1944 | 228 |

Contents

| | | |
|------------------|---|-------|
| 25 | Gisevius | 235 |
| 26 | Miscellaneous Contacts | 240 |
| 27 | 'Eastern Solution'? | 243 |
| 28 | Otto John 1944 | 246 |
| PART VI | ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS 1933–1942 | |
| 29 | The Early Days | 251 |
| 30 | Attempts of 1938–1942 | 255 |
| PART VII | TRESCKOW AND ARMY GROUP CENTRE | |
| 31 | Preparations | 263 |
| 32 | Projections of 1943 | 278 |
| 33 | Abortive Plans | 290 |
| 34 | 'Valkyrie' | 301 |
| PART VIII | STAUFFENBERG AND THE REPLACEMENT ARMY | |
| 35 | Stauffenberg's Career | 315 |
| 36 | Assassination Attempts – Bussche, Kleist, Breitenbuch | 322 |
| 37 | Procurement of Explosive | 333 |
| 38 | Communications Planning | 337 |
| 39 | Internal Political Planning | 348 |
| 40 | Stauffenberg's First Two Assassination Attempts | 373 |
| PART IX | 20 JULY 1944 | |
| 41 | 'Wolfschanze' | 397 |
| 42 | Berlin: The Coup | 412 |
| 43 | The Coup in the Provinces | 440 |
| 44 | Prague, Vienna, Paris | 461 |
| 45 | Collapse in Berlin | 479 |
| PART X | WRECK OF THE OPPOSITION | |
| 46 | Summary Court Martial | 507 |
| 47 | Arrests | 509 |
| 48 | People's Court, Executions, Concentration Camps | 524 |
| Notes | | 535 |
| Appendices | Map of Europe as at 20 July 1944 | 724–5 |
| | Map of Germany – The <i>Wehrkreise</i> | 726–7 |
| | Berlin Area | 728–9 |
| | Berlin City Plan | 730–1 |
| | 'Wolfschanze' HQ Area with Airfield, 1941–1944 | 732–3 |
| | 'Wolfschanze' HQ, July 1944 | 734–5 |
| | 'Wolfschanze' Telephone Communications | 736 |
| | 'Wolfschanze' Teleprinter Communications | 737 |
| | Signals Diagram – Eastern Germany | 738 |
| | Diagram – Channels of Command | 739 |
| | Plan of Briefing Hut in 'Wolfschanze' | 740 |
| | Plan of Office of C-in-C Replacement Army | 740 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Diagram – British Chemical Time Fuse | 741 |
| Diagram – British Adhesive Mine – The ‘Clam’ | 741 |
| Some Secret Reports on the German opposition received by the US Government | 742 |
| Text of important Teleprinter Messages | 754 |
| Report by Werner Vogel, 26 June 1970 | 762 |
| Stauffenberg’s Attendance at Briefings in the <i>Führer’s</i> HQ in July 1944 | 764 |
| Some of the more important Headquarters Ranks – Approximate Equivalents | 765 |
| Abbreviations and Glossary | 769 |
| Sources and Bibliography | 773 |
| Addenda to the Bibliography | 813 |
| Index | 817 |
| Errata and Addenda | 850 |

This page intentionally left blank

Author's Foreword

There has always been resistance to authority ever since authority existed. If the possessor of power, based on a traditional or written code of law, abuses his authority, if he does not fulfil the obligations which men have always considered inseparable from power, the victims of such abuse are entitled to consider themselves released from their own obligations. Mediaeval feudal law was based on such a reciprocity of service – protection and livelihood on the one side, obedience and allegiance on the other. In 1530 even the Lutheran princes, despite Luther's doctrine of god-given authority, claimed the right of resistance to the measures of the Emperor. In 1804, with the onset of the Napoleonic hurricane and the end of the Holy Roman Empire in mind, Friedrich Schiller put the following into the mouth of Stauffacher in *Wilhelm Tell*:

When the oppressed for justice looks in vain,
When his sore burden may no more be borne,
With fearless heart he makes appeal to Heaven
And thence brings down his everlasting rights
Which there abide, inalienably his
And indestructible as are the stars.
Nature's primeval state returns again
Where man stands hostile to his fellow man,
And if all other means shall fail his need
One last resource remains – his own good sword.

Admittedly the right of resistance has never been undisputed. The Roman legal luminaries developed the concept of the majesty of the ruler and the sovereignty of the state, a notion overemphasized in 19th-century Germany by many; this hardly allowed room for any legal resistance. Many of the 17th-century philosophers of natural law, Thomas Hobbes for instance, flatly denied any right of resistance. Others, however, have deduced from the law of nature, from the assumed basic legal state of freedom, a right to resistance which has in practice been exercised over and over again.

There is moreover no lack of examples of the exercise of this right of resistance. In 1649 the English followed the doctrine of sovereignty of the people to its extreme conclusion and beheaded their King, Charles I; in 1688 they refused the throne to one of his descendants. Between 1789 and 1795 the

Author's Foreword

French sought to assert the concept of the people's sovereignty with terrible consistency and during the 19th century almost all European peoples attempted, by means of more or less coordinated resistance to the established State authority, to obtain for themselves that which the French Revolution had achieved – individual freedom, legal and economic security, the 'rights of man', in short a constitution and a legal definition of the nation's existence. Resistance to a state of affairs felt to be intolerable but nevertheless maintained by the State is therefore nothing unheard-of in the history either of Europe or of Germany.

The resistance which is the subject of this book is in this line of tradition. In broad terms this resistance had already begun before Hitler's seizure of power; in the true sense, however, it began only in 1933 and even then took five years to progress to the stage which is the real hallmark of resistance, dealt with in this book – the attempt at a *coup d'état*. For this the spur provided by the imminent threat of a major war was necessary. In this context, therefore, 'resistance' implies activity designed to bring about the overthrow of the Nazi regime from within; in general terms it was carried on by those groups directly or indirectly involved in the assassination attempt of 20 July 1944.

Active resistance to an unlawful regime can only be demanded from the mass of the people by someone both ready and competent to organize and lead it. In the state constructed by Hitler, with its feared and apparently ubiquitous police, with its social achievements and its apparently brilliant successes, this was not in practice possible and, when catastrophe was visibly approaching, the majority simply wanted to save their skins. In such a society only a few highly-placed functionaries possessed both the essential timely insight into the realities of the situation and the authority to deal with it accordingly by opposition to the government. Only a few were able to make up their minds unequivocally whether and when a sworn oath and pledged loyalty had become meaningless and were only assisting in the destruction of that which they were supposed to protect. Both condemnation and denigration of those who remained faithful to their oath are equally pharisaical. Equally wrong is condemnation of the conspirators, who refused to recognize 'law' based solely on force, when it was destroying life rather than preserving it. Such an attitude elevates the form of the law above its purpose or content. The attitude of the conspirators was the more spiritually creative and fundamentally humane in that it accorded with the principle of life and the preservation of life.

It is now thirty years since the end of the Second World War and during this period innumerable authors have dealt with Germany's most recent past. They have tried to explain how it was possible for a world conflagration to be initiated in which over forty million men lost their lives and which ended in the dismemberment of Germany, the division of Europe, and Russian military hegemony on the continent. Since the war thousands of books and articles have been published purporting to describe what was being done inside Ger-

many, initially against the ruinous policy of the Nazi regime and its consequences, finally with the object of the regime's total elimination. These publications include a considerable number of outstanding works but an even greater number which fail to satisfy the requirements of historical scholarship. All have one failure in common: an inadequate basis of source material for an account of the concrete attempts to overthrow the Nazi regime and do away with Hitler.

There are many reasons for this. Many authors have been and still are today more interested in describing the motives of the resistance than its actual deeds; many who wrote of their own experiences knew and saw only a small section of the whole; for others numerous important sources were inaccessible at the time of writing. In many respects the position in regard to sources was more difficult twenty years after the end of the war than it was in 1945. Numerous witnesses of these events had died; others had either forgotten or preferred to forget the details. On the other hand many of the former German *Reich's* official files relevant to research on the resistance have meanwhile been returned to the Federal Republic by the western Allies (it is, of course, hardly possible to say what important material is still stored away in the East); moreover discussion of the rights and wrongs of resistance can now take place in a calmer atmosphere than in the years immediately following the war, when 'denazification' and the search for the guilty were the order of the day. Many witnesses have therefore been prepared to give a factual account of their experiences when ten years earlier they would have held their tongues.

My starting point has been the conviction that the resistance movement of 20 July 1944 and its tragic failure can only really be comprehensible if the previous history and course of events are known in detail; I have accordingly been concerned primarily to clarify the course of events connected with those attempts to overthrow the regime or assassinate its leaders which progressed beyond the stage of mere thought and discussion. They culminated in the rising of 20 July, the last attempt of a long series. The well-known books by Hans Rothfels, Eberhard Zeller, Gerhard Ritter, Annedore Leber and others remain the basic secondary works for any character study of the personalities involved or their motives, for any understanding of the overall phenomenon of the resistance movement and for any study of the activities of individuals.

At this point I would wish to thank all those who have assisted me in my extensive researches. It is not possible to list them all individually but at least mention must be made of: the staff of the Federal Archives in Koblenz, that of the Württemberg *Land* Library in Stuttgart, that of the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* in Munich, of the Central Reference Archive of the Federal Archives in Kornelimünster, of the Central Office of Provincial Judiciaries in Ludwigsburg, of the Berlin Document Centre, of the National Archives, Washington (Messrs Wolfe, Bauer and Taylor were particularly helpful), of the Library of Congress, Washington, of the Hoover Institution in Stanford, California, where Mrs Agnes F. Peterson was a constant and reliable source of assistance, and of the Library of the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls; I should also mention the many people who were involved in these

Author's Foreword

events and who were prepared to tell me what they had seen (their names appear in the 'Notes' and 'Sources'). I am also grateful to the *Militär-geschichtliches Forschungsamt* (Military History Research Office) for knowledge of certain important papers, although I did not succeed in gaining sight of all relevant documents stored there.

Production of this book, which entailed much travel, would not have been possible had it not been for the initiative and generous financial support of the *Hilfswerk 20 Juli 1944* Foundation from 1962 to 1964, of the *Evangelische Verlagswerk* from 1963 to 1965, of the *Volkswagenwerk* Foundation in 1965 and of the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, from 1966 to 1968. My special thanks are due to all these institutions.

Last but not least I owe the completion of this book and of this third (revised and expanded) edition to the patience, understanding and active assistance of my wife. My thanks are also due to my father, Professor Wilhelm Hoffmann, and to Professor Hans Rothfels for reading the original manuscript and for their encouraging comments.

P.H.
McGill University, Montreal.

Preface to the Third Edition

This third English edition follows upon six German editions, the latest of which is still in print, and a French edition;¹ the passage of more than fifty years since the end of the Second World War has not diminished interest in the subject. This is a tribute to the extraordinary courage and moral steadfastness of the thousands of Germans who gave their lives to oppose Hitler's evil tyranny.

Tens of thousands of Germans were killed for one or another form of resistance. Between 1933 and 1945 Special Courts killed 12,000 Germans, courts martial killed 25,000 German soldiers, and 'regular' justice killed 40,000 Germans.² Many of these Germans were part of the government's civil or military service, a circumstance which enabled them to engage in subversion and conspiracy while involved, marginally or significantly, in the government's policies. They alone had any realistic prospect of overthrowing the evil regime, in contrast to the tens of thousands of declared or suspected opponents of Hitler's dictatorship who were in prisons and in concentrations camps.

Military and political leaders opposed Hitler in 1937 and 1938 when he was obviously driving to war. Most of them were simply removed from office, through persuasion, pressure, or nefarious intrigue. The response of society at large to the threat of war was similar to that of the military and political leaders. For instance, Berliners flatly refused to cheer on 27 September 1938 when combat troops of the 2nd Mechanized Division from Stettin were marched through their streets. The American CBS correspondent William Shirer recorded their reaction in his diary:

The hour was undoubtedly chosen today to catch the hundreds of thousands of Berliners pouring out of their offices at the end of the day's work. But they ducked into the subways, refused to look on, and the handful that did stand at the curb in utter silence unable to find a word of cheer for the flower of their youth going away to the glorious war. It has been the most striking demonstration against war I've ever seen. Hitler himself reported furious. I had not been standing long at the corner when a policeman came up the Wilhelmstrasse from the direction of the Chancellery and shouted to the few of us standing at the curb that the Führer was on his balcony reviewing the troops. Few moved.

Preface

I went down to have a look. Hitler stood there, and there weren't two hundred people in the street or the great square of the Wilhelmsplatz. Hitler looked grim, then angry, and soon went inside, leaving his troops to parade unreviewed. What I've seen tonight almost rekindles a little faith in the German people. They are dead set against war.³

Mass action against the regime during the war was prevented, however, primarily by loyalty to the government in time of war and to the soldiers who were fighting and dying at the fronts, combined with the conditions of a brutally efficient police state. The attitude of the population was also affected by the fair chance of survival that most Germans enjoyed, despite enemy bombing of most of their larger cities, secret police surveillance and raids, and the threat of concentration camp. Attempts to organize popular resistance during the war proved to be impossible. Socialist and Communist resistance cells attempted to produce effective opposition to Hitler's regime both before and during the war, but the secret police kept them constantly on the defensive and arrested most of their activists.⁴ For several months in 1942 and 1943 the White Rose student group secretly distributed leaflets in which they called for resistance against the war, the killing of the Jews, and the other crimes the regime was continuously committing; but they were arrested and executed before they were able to generate any significant support.⁵ In June 1944 underground Communist and Social-Democrat functionaries planning concerted action were discovered and arrested before they could even begin to contact their followers to call on them to rise up against the regime.⁶

After the war, recognition of the resistance was muted. The Western Allied occupation powers proscribed the entire German nation under a 'collective-guilt' theory which precluded the American, British, and French military governments in Germany from acknowledging any German resistance, while the Russian military government in the central and eastern German provinces approved only of the Communist resistance and discounted all other resistance as 'reactionary'.

The ambivalence most Germans felt toward the resistance limited their acknowledgment as well. Once the regime's crimes had been revealed and the nation subjected to prosecution and condemnation by the victors, failure to have resisted Hitler's rule was an embarrassment. Celebrating the resisters, on the other hand, appeared to be taking the side of the victors. This ambivalence was reflected in the public positions of the major post-war political parties. While many of their leaders came from the ranks of Hitler's opponents, and some were survivors of the active resistance, they competed intensely for the most 'national' public stance, and for the votes of the more than ten million Germans who had been expelled from German territories annexed by Czechoslovakia and Poland.

Ambiguities continued after two German states were constituted in 1949, under Western and Soviet Russian auspices respectively. From 1951 onward the government of West Germany regularly made public declarations of respect and approval of the anti-Hitler resistance. At the same time hundreds

of thousands of former members of the National Socialist Party were rehabilitated in the wake of the Korean War and the beginning integration of the Federal Republic into the defence structure of the West. More than six years after the fall of Hitler's dictatorship, the government got around to making some efforts to include survivors and dependants of executed resisters in programs for the compensation of victims of the National Socialist regime and to reinstate their pension rights and restore their confiscated property.⁷

In the 1960s and 1970s there were concerted attacks on the German resistance from both the political Right and Left. Those from the Right commonly sought to portray Hitler's opponents as traitors to the nation and as otherwise morally flawed, while those on the political Left tended to accuse them of having been 'undemocratic' and anti-Semitic, or belittled the resistance as based 'merely' on the moral imperative.⁸

Disdain for resistance motivated by a moral imperative must be based on a rather cynical view of human affairs. The accusations of treason, 'undemocratic' intentions, and anti-Semitism are unsupportable. Treason against the country is defined by the Criminal Code as the intention and attempt to harm the interests and integrity of Germany: the resisters' aim was the exact opposite. The claim that the resisters were not 'democratic' is based on the failure to recognize the resisters' plans as the necessary precautions against the recurrence of the 'democratic' chaos of the years before 1933 which had produced the Hitler dictatorship. The anti-Semitism accusation against most resisters is patently false, and for the rest at least disingenuous since it equates the anti-Semitism common everywhere before 1933 (deplorable as it was) with Hitler's murderous persecution, against which the resisters staked their lives.⁹

Until the 1960s the government of the former Soviet zone of occupation, known as the 'German Democratic Republic' from 1949 to 1990, was unwilling to acknowledge that there had been any resistance except that by Communists. In 1964 a Soviet journalist published a book which credited parts of the 'conservative', 'bourgeois', and 'national' resistance with some measure of 'progressiveness'. Since then the East German government, having always claimed to be the only legitimate custodian of the heritage of the German nation, has admitted some non-Communist heroes of the resistance to its own pantheon by declaring them 'progressive', which is to say friendly toward the Soviet Union and the Communist ideology. Historians and journalists in the 'German Democratic Republic' have also published a few books and articles on the non-Communist resistance.¹⁰ But the East German government did not permit them free use of the archives within or outside their borders and forced them to subject their writing, even about the Communist resistance, to day-to-day political considerations. As a consequence, they were not able to add much to our knowledge about the German resistance. On the contrary, East German writers sought to demonstrate that leading resisters such as Claus von Stauffenberg, Albrecht Mertz von Quirnheim, and Helmuth von Moltke had affinities to the 'progressive' forces of society; some of these writers did not stop short of forgery to do so.¹¹

Preface

There have been periods in the Federal Republic of Germany when the so-called 'conservative resistance' to Hitler received a good deal of attention and recognition, both in public declarations and in the work of researchers. These periods have alternated with periods during which the dominant historians treated social, institutional, and system history as being more important than biography and the 'history of events'. During the latter periods Communist, Socialist, and 'grass-roots' resistance received more consideration, and there were also efforts in West Germany to rehabilitate the reputations of Communists and fellow-travellers who had cooperated with the Soviet Union from inside Germany during the war. But this historiography produced little new factual information, partly because the Soviet Union controlled much of the relevant archival material in Russia and East Germany and permitted only orthodox sycophancy.

Judicial prosecution of National Socialist criminals and political events since 1949 have continued to cause controversy about the resistance, partly about what actually happened and partly about fundamental questions of its justification. A debate in the Bonn parliament in 1969 that led to the abolition of the statute of limitations for genocide, for example, provoked such a controversy. Since 1967 student unrest, anarchist terrorism, and media campaigns organized by the East German government have distorted public perception of the anti-Hitler resistance. Opponents of the social and democratic order of the West achieved the same effect when they declared themselves to be 'resisters', although they could not, and did not wish to, identify with the spirit of the morally motivated resistance against National Socialism.

The periods of shifting attention and thematic emphasis have alternated approximately synchronously with changes of parliamentary majorities and governments between the Christian Democratic Union and the Social Democratic Party. The Christian Democratic Union led the government from 1949 to 1969 and 1981 to the present, and the Social Democratic Party from 1969 to 1981.

Generational change has also had an impact on the way the resistance was perceived. The number of those born after 1945 has increased both absolutely and proportionately, and this new generation has tended to view the resistance with less bias than their elders. They were also attracted by the moral rigor and existential depth of the anti-Hitler resistance. From 1982 on, resistance against National Socialism generally has been given greater recognition than before. Polls taken in 1951, 1956, 1960, 1964, 1970, and 1985 indicate first a decrease, and then, in 1985, a significant increase in knowledge and approval of the resistance among the population.¹²

The concept of the right to resist an evil regime has taken hold of the general consciousness in Germany to a much greater extent than before 1933. In 1968 the parliament in Bonn approved an amendment to the Constitution that declares that all Germans have the right to resist anyone attempting to do away with their constitutional order, should no other remedy be possible.¹³ Knowledge about the German resistance against Hitler has increased outside of Germany as well. There has been a steady flow of publications, and in

1992 an American documentary film on the German resistance, *The Restless Conscience*, was nominated for an 'Oscar'.¹⁴

Knowledge about the aims and the struggle of the resistance, and about its intellectual and moral roots, was generated after 1945 through the publication of memoirs about the resistance and diaries and letters of resisters. These were soon followed by comprehensive assessments, biographies of Carl Goerdeler and Claus von Stauffenberg, a comprehensive history of Helmuth von Moltke's 'Kreisau Circle', numerous studies of issues and aspects of the resistance, and the first German edition of the present work.¹⁵ Among the more substantial works about the resistance which have appeared since then are a new, more accurate, and more comprehensive edition of Ulrich von Hassell's diaries,¹⁶ Helmuth von Moltke's letters to his wife,¹⁷ a work on the foreign contacts of the resistance,¹⁸ a new biography of Claus von Stauffenberg based on a comprehensive collection of sources,¹⁹ a notable account of the resistance activities of a hitherto relatively unknown group of progressive conservatives,²⁰ and a detailed treatment of the rescue of Jews by a resistance group in the German military counter-intelligence service.²¹ An international conference on the resistance held in Berlin in 1984 resulted in a voluminous publication of conference papers, which was soon reprinted and sold commercially, and in numerous other publications.²² The year 1994 again saw a flood of new publications on the resistance.

Only a few of all the publications which have appeared since the second English edition of the present work, however, have at all modified the account given here; those that produced more than marginally new information are mentioned in the 'Errata and Addenda' in this third English edition.

P.H.
McGill University
Montreal, 1996

NOTES

Works which did not appear in the first two English editions of *The History of the German Resistance* and which are referred to in the following notes are cited in full in an addendum to the Bibliography.

- 1 Hoffmann, *Widerstand, Staatsstreich, Attentat. Der Kampf der Opposition gegen Hitler*, 4 editions and two licenced editions produced by other publishers; Peter Hoffmann, *La résistance allemande contre Hitler*.
- 2 Trial, Vol. 38, pp. 362–5; Broszat, 'Nationalsozialistische Konzentrationslager 1933 bis 1945' in Broszat, Jacobsen, Krausnick, *Konzentrationslager, Kommissarbefehl, Judenverfolgung*, pp. 158–9; Boehm, *We Survived*, p. viii based on Secret State Police (Gestapo) documents; equally Almond, 'The German Resistance Movement', pp. 409–527; cf. Sofsky, *Die Ordnung des Terrors*, pp. 56–7; Wagner, *Der Volksgerichtshof im nationalsozialistischen Staat*, p. 945; Messerschmidt and Wüllner, *Die Wehrmachtjustiz im Dienste des Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 49–50, 70, 73; Kiessel, 'Das Attentat des 20. Juli 1944 und seine Hintergründe'; Hammer, 'Die "Gewitteraktion" vom 22.8.1944', p. 15.
- 3 Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, pp. 142–143.

Preface

- 4 See Glondajewski and Schumann, *Die Neubauer-Poser-Gruppe*; Duhnke, *Die KPD von 1933 bis 1945*.
- 5 See pp. 23, 30, 278.
- 6 See pp. 363–4.
- 7 Reich Minister of Justice [Georg] Thierack to Heinrich Himmler 24 Oct. 1944, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, Slg Schumacher; Large, 'Uses of the Past: The Anti-Nazi Resistance Legacy in the Federal Republic of Germany', in Large, *Contending with Hitler*, p. 167.
- 8 [Hans W. Hagen], *Zwischen Eid und Befehl*; Remer, *20. Juli 1944*; Ribbentrop, *Die Kriegsschuld des Widerstandes*; Balzer, *Der 20. Juli und der Landesverrat*; *Verrat und Widerstand im Dritten Reich*; Mommsen, 'Gesellschaftsbild und Verfassungspläne des deutschen Widerstandes'; Hillgruber, 'Tendenzen, Ergebnisse und Perspektiven der gegenwärtigen Hitler-Forschung'; Müller, *General Ludwig Beck*; Dipper, 'Der Deutsche Widerstand und die Juden'.
- 9 Hoffmann, 'Persecution of the Jews as a Motive for Resistance against National Socialism'.
- 10 Mel'nikov, *Zagovor 20 iulija 1944 goda v Germanii*; Melnikow, *20. Juli 1944*; Finker, *Stauffenberg und der 20. Juli 1944*; Finker, *Graf Moltke und der Kreisauer Kreis*.
- 11 Emrich and Nötzold, 'Der 20. Juli in den öffentlichen Gedenkreden der Bundesrepublik und in der Darstellung der DDR', p. 10; Wegner-Korfes, 'Der 20. Juli 1944 und das Nationalkomitee "Freies Deutschland"', Scheel, 'Die "Rote Kapelle" und der 20. Juli 1944'; Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg* (German ed.), pp. 472–4, 573–4.
- 12 Noelle and Neumann, *Jahrbuch der öffentlichen Meinung 1947–1955*, p. 138; 1957, pp. 144–5; 1965, p. 235; Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, *Der 20. Juli 1944*; Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach to the author 20 Nov. 1978; Allensbacher Archiv, *IfD-Umfrage 4056*.
- 13 *Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany*, rev. and updated ed. June 1994, art. 20.4.
- 14 Large, *Contending with Hitler*; Nicosia and Stokes, *Germans Against Nazism*; Pejsa, *Matriarch of Conspiracy*; Schöllgen, *A Conservative against Hitler*; *The Restless Conscience*, documentary film by Hava Kohav Beller, 1992.
- 15 Rothfels, *The German Opposition to Hitler*; Rothfels, *Die deutsche Opposition gegen Hitler*; Zeller, *Geist der Freiheit*; Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler und die deutsche Widerstandsbewegung*; Kraus, *Die im Braunschweiger Remerprozess erstatteten moraltheologischen und historischen Gutachten nebst Urteil*; *Vollmacht des Gewissens*; Roon, *Neuordnung (German Resistance to Hitler)*; Hoffmann, *Widerstand, Staatsstreich, Attentat*; Kramarz, *Claus Graf Stauffenberg 15. November 1907–20. Juli 1944 (Stauffenberg. Life and Death of an Officer)*; Müller, *Oberst i.G. Stauffenberg*; Peukert, *Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde*; Cartarius, *Bibliographie "Widerstand"*; Laska, *Nazism, Resistance, and Holocaust in World War II. A Bibliography*; Schmädeke and Steinbach, *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*; Nicosia and Stokes, *Germans Against Nazism*; Large, *Contending with Hitler*.
- 16 Hassell, *Die Hassell-Tagebücher 1938–1944*.
- 17 Moltke, *Letters to Freya*.
- 18 Klemperer, *German Resistance against Hitler*.
- 19 Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg. A Family History, 1905–1944*; German ed. *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg und seine Brüder*.
- 20 Sassini, *Liberale im Widerstand*.
- 21 Meyer, *Unternehmen Sieben*.
- 22 Schmädeke and Steinbach, *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*.

PART I/THE BACKGROUND

This page intentionally left blank

1 The Year 1933

On 30 January 1933 Adolf Hitler was appointed *Reich* Chancellor by President von Hindenburg; he was commissioned to form a government, for which he was to find a majority in the *Reichstag* later. He had therefore come to power by virtue of the provisions of the German *Reich's* current constitution, although he had been proclaiming for years that he would change both the State and the constitution, through which he had reached his goal, on National-Socialist and authoritarian lines – in other words destroy them.

The Weimar Republic, successor to the Prussian/German empire defeated in the First World War, had not been able to overcome its external or internal weaknesses and contradictions. In particular it had been unable to cope with the continuous and irresponsible attacks of its opponents, both left-wing and 'national' – German-National (*Deutschnationale*), reactionary, militarist and ultra-conservative; even in its early years there had been right- and left-wing extremist *putschs*, with uproar and separatism, with the refusal, primarily by the nationalist elements of the National Assembly, to affix their signature to the Treaty of Versailles and an equal refusal to assume responsibility for their action by forming a government. In the following years the victors too did not allow the young state to recover from the war; society and the economy were ruined and eroded by the burden of reparations and by inflation. When hatred finally began to give way to common sense and a good start had been made with economic consolidation, the reviving republic, in common with all industrial nations, was rocked in 1929 by the most catastrophic economic crisis which the world had ever seen.

Adolf Hitler, born in Austria, stateless from 1924 to 1932 and a devilishly clever demagogue, was the most adroit of all in exploiting this antipathy to the 'Weimar system', which was held guilty of everything; he was largely responsible for fanning this antipathy and finally, with the aid of his following, swollen into a mass party, he was in a position to administer the death-blow to the Weimar Republic.

He had, however, by no means 'seized' power entirely on his own initiative, although this was what he said; it would in any case have been contrary to the legality by which he had ostensibly been setting so much store ever since the miserable failure of his *putsch* in 1923. Instead power had fallen into his lap as the result of the apparently insoluble problems of internal politics, the constitution and the economy. The politicians, whether opportunist, perplexed or

The Background

dazzled, were at work behind the scenes with their intrigues; 'the people', however, had also played no small part in Hitler's rise to power. Precisely how strong Hitler's popular backing was can hardly be established; certain indications, however, enable some estimate to be made. In the elections of July 1932, 37.4% of all who went to the poll (84%) cast valid votes in favour of the NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei* – the Nazi party); in November 1932 the Nazi vote was 33.1% in an 80.6% poll. In March 1933, however, when the Nazis had been for a whole month in control of the *Reich* and Prussian Ministries of the Interior and therefore of the entire police force, when they had been terrorizing the population by means of the SA for more than four weeks, they still scored only 43.9% of all valid votes in an 88.7% poll.¹

The results of these three elections, of course, reflect the popular mood of 1933 only to a limited extent. Hundreds of thousands of people never registered their political views, at least not by going to the polls. The figures certainly require interpretation and must be looked at against the background of the situation at the time.

It will rightly be observed that a thirty to forty per cent vote for a lawless demagogue like Hitler, who made no secret of his views, was too large, in other words that it indicated a degree of extremist and violent nationalism greater than could be carried by a state as young as the Germany of that time. A good illustration of the open acknowledgment of violent crime by Hitler and his Nazis was provided by the 'Potempa case'. In August 1932 some SA men in the Silesian village of Potempa beat and kicked to death before his mother's eyes Konrad Pietzuch, one of their workmates who supported the Communist Party. Sentences of death and life imprisonment were pronounced. Hitler and the other Nazi leaders thereupon explicitly and publicly proclaimed in the Party newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, their solidarity with their 'comrades', swearing to revenge and release them.² Their acknowledgment of violence, crime and lawlessness was unmistakable in August 1932. The criminals were amnestied on 23 March 1933.

Although the 'Potempa case' can justifiably be quoted as a typical example of Nazi methods, an explanation is also to be found in the general political atmosphere of brutality and extremism characteristic of the years 1929–33. Disturbances and violence, political and criminal murder were the order of the day. Wildcat strikes broke out in various places, sometimes simply provoked by the extremists, who stood only to gain from chaos. The wildcat strike of transport workers in Berlin in 1932, for instance, was supported both by the communists and the Nazis.³

A further factor was the colossal unemployment; by February 1932 this had reached the terrifying figure of over six million and no effective reduction took place between the winters of 1931–32 and 1932–33. Not until 1933 was there any significant fall in unemployment; in the first six months of that year alone the reduction was over 1½ million.⁴

Despite some small improvement, in 1932 poverty was still very great, in many individual cases almost inconceivable. There were working-class

couples paying 10 marks rent per month but receiving only 3.20 marks per week in national assistance, leaving them in theory only 2.80 marks per month to live off. If they were not to die of hunger they had to rely on gifts from relatives and friends or credit in the shops. Another worker with a wife and two children received 9 marks per week in national assistance but was paying 4.50 per week in rent, leaving available for the family 0.16 marks per person per day.⁵ In this situation the communists promised class warfare and a better, but distant, future; the Nazis, on the other hand, promised work, bread and good order; since they also presented themselves as patriots, many believed in them rather than the communists who, it was feared, would bring revolution and civil war.

The extent of Hitler's following can therefore largely be explained by the general economic situation and by ill-feeling towards both the victors of the war and the people's own leaders, who were trying to reach some accommodation with the victor powers. On the other hand a very large section of the electorate, over half of the adult population which played any part at all in political life, had not been beguiled by Hitler and National-Socialism. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of voters were irreconcilably opposed to the Nazis. Only later, with the new government's growing success, did a broader-based measure of support develop among the masses and even this was coincident with the systematic destruction of all opposition organization by the new regimented (*'gleichgeschaltet'*) *Führer* State and the erection of the 'SS State' in which Heinrich Himmler, leader of an élite Party army, wielded an instrument of thorough domination in his capacity as *'Reichsführer-SS* and Chief of the German Police'. Then it seemed wise to keep quiet, to allow the new government, like the old, just to carry on, and to look for a job; things were now on the upgrade; the masses could see work and food ahead of them; those who behaved with the necessary propriety and were not in some way classified as 'enemies of the state' had no need to fear molestation by the regime.

In the early months of 1933 there was still some form of legal opposition. An incessant stream of prohibitions on meetings and publications, together with other repressive measures, descended upon it but initially neither the Social Democrats nor the communists were banned as organized political parties. Nevertheless, despite all the proclamations and fine words of the preceding years and months, they did not offer any large-scale resistance to the excesses of the Nazi-controlled government.

The Communist Party had long been in the forefront in preparing and arming for civil war against 'fascism'. Yet, when 'fascism' came to power, nothing really significant was done.⁶ The German Communist Party was directed by the Communist Party Central Committee of the Soviet Union, and the prevailing view there was that the advent of a fascist government should promote Germany's internal self-destruction and prepare the ground for a communist seizure of power. As we know, Stalin had imposed the principle of 'socialism in one country' in opposition to Trotsky's doctrine of continuing world revolution and he frowned on any attempt to instigate revolutions in neighbouring countries in support of that in Russia. In this it is admittedly

The Background

difficult to differentiate between Stalin's interest in the elimination of Trotsky and his genuine political convictions. In any case, however, persecution by the regime together with the ideological dissensions and quarrels between the German Communist Party and other left-wing political groupings made any real or effective cooperation between them impossible even in the hour of greatest danger. The call for a general strike on 25 February 1933 organized by the communists and Social-Democrats in concert was almost totally disregarded.

Three days later all previous political developments were overshadowed by the *Reichstag* fire. This enabled the wielders of power to take far sterner action against the communists than they had probably planned to do at this early stage of their rule.⁷ On 1 April the Executive Committee of the Comintern (Communist International, the coordinating agency for the work of non-Russian communist parties), which was impotent but never at a loss for tactical subterfuges, decided that, with the ban on the Communist Party, the open establishment of a fascist dictatorship must inevitably assist the masses to discard their democratic illusions; this would release them from Social-Democrat influence and accelerate the tempo of Germany's progress towards the proletarian revolution. Such opportunism does not detract from the heroism of the few Communist Party members who offered resistance. Nevertheless, as a revolutionary and anti-fascist organization, the German Communist Party had proved a failure. Many of its leading functionaries emigrated, leaving the perils of the underground struggle to their subordinate officials and members.

The attitude of the German Communist Party therefore stood in sharp contrast to its previous claims and public pronouncements but it was at least a truer reflection of its real influence on the masses than the reaction of the two largest left-wing political organizations, the Social-Democrats and the trade unions. They remained equally inactive, but there was nothing new or unusual in their inactivity. Ever since 1930, in a broader and more general sense ever since the early 1920s, since the Kapp *putsch*, even since the *Reichstag* vote on war loans in August 1914, the Social-Democrats had abandoned use of revolutionary methods. A legalistic attitude of mind was widespread and deep-rooted in the Party; a refusal to recognize the new government of 30 January 1933 was hardly possible; everything was confused, politically obscure and undefined; no one knew what to do.⁸ The leaders were not sure of the support of the working masses and did not think that they could risk a general strike. Inactivity seemed to offer the only chance of survival. In the space of a few weeks the basis of real power had changed radically as a result of the dissolution of the *Reichstag* on 1 February 1933, the electoral campaign, the Emergency Ordinance of 4 February, Göring's terror campaign in Prussia where he was Minister-President, and the rapid widespread muzzling of the press.

The emergency Ordinance of 4 February 1933, which was based on Article 48 of the Weimar constitution, forbade all open-air meetings or parades which might endanger public security.⁹ It was now a simple matter to ban all opposi-

tion demonstrations or gatherings and confiscate all publications which could be labelled as dangerous to public security and order. Anyone who contravened the Ordinance, anyone who organized some gathering subject to a ban, even a retrospective one, anyone who distributed printed matter, be it newspaper, poster, leaflet or advertisement thought by the new rulers to merit a ban, and even anyone who knew of such things and did not report them, could be punished with imprisonment and consequently arrested. In this way all opponents could be eliminated, ostensibly legally. The timing of the various measures was merely a question of tactics; clearly it was wrong to try to disrupt all opposition groups at one and the same time. The more they could be separated from one another, treated in isolation and, if possible, assaulted individually, while leaving the remainder in hope, the more helplessly they would have to surrender themselves to the wielders of power.

Everything else was designed more for the consolidation than for the seizure of power. The Nazis were as surprised as the communists by the *Reichstag* fire of 27 February 1933. Many of the government's measures were totally unplanned and ill-considered,¹⁰ but it seized the opportunity only five days before elections for a new *Reichstag* to complete its grip on all authority at home. The Emergency Ordinance abolished the basic rights and guarantees of personal freedom established under the Weimar constitution. Almost without restriction, certainly without a court order and without subsequent redress by the courts, people could now be arrested and detained for an indefinite period; theoretically, and largely also in practice, any human utterance, any exchange of information, any publication in word or picture was subject to censorship; periodicals and books could be banned, parties and associations dissolved, meetings forbidden and property confiscated.¹¹ All this struck at the whole basis of the rule of law in the state and the method used was that designed to save the state, the right of emergency legislation.

The Enabling Law of 23 March 1933, giving the government complete freedom of action without regard to parliamentary or constitutional limitations, was merely the 'legal' culminating point. The government was now explicitly authorized, not only to promulgate laws without the participation of the *Reichstag*, but even to introduce legislation incompatible with the constitution.¹² Shortly after the *Reichstag* elections of 5 March communist deputies were expelled from the House and their Party was banned; they could therefore do nothing against this law. The Social-Democrats fought it bravely but vainly. The Centre Party, the Bavarian Peoples Party and the remaining splinter groups lying between the socialists and the German-National/National-Socialist coalition voted for their own emasculation in the paradoxical hope of saving their existence thereby.¹³

The previous opposition leaders had now been 'cut out', to use an apt technological phrase, and the National-Socialists proceeded to ensure themselves total control over all walks of life by means of *Gleichschaltung*, in other words projecting on to the level of the *Länder* the prevailing political conditions in the *Reich*, elimination of the *Länder* parliaments, assumption of power in the *Länder* by Nazi *Reichsstatthalter* (Regents), penetration of all

The Background

official agencies and authorities by National-Socialists and finally the abolition of all parties except the NSDAP and proclamation of the 'Unity of Party and State'.¹⁴

Again and again the question has been asked: how was this possible? Why was there no opposition movement or even any stubborn defence of established rights?

There is no short satisfactory answer. Those who wrestle with this question generally, with some justification, refer to the 'situation at the time' which, they say, must be understood. Formation of a totalitarian state was something entirely new; there was no previous experience on which to draw. Germany had not achieved her form of government as a result of centuries-long endeavour; it had just 'happened' in 1919 along with military defeat and the collapse of a once-brilliant empire. Germany had then passed through a series of severe economic and political crises, for which the people and the majority of its representatives held not only their ex-enemies but also their own government largely responsible. Now, after a continuous political, economic and social crisis lasting since 1930, the country was politically exhausted. A sense of democracy and republican vigilance would have been fortunate accidents, certainly not a natural development. Before 30 January 1933, even before the elections of July and November 1932, people knew of the Nazis' violence, brutality and contempt for the law. But violence and brutality were attractive; many mistook them for strength and were convinced. On the other hand in the free elections held between 1919 and 1934 only a minority had ever voted for the NSDAP. The individual German had no influence on the events of 30 January, 4 February, 28 February and 23 March, in so far as he understood them at all. Many even of those who possessed all the necessary knowledge and information did not believe that the threats to which Hitler and his adherents were continuously giving vent, were seriously meant; they genuinely hoped that the Nazis could be tamed if they formed a minority in a cabinet, and would then be compelled to assume political responsibility.

The problem was therefore not solely lack of the will to resist but equally lack of comprehension of the nature of Nazism. Uncertainty and loss of the basic values added to ignorance, led to absence of comprehension and helplessness in face of the appearance of a totalitarian leviathan which felt itself bound by no dictates of humanity or law. People did not believe that the Nazis would obtain an absolute majority in the *Reichstag* to be elected on 5 March – and the Nazis did not; people naïvely hoped that the government could be held in check by parliamentary methods and by the checks and balances enshrined in the constitution, and be forced to return to the constitutional ways which from the outset it had rejected. As long as people thought this, there could be no question of an 'illegal' resistance.¹⁵ For the Social-Democrats in particular adherence to legality had become an *idée fixe*. The fact that the *Reichsbanner*, the socialist militant wing, other similar organizations and many of the workers were ready, even clamouring, for a fight by means of strikes, demonstrations, disturbances and even an armed rising, was of no avail. The Social-Democratic leadership remained im-

movable, hopeful, uncomprehending. There were sufficient subjective grounds for inactivity: the *Reichswehr's* apparent collaboration with the government; the formal legality of the Hitler government and its measures; the threat of the Social-Democratic Party's complete annihilation. Looked at from a distance, the most convincing explanation is lack of comprehension of Nazism and its true nature, despite the fact that there were plenty of warning voices. The courageous speech made in the *Reichstag* by Otto Wels, chairman of the Social-Democrats, protesting against the Enabling Law, should not be forgotten.

'Legal resistance', about which many cudgelled their brains, was an illusion. The electoral campaign preceding 5 March had shown that the Nazis were determined to cling to power 'by all methods'. The press was censored and deluged with restrictions; the radio was almost totally under Nazi control. More than four million adult Germans were quietly allowed to vote communist; then their elected deputies were arrested or forced into hiding and emigration, so that the relative Nazi strength in the *Reichstag* was increased. Finally the German Communist Party was banned altogether. The Social-Democrats were permitted to lead a shadowy existence for a time but on 22 June 1933 their hour of dissolution and proscription struck. By the end of the following three weeks no German political party existed apart from the NSDAP.¹⁶

Meanwhile the terror increased; all who opposed or fell foul of the authorities were literally clubbed down. As early as February 1933 the Nazis began to misuse the police as an instrument of power and terror, also to transfer auxiliary police functions to uniformed members of the Party and SA.¹⁷

So the 'legal' door was thrown wide open to arbitrary action and terror. A Party uniform and a white armband were adequate justification for the use of the rubber truncheon or revolver; arbitrary arrest was the rule; people were beaten up on the street, assaulted and kicked by undisciplined uniformed Nazis or 'shot while attempting to escape'. Thousands who survived their first assault were taken to 'wildcat concentration camps' run by the SA. Looting, theft, deprivation of liberty, bodily injury, manslaughter and murder were somewhat out-of-date expressions for measures now called 'police' and therefore 'legal'. Who can be surprised that many were intimidated by such terror?

Despite all this, and often before the terror had reached its full height, resistance to certain of the new government's measures was offered in many places both by official institutions and by individuals. In Bavaria there was widespread and energetic opposition to the *Gleichschaltung* policy; restorationist and even separatist motives and tendencies fused and coalesced with those of the federalists and anti-Nazis. Representatives of the Bavarian Peoples Party acted with special energy. They petitioned the *Reich* President and obtained assurances both from him and from von Papen, the Vice-Chancellor. Heinrich Held, the Party's leader, declared on several occasions in February that no *Reich* Commissar would cross the line of the Main with im-

The Background

punity; if, contrary to Hindenburg's assurances, one of them did enter Bavaria, he would be arrested forthwith. The Emergency Ordinance of 28 February, however, gave the government a 'legal' handle for the seizure of power in the *Länder*, including Bavaria, in so far as 'the necessary measures for the reestablishment of public security and order' had not been taken there.¹⁸ Decision on whether this had in fact been done was the prerogative of the Nazi Minister of the Interior, Dr Wilhelm Frick. Further protests were of no avail; legal methods and procedures could achieve nothing against the ostensible legality of a dictatorship which was in fact violating both the constitution and the law. Here was yet another illustration of the complete change in the location of power, also of the complete misappreciation of the situation by the victims and the protesters.

After the elections, in which the Bavarian Nazis scored 43%, all possible methods were employed to impose *Gleichschaltung* on Bavaria, the last *Land* without a Nazi government.¹⁹ On 9 March 1933 armed detachments of SA and SS dominated the streets of Munich; the swastika flag was hoisted on the City Hall tower; SA leaders in uniform demanded the immediate installation of General Ritter von Epp as State Commissar-General. The Bavarian government, however, remained firm and opened negotiations with the *Reichswehr* on measures to be taken against revolution in the streets. But the *Reichswehr* Ministry in Berlin was discouraging; events in Bavaria, it said, were purely internal political matters, from which the *Reichswehr* must remain aloof; it would remain standing at ease. Heinrich Held, the Bavarian Minister-President, remained unshaken; Ernst Röhm, Chief of Staff of the SA, General von Epp, Adolf Wagner, *Gauleiter* of Bavaria, and Heinrich Himmler, commander of the SS, were sent unceremoniously packing.

What could have been done? For technical reasons effective resistance was barely conceivable. How long would the police obey the orders of the legal Bavarian government? How long could they hold out against the SA and SS? Whom would the *Reichswehr* obey, should it cease standing at ease? Should the population be incited to civil war and revolt against uniformed 'authority'? Resistance would have implied disturbance of public order and so given the *Reich* government the handle for which it had been waiting all along.

'Legal' resistance could achieve nothing in the long run. The SA dominated the streets; there was much disorder and the government was largely powerless. So the inevitable happened; the *Reich* government intervened on the basis of the Emergency Ordinance of 28 February and appointed Ritter von Epp its representative in Bavaria. Protests and telegrams were of no further avail; the President, through Hans Otto Meißner, his State Secretary, replied that application should be made direct to Hitler. Thus the President registered his own impotence.

In other *Länder* men were to be found no less courageous than those in Bavaria. Many of them were executed by the Nazis after 20 July 1944. Dr Carl Goerdeler, the Burgomaster of Leipzig, stopped the swastika flag, which was not yet the national emblem, being hoisted on the City Hall; he also intervened personally to protect Jewish businessmen from molestation by the SA.²⁰ Such

resistance was frequently of short duration; it was offered in ignorance of the perils involved and in the belief that the incident concerned was due to an isolated, or at any rate temporary, excess of zeal, not to deliberate policy. But in those days all were treated alike; everywhere the Nazis seized power with unexampled brutality. The discussions and parliamentary methods, of which the Social-Democrats were the main protagonists in their efforts to stop the Enabling Law, could no longer achieve anything.

The reader will wonder to what extent the Nazis' partners in the government coalition offered resistance to the progressive totalitarian seizure of power; from the outset, after all, they had joined the coalition with the intention of 'taming' Hitler and his party and confining them to proper legal procedures.

Hugenberg was the one who at least made some move towards a demand for the association of President Hindenburg with those laws due to be promulgated on the basis of the enabling legislation.²¹ Meissner, Hindenburg's State Secretary, however, assured him that this was neither necessary nor would Hindenburg wish it. Nevertheless, he said it was for consideration whether Hindenburg's authority should not somehow be 'engaged' in the case of particularly important legislation; moreover the President had in fact 'insuperable objections' to one proposed ordinance whereby the *Reichstag* fire-raising would be punishable with death, a sentence not on the statute book when the fire took place.

The resistance offered by the Nazis' political partners was therefore very small, in fact insignificant. In practice they placidly renounced their support from the President, in effect the whole basis of such influence as remained to them. They had no wish to cause a split by open opposition in cabinet.

Ultimately, therefore, though in face of determined resistance from the socialist parliamentary party, the *Reichstag* was put out of business through the acceptance of the Enabling Law on 23 March 1933. It was a spectacle of opportunism, of desperate attempts by the parties to preserve their existence which in fact they succeeded in prolonging only by a few weeks. This spectacle of the weakness shown by the remnants of a never very robust democracy is undoubtedly both disillusioning and exasperating. In practice a refusal to vote the Enabling Law would have achieved nothing other than to allow the parties to make an honourable exit from the stage. This weakness was general and it applied to all walks of political life.

Parliament did not, of course, agree to the Enabling Law entirely of its own free will. The *Reichstag* met under unconcealed pressure from the Nazi private armies, the SA and the SS, and under pressure and threat from the streets. Well-drilled supporters, who penetrated even into the Chamber, gave notice of violence; in the Kroll Opera House, where parliament had met ever since the *Reichstag* fire, SA and SS uniforms dominated the scene; SA and SS 'stewards' stood menacingly beside the opposition benches; there were shouts of 'Heil', thunderous applause for Hitler, swastika flags, the singing of the national anthem at the end of Hitler's speech – everything designed to create the intended mass-meeting atmosphere.²² In a famous speech Otto Wels, the

The Background

Social-Democratic Party leader, rejected the Enabling Law, defending freedom and democracy. Hitler thereupon replied that 'only for the sake of the law' had they sought from the *Reichstag* something 'which we could have taken in any case'. So the Enabling Law, giving the Nazis a free hand in almost everything, was forced through. In the end, however, the Nazis neither observed nor respected this law which had reached the statute book in so illegal and unconstitutional a manner; they broke it as unscrupulously as they did all their other obligations and promises. With his unconcealed scorn for procedure adopted 'for the sake of the law', Hitler had, as always, given forewarning of his real intentions.

In parallel with the elimination of the parties went that of the trade unions, potentially strong though they were; the major campaign against them, however, did not open until April 1933. Faced with an apparently inevitable choice between *Gleichschaltung* and elimination, the trade unions, despite all earlier brave words and even occasional militant utterances in February 1933, proved as ineffective as the Social-Democratic leaders. One historian describes them as helpless, timid, resigned and fragile.²³

After the March 1933 elections the SA together with members of the Nazi factory cells began to occupy certain trade union offices. The reply to this was acquiescence instead of resistance. The Committee of the German General Trade Union Federation decided to address a memorandum to Hitler; in this Theodor Leipart, First Chairman of the Free Trade Unions, said that he wished to keep the trade unions out of politics and would accept any regime 'of whatever type'. The Nazis then succeeded in persuading large numbers of trade union members to participate in the May Day celebrations – the day had been declared a paid holiday, thereby forestalling the trade unions. The rest then followed 'blow upon blow'. On 2 May *Gleichschaltung* of the trade unions began with arrests of trade union leaders, occupation of trade union offices by SA and SS, expropriation of trade union banks and the trade union press. Trade union officials were thrown into concentration camps, their previous readiness to compromise being scoffed at as subservient hypocrisy. On the same day formation of the Nazi 'German Labour Front' was announced. All this happened ostensibly without legal backing from the government; it was a purely Party initiative.

In the following months such members of the Social-Democratic hierarchy as had not emigrated suffered a similar fate. On 29 May Party headquarters in Prague announced the start of illegal resistance and underground activity – in fact an admission of the loss of almost all freedom of action inside Germany.²⁴ Finally a split developed between the Social-Democratic leaders in Berlin and those in Prague; the Party collapsed and was in effect banned by the government at the end of June.

Finally even Hitler's partners, the German-Nationals, were persecuted, bypassed and terrorized, primarily when they attempted to protest against Nazi encroachments and Nazi tutelage. Here again arrests, prohibitions, beatings-up and SA raids were the order of the day.²⁵

Were there other spheres, the intellectual for instance, where the Nazis met

greater and more determined resistance? Here too the general picture is one of acquiescence, weakness, opportunism, delusion and error. Hundreds of German professors hastened to acclaim Hitler and National-Socialism; the notorious speech by Martin Heidegger, Chancellor of Freiburg University, on 27 May 1933 was merely a particularly striking, but by no means isolated, instance.²⁶

Even the churches were not entirely immune to this conformism, although their whole *raison d'être* was as vitally affected as that of the sciences. They were, however, the only organizations to produce some form of a popular movement against the Nazi regime.

Admittedly in the early days of the regime the churches were hardly engaged in anything like a struggle. No one can deny that Martin Niemöller was the outstanding figure among the leaders of ecclesiastical resistance and that he suffered severely for his courageous stand by long years spent in a concentration camp. Even he, however, in a thanksgiving sermon in the autumn of 1933 spoke of 'calling and status, race and nationality [*Volkstum*]' as inescapable requirements and of the reawakening of the German people.²⁷ The Nazi regime initially treated the churches with the greatest circumspection; it had no wish to start a battle for the prevalence of a new ideology during its very first months; appeasement was the watchword. On the other side many evangelical pastors who had once been royalist and imperialist and were still patriots, hailed and accepted the spirit of Germany as preached by Luther, heroic piety and even a form of Christian faith 'suited to the times'; many even supported the movement known as 'German Christians' in their opposition to Marxism, Jewry, cosmopolitanism and freemasonry.

Ludwig Müller, the Nazi '*Reich* Bishop', however, was not accepted by the evangelical church despite a public statement by Bernhard Rust, Commissar for Science, Art and Popular Education in Prussia, that the formation in the church of a 'first focus of resistance' was not to be tolerated. Soon such organizations as the 'Pastors Emergency League' and the 'Confessional Church' were formed, initially to combat the 'Aryan paragraphs' in the new German church constitution of 11 June 1933. Led by Martin Niemöller of Dahlem and the young theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, they resisted any adulteration of the evangelical faith by Germanistic or other non-Christian ideas. Thousands of pastors now felt themselves, and remained, under an obligation to offer religious resistance to Nazism; an equal number, however, evaded the issue, held their tongues or paid more or less thorough-going lipservice to the regime and 'our *Führer*'. Nevertheless what the Nazis had feared had happened: a 'first focus of resistance' had formed. They were forced to abandon their attempts to regiment and control the evangelical church from within and shifted to brutal control from outside, using the police, the administration and the regulations. The *Reich* Bishop was dropped but refused to resign. At the end of the war he committed suicide in Königsberg.

In general terms the Catholic Church, like the Protestant, had reacted to the seizure of power by recognition of the new regime.²⁸ After the passing of the

The Background

Enabling Law at the end of March 1933, for instance, the Bishops' Conference in Fulda thought it right to express a certain confidence in the new government subject to reservations concerning some 'religious and moral lapses'. In July, only a few days after the dissolution of the Catholic Centre Party, a concordat was concluded between the Vatican and the German government – Hitler's first major international success. The government explicitly guaranteed certain rights and prerogatives of the Church, on which the Catholics were proposing to insist. Catholic schools were not to be touched but, on the other hand, all Catholic organizations of a political, social or professional nature were to be disbanded.

During the course of 1933, however, the Catholic Church too was literally forced to resist. It could not silently accept the general persecution, regimentation or oppression, nor in particular the sterilization law of summer 1933. Over the years until the outbreak of war Catholic resistance stiffened until finally its most eminent spokesman was the Pope himself with his Encyclical '*Mit brennender Sorge*' ('With burning anxiety') of 14 March 1937, read from all German Catholic pulpits. Clemens August Graf von Galen, Bishop of Münster, was typical of the many fearless Catholic speakers.²⁹

In general terms, therefore, the churches were the only major organizations to offer comparatively early and open resistance; they remained so in later years. They achieved a certain success, for even during the war the Nazi rulers did not think that they could risk complete destruction of the churches. They were confronted here with barriers which they could not understand – the fortitude and integrity of religious conviction, conscience and a sense of responsibility for one's fellow men which were not to be extinguished by regulations and prohibitions.

There were 'invisible frontiers' which proved to be genuine obstacles in bringing the new rulers to a halt. To the outward eye both religious and intellectual life was regimented and controlled; all intellectual utterances were subject to censorship. The object was to concentrate under unified control the press, the cinema, the radio, literature, the theatre, and mass demonstrations; their 'centralized employment' must be 'absolutely guaranteed', declared Dr Joseph Goebbels, the Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda; propaganda, he continued, was one of the most important arts by which a people could be ruled; all cultural life must now be concentrated in the service of the National-Socialist concept.³⁰ The control of the minds of the people, essential for total domination, could only be achieved if these were entirely permeated by the thinking of the rulers and purged of everything else. In this they did not eventually succeed – nor has anyone else anywhere.

During 1933 the following were formed: a *Reich* Chamber of Authorship, a *Reich* Press Chamber, a *Reich* Radio Chamber, a *Reich* Theatre Chamber, a *Reich* Music Chamber, and a *Reich* Chamber of the Visual Arts. All these formed the *Reich* Cultural Chamber, which was subordinate to the *Reich* Ministry of Propaganda. Anyone who wished to pursue these 'registered' professions had to belong to the relevant Chamber. Executive instructions, under which, for instance, only 'Aryan' writers were permitted, laid down the

system of control and regimentation in the minutest detail. Brecht, Döblin, Kaiser, Mann, Tucholsky, Zweig, Bergengruen, Borchardt, Hofmannsthal, Lasker-Schüler, Werfel, Hesse, Heine, Kästner and Kafka were declared 'degenerate' authors; on 10 May 1933 thousands of 'degenerate literary works' were burnt on the Opernplatz in Berlin and in the squares of other German cities; students held the torches and suitable speeches were made by professors. During 1933 many people eminent in German intellectual and cultural life were deprived of their citizenship.³¹

All this was accompanied by terror of incalculable brutality, without which the internal German situation would be incomprehensible. Terror was nothing new; it had been used by numerous political groupings in the party struggles of the previous turbulent crisis years. Now, however, it had risen to be an instrument of government policy. The government could easily have dealt with its opponents by the 'legal' means which had meanwhile become available. But Hitler had no intention of putting a brake on the terror – on the contrary. He knew that he could not convert the stubborn non-conformists and so the only alternative was their suppression by force.³² Terror and violence, no matter against whom, kept the 'movement' going and without movement the masses might possibly come to their senses; the opponents whom Hitler rightly suspected of existing in all walks of life might congeal into an opposition.

The campaign preceding the 5 March elections had already cost sixty or more lives. Göring had urged the police to abandon all political neutrality and not to be afraid 'to use their weapons' when dealing with 'anti-state', in other words left-wing, organizations or when supporting 'national' formations, in other words the SA, the SS and the *Stahlhelm*.³³ These latter three organizations were given the status of 'auxiliary police'; on 20 February Hitler threatened that 'the enemy' would be beaten, either constitutionally through the forthcoming elections, or in battle using other weapons – and this would, of course, mean more casualties. By mid-October 1933 this unequal struggle had cost between five and six hundred lives and over 26,000 people had been deprived of their liberty as 'police prisoners'. The various 'actions' were frequently characterized more by ill-treatment of prisoners in the notorious SA cellars, by sadism and material greed than by any genuine struggle against 'the enemy'. While on the hunt for communists, Jews and other 'enemies', the SA flying squads did not find housebreaking, robbery, looting, violence, kidnapping or blackmail for ransom to be beneath their national dignity. The murders of 30 June and 1 July 1934 were admittedly a terrible culmination of this unconcealed terror campaign, but incomparably more terrible were the sufferings of hundreds of thousands behind prison walls or the concentration camp barbed wire; what was not known was at least suspected by potential victims. The people were now fully regimented (*gleichgeschaltet*); fear prevented almost everyone leaving the well-drilled ranks.

A few figures may perhaps give some vague idea of the extent of the terror and also of the breadth of resistance to it. Over six years the regular courts alone sentenced 225,000 persons in political cases to terms of imprisonment

The Background

totalling some 600,000 years. In addition there were the far more numerous, but barely calculable cases, in which detainees were thrown into a concentration camp without trial or done to death beforehand by police measures.³⁴ Official data show that between 1933 and 1945 about three million Germans were held at some stage in a concentration camp or prison for political reasons, some only for a few weeks, some for the whole twelve years; of these approximately 800,000 were held for active resistance.³⁵

A *Gestapo* report of April 1939 shows that at that time there were 162,734 persons held in 'preventive custody' for political reasons, 27,369 awaiting trial for political misdemeanours and 112,432 under sentence for political misdemeanours.³⁶ On the outbreak of war an SS summary showed 21,400 prisoners in six concentration camps; by the end of April 1942 the number in these same six camps had risen to 44,700. In December 1942 there was a total of 88,000 persons in concentration camps and this had risen to 224,000 by August 1943. The total for August 1944 was 524,286, the majority Jews and forced labourers. The peak figure was reached in January 1945 when the total of concentration camp prisoners in Germany as a whole was 714,211.³⁷

In the space of fourteen months in 1935–36, 2,197 persons from left-wing circles were arrested in Berlin alone.³⁸ In 1936, 11,687 persons were arrested throughout Germany for illegal socialist activity. In 1936 the *Gestapo* seized 1,643,200 illicit leaflets distributed by the Communist and Social-Democratic Parties alone and, in 1937, 927,430.

Anyone fortunate enough to be released from a concentration camp involuntarily contributed to an even more sophisticated system of terror, since the ex-prisoner was forbidden to speak of his terrible experiences.³⁹ His silence alone produced a sinister increase in the fear and horror aroused by these camps. Frequently, however, ex-prisoners did tell their acquaintances of the ill-treatment, starvation, rape, murder and homicide which were the order of the day in concentration camps; his listeners were then subject to the pressure of knowing the truth but being forced to hold their tongues on pain of permanent threat of the concentration camp.

The register of executions kept by the *Reich* Ministry of Justice from 1871 to 1945 was known as the 'murder register' because, until 1933, the death sentence was only exacted for common murder. After 1933, however, it lived up to its name since, by legal principles, many of those executed were merely the victims of judicial murder. It is estimated that between 1933 and 1945 some 32,600 persons were executed in Germany after pronouncement of a death sentence but less than half of these are shown on the 'murder register'.⁴⁰ It carries only 11,881 names and does not include those sentenced by court-martial – over 20,000. The list is also incomplete because, particularly in the final weeks of the regime, executions could no longer be recorded centrally. On the other hand it does include the names of common criminals. It is estimated that 'only' 6,927 people were executed on political grounds, of whom 3,137 were Germans.⁴¹ On the other hand, based on files captured after the war, the British estimate at 4,980 the number of people executed for participation in the 20 July 1944 conspiracy alone.⁴² This figure, however, undoubtedly in-

cludes many executions not connected with 20 July.

All these figures are probably too low. They do not include the innumerable people shot 'while attempting to escape', those starved or beaten to death in concentration camps, the victims of bestial experiments, those shot or hanged under camp 'justice'. Nevertheless, they give only too clearly a picture of the conditions; they prove that, not only was there oppression, persecution and terror, but also widespread resistance to the regime.

A glance at the suicide statistics for Germany will round off the picture. In the periods July-December 1942 and 1943 7,862 and 7,379 persons respectively took their lives; the figures remained constant despite the considerable reduction in population due to casualties at the front and the bombing of cities.⁴³ The figures for suicides of Jews are particularly illuminating; official statistics show that for the period July-December 1942 the figure was 1,158 but only 49 for the same period in 1943.

Such, therefore, was the setting in which the resistance movement conspired and acted – brave courageous men, all working against Nazism whether or not they knew each other or were in touch with each other; from them sprang that section of the movement responsible for the attempts to overthrow the regime and assassinate its leaders which will be recounted in this book.

2 *Forms of Resistance*

While pursuing their revolution inside Germany, the Nazis succeeded in scoring victories and gaining respect in the outside world such as had never been vouchsafed to their democratic predecessors. Apparently uninterrupted, they extracted piecemeal revisions of the hated Versailles Treaty from their former enemies, thus enabling Hitler to fulfil one of his best vote-catching promises. When he reintroduced universal military service in 1935, no one lifted a finger: on the contrary, while Hitler was tearing up the Treaty of Versailles page by page, a stream of prominent visitors made the pilgrimage to Germany and were granted audiences. In 1934 came Jean Goy, President of the French Ex-Servicemen's Association; in 1935 a British Legion delegation arrived and was also received by Hitler. In March 1935 Sir John Simon and Anthony Eden came on a visit and in June of that year the Anglo-German Naval Agreement was concluded, allowing Germany to build warships up to 35% of the strength of the British Navy and submarines on a parity with those of the British.¹ Great Britain had thus given agreement to a partial rearmament of Germany in order to prevent a repetition of the pre-war arms race. How totally were people deceiving themselves! As early as 3 February 1933, only three days after his appointment as *Reich* Chancellor, Hitler had said in an address to senior *Wehrmacht* commanders that if France had any statesmen, she would not allow Germany the time to rearm but would attack the *Reich* in good time.²

In December 1935 William Philips, the US Under-Secretary of State, came to Germany, and in February of the following year Lord Londonderry, the British Lord Privy Seal, visited Hitler. A few days later German troops marched into the Rhineland, which had been demilitarized under the Versailles Treaty; as we know, there were no consequences whatsoever apart from empty protests. Hitler, however, now had the freedom he required to construct fortifications in the west and so protect his rear in the event of a move eastwards;³ moreover he had demonstrated that France and Britain would give way in face of determined action. Nothing was done when Hitler supported Italy during her invasion of Abyssinia. German troops gave even more effective support to Colonel Franco and his Civil War party in Spain; on this occasion new weapons and tactics were tested and, moreover, the line-up in the looming world war now became obvious: the Germans and Italians supported Franco, the right-wing extremist, while numerous French, British and

American volunteers fought on the side of the republicans and communists.

In July 1936 Hitler received Charles Lindbergh, the famous Atlantic flyer; in the same year the Olympic Games were held in Berlin amid incredible pomp and circumstance and were visited by many distinguished foreign guests. On 4 September Lloyd George, one of the Big Four of Versailles, came to Germany, followed in October by the Governor of the Bank of France and the French Minister of Commerce. In May 1937 the Marquis of Lothian, formerly Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and later British Ambassador in Washington, who had already attended on Hitler in 1934, paid a second visit; in the autumn of 1937 even the Duke of Windsor and Lord Halifax, then a Privy Councillor and later Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, were unwilling to be excluded from the procession of dignitaries. This list is by no means exhaustive but names only the most prominent personalities.⁴ Though probably unintentionally, their appearance gave an impression of approval of Hitler's regime, both externally and internally; his opponents were correspondingly discouraged.⁵ Hitler seemed to be registering one success after another. The hated Treaty of Versailles was no longer valid; German-speaking areas, such as the Saar, were coming back to the German *Reich*, as were areas which had once formed part of the Holy Roman Empire but had never belonged to the Bismarckian *Reich* and had never been claimed by Bismarck or his successors of the Weimar Republic. Despite all the shortcomings of his regime, therefore, was not Hitler a great German? Who either would or could offer 'resistance' and thereby expose himself to the reproach of being a traitor?

Nevertheless there were men who did exactly this; many of them had begun to resist even before 1933. One was Ernst Niekisch who, in 1926, founded the 'Journal for socialist and national-revolutionary Policy' entitled *Der Widerstand* (Resistance); it campaigned against reparations, characterizing them as blackmail by the capitalist powers; it called for world revolution against world capitalism and so acquired the label 'National-bolshevist'.⁶ In 1932 Niekisch published a pamphlet, 'Hitler – a German disaster' (Berlin 1932), and even after 30 January 1933 he continued his journalistic campaign against the regime in *Der Widerstand*. The paper was not banned until the end of 1934 when the *Gestapo* seized all available copies of the November issue.⁷ Niekisch himself was allowed to go but in 1937 was accused of treason and sentenced to life imprisonment; he was not released from Brandenburg prison until 1945.⁸

Contact between Niekisch and the communists had come about quite naturally since he championed an 'eastern orientated' German policy, in other words collaboration with Russia which, like Germany, had been isolated since the war and which had waived German reparations payments. Ever since 1932 Niekisch had been conspiring with functionaries of the German Communist Party, using as intermediary Dr Josef ('Beppo') Römer, an ex-Free Corps captain who had joined the Communist Party.

After 1933, however, Niekisch's contacts extended even into extreme conservative and nationalist circles.⁹ Through his interest in questions concerning the East he came to know Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin, an ultra-conservative Prussian monarchist landowner and politician, one of the most

The Background

determined and uncompromising opponents of Hitler; he edited the *Mitteilungsblatt der konservativen Hauptvereinigung* (Information Journal of the Central Conservative Association) which courageously called a spade a spade until banned in 1933 because of an article Fabian von Schlabrendorff had published in it.¹⁰ From March 1933 Kleist invariably visited Niekisch whenever he came to Berlin; they exchanged information and Kleist would express his scorn for *Reichswehr* officers, such as Rundstedt and Blomberg, for their failure to oust Hitler. In a draft of a leaflet Kleist wrote: 'In future the word will be: "As characterless as a German official, as godless as a Protestant minister, as unprincipled as a Prussian officer"'.¹¹

Ewald von Kleist was due to be shot during the mass murders of 30 June 1934; he had steadfastly refused to fly the swastika flag or give even a penny to the NSDAP – the Nazi district leader had even been reduced to suggesting that at least he might contribute 10 pfennig. He was warned, however, and escaped in time; Niekisch, the left-wing radical, hid him in his Berlin apartment.¹² Here was one of the remarkable but characteristic features of the anti-Hitler resistance.¹³ National-Socialism was not simply a party like any other; with its total acceptance of criminality it was an incarnation of evil, so that all those whose minds were attuned to democracy, Christianity, freedom, humanity or even mere legality found themselves forced into alliance. So after Kleist took refuge in Niekisch's apartment on 1 July 1934, political friends of both of them would meet there – 'left-wing' conspirators in one room, 'right-wing' in another. Kleist was executed after 20 July 1944 for his part in the attempted *coup d'état*.

However heroic the resistance offered by these brave men and however great the number who paid for it with their lives, it seldom had any prospect of success. Soon after 30 June 1934 Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau, the old Court Chamberlain, did succeed in making his mark; by virtue of his great age, his total intrepidity and his commanding presence he contrived to push his way past all the guards and penetrate into Hindenburg's bedroom to tell him of the Nazi murders. Hindenburg, however, was already too old and sick to make any attempt to dismiss Hitler. Nevertheless some of those arrested on 30 June were released on Hindenburg's orders.¹⁴

Many offered resistance simply by refusing to fly the swastika flag on the prescribed days, by suddenly turning into ardent church-goers, or by studiously failing to hear the cry 'Heil Hitler'. Many deliberately refused promotion to avoid having to join the Nazi Party; they concealed Jews and others on the run; if on the judicial bench, they awarded lenient sentences in political cases. Others joined the army to be safe from Nazi importunities or persecution and to escape the *Gestapo*. Journalists and authors wrote on subjects providing an analogy of the existing situation that was obvious to anyone and that enabled them to criticize in indirect, non-judiciable terms. These methods of resistance were aptly termed 'internal emigration'.¹⁵ The more active forms of resistance, aiming at concrete results, had an equally wide range of possibilities and variations.

For instance, people disillusioned by the ideological and organizational

rigidity and conformism of the German Communist Party formed a group led by Walter Löwenheim and known as the 'Leninist Organization'.¹⁶ Ever since 1929 Löwenheim had been recruiting into his organization Social-Democratic and Communist Party members who wished to liberate the forces of socialism from their dogmatic immobility. He had to proceed secretly, since he wished to infiltrate his supporters into all socialist organizations and so ultimately control them or at least guide them back on to the true path of socialism. From the outset, therefore, this group inevitably had to work underground.

Löwenheim, however, only realized somewhat late in the day the true significance of the Nazi seizure of power and its concomitant revolution. Not until the *Reichstag* fire and its accompanying wave of arrests was the group (known as 'The O' for short) convinced of the seriousness of the situation.¹⁷

Many conspiratorial illusions were suddenly destroyed. It was not possible to produce a clandestine effect from within on workers' organizations which no longer existed or which had been banned and broken up. So 'The O' pinned its hopes on some crisis of the regime. It concentrated on information and on 'education', on under-cover agitation in the factories – 'industrial activity'; it attempted to form a 'unity front' with other class-warfare circles, even including those labelled 'bourgeois-democrat'.¹⁸ Forbidden pamphlets were smuggled in – one written by Walter Löwenheim, for instance, entitled *Neu Beginnen* ('Begin afresh'), published in October 1933 by the Social-Democratic Party Committee-in-exile. This was then re-edited in the form of an advertisement booklet and issued in November by 'Graphia' of Carlsbad under the pseudonym 'Miles' and with the camouflage title 'Schopenhauer – On religion'; 5,000 copies made their way into Germany.¹⁹ As a result the 'Leninist Organization' has frequently been called the 'Miles Group' or the 'Begin afresh Group'. In 1934 English, American and French editions of the pamphlet appeared and the resistance group became one of the best known of all in its time. Its reputation abroad was greatly assisted by the fact that its members had remained in Germany and were not *émigrés*.²⁰

Nevertheless, although its underground operations were adroit and it worked for a considerable period without losses, this organization came no nearer overthrowing the regime than had the socialists or communists; all had to relearn the conspiratorial trade. In the light of conditions in a totalitarian state even the first prerequisite for a revolution from below, in other words a mass movement, could not be created.²¹ The 'Leninist Organization' in fact went so far as to state that formation of a mass movement was possible in the period following the fall of National Socialism, provided that democratic political structures were allowed enough 'elbow room'.²² Under the prevailing circumstances, however, no mass movement could possibly be created; organization, however efficient, could do nothing to alter this fact.

The great year of arrests and destruction of the communist, Social-Democrat and trade union underground organizations was 1935. For a time a flood of illegal brochures and pamphlets was produced from secret printing presses in Germany or neighbouring countries and distributed, usually with innocent bindings and titles, presenting the contents as a classical drama or

The Background

cookery book.²³ At this period the *Gestapo* was still only in process of expansion; gradually its methods improved; the informer service and penetration of opposition organizations began to have their effect. Then came the period of mass arrests and mass trials; on one occasion, for instance, 400 Social-Democrats were placed on trial and on another 628 trade unionists; 232 Social-Democrats were tried in Cologne. In 1935 and 1936 fifty-five members of the little 'Begin afresh' group were arrested; the majority were given prison sentences of two to five years. Fate caught up with the remainder in 1938; in 1939 almost all surviving members of 'Begin afresh' were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment and were only released in 1945.²⁴

Most other groups had similar experiences. In Mannheim, for instance, when the Social-Democratic Party was banned, Jakob Ott reformed it underground; by distributing illegal newspapers he held together approximately one thousand members; he had no plan, however, for a *coup* or any other action. Another socialist group, formed by Emil Henk, also existed in Mannheim. It looked for ways of overthrowing the regime and maintained contact with other groups in Mannheim, Eberbach, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Offenbach, Darmstadt, Worms, Landau, and with the Party Committee-in-exile in Paris. Basically, however, it could do no more than inform, advise and pursue general conspiratorial activities.²⁵ In late summer 1934 this organization was blown when one of its members had a motor-bicycle accident and the propaganda material he was carrying was strewn all over the street. The organization's officers were arrested and, although the leadership was quickly reconstituted, it was broken up again in 1935. By that year the period of large-scale underground activity was over; the *Gestapo* had annihilated the various organizations. From 1936 many German communists and socialists, including Wilhelm Zaisser, Walter Ulbricht, Alfred Kantorowicz, Ludwig Renn and Willy Brandt, saw in the Spanish Civil War an opportunity of fighting Spanish and German fascism; Hitler was supporting Franco with troops and war material, and they regarded fascism as a class warfare phenomenon, not as a nationalist movement. The majority of these volunteers foregathered in the Thälmann Brigade.²⁶ With Franco's victory in 1938 this incident in the anti-Hitler resistance was over too. Of some 2,000 German survivors from the International Brigades (out of a total of about 5,000) hundreds next saw each other either in the French internment camps or in the hands of the *Gestapo* or later in the French resistance movement; some even escaped to Mexico or San Domingo. So when war broke out in 1939, apart from isolated groups and cells, there was no working-class underground movement in Germany worth mentioning.²⁷ Such will to resist as remained on the part of numerous communist groups was, at least temporarily, stifled by the Russo-German pact of 23 August 1939.

War, and the crimes instigated by Hitler under cover of it, led to new forms of resistance, self-sacrificing but mostly impotent and hopeless. Even a semi-exhaustive description of this resistance would fill many volumes but certain outstanding instances can at least be quoted as illustrations.

Communist cells and groups in particular felt it their duty to continue anti-

war and anti-regime agitation. In many cases they were even prepared to cross the line between treason against the government and treason against their country and to conspire with prisoners of war. One such group was that led by Dr Theodor Neubauer, a former communist deputy in the *Reichstag*. Neubauer spent five-and-a-half years in Buchenwald concentration camp between 1933 and 1939. On his release he immediately resumed his illegal activity; he drafted leaflets and from his base in Jena organized contacts to Berlin, Leipzig, Eisenach, Gotha, Erfurt, Weimar and the Ruhr. He was once more arrested and finally executed in Brandenburg prison on 5 February 1945.²⁸ Another group, led by Saefkow, Jacob and Bästlein and directed from the Soviet Union, engaged in similar activities. The organization led by Harro Schulze-Boysen and known as 'Red Orchestra' was primarily concerned with espionage.²⁹ Other groups, such as the one around Reinhold Mewes which cooperated with the former Free-Corps leader Dr Josef Römer, also became convinced by autumn 1941 that it was in the interests of the working classes to aid the struggle of the Soviet Union against National-Socialist Germany and at the same time to prevent an Anglo-French-American occupation of Germany. Römer, whose name is mentioned far less frequently by East German historians than the names of other communist underground fighters, led a resistance group that was perhaps the largest and best-organized of any operating in Germany under communist auspices. The Schlotterbeck brothers and some of their friends formed a smaller but equally ideologically-based organization; it carried on espionage for the Soviet Union – for political reasons, not for money. Their Russian contact man, however, who had arrived by parachute, fell into the hands of the *Gestapo* and was forced to transmit 'play-back' material, in other words false information, over his radio. As a result the group was destroyed. Friedrich Schlotterbeck alone contrived to escape into Switzerland; nine members of his family were executed on 30 November 1944.³⁰

One of the many groups resembling each other both in spirit and in action was that of the Scholls (brother and sister) and their friends; in 1942 and 1943 they prepared and distributed leaflets in Munich calling for resistance to the government and the war. Although they realized that their activities could hardly do any significant damage to the regime, they were prepared to sacrifice themselves.³¹ Secretly they may have hoped to produce greater results, but primarily they were ready to stake their lives for the cause. Even Marinus van der Lubbe's act of fire-raising (the *Reichstag* fire) should be looked at in this light – as an attempt to rouse the working class and as altruistic self-sacrifice.

Kurt Gerstein should also be counted as a resister. He had close links with the Confessional Church and had twice, the second time in 1938, been sent to a concentration camp for resistance activity on religious grounds; he had also been expelled from the Nazi Party.³² He was a mine manager and industrialist, well-to-do and deeply religious, and had also studied medicine; he was convinced that, as an individual, he could only exert some effect from inside the machine. Accordingly on 10 March 1941, when he heard of the start of the

The Background

euthanasia programme, he joined the SS. The improbable happened. In January 1942 Gerstein became Head of the Technical Hygiene Section in SS Headquarters and was commissioned by the RSHA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt* – Central Security Department) to obtain supplies of prussic acid; he thus gained an insight into the whole fearful extermination system in the concentration camps. He set about using chemical methods to make his consignments of prussic acid harmless; his main activity, however, was the broadcasting of his knowledge wherever he could; he told over one hundred people what he had discovered. In August 1942, after he had personally attended a mass gassing using the somewhat ineffective method of exhaust fumes from a diesel engine, he told a member of the Swedish embassy in Berlin what had happened, asking him to ensure that the news was passed on to London. Gerstein believed that, once the German people knew of this crime, they would put an end to the regime. This hope proved illusory, partly because it was based on an overestimation of 'the people', partly because the news was inadequately disseminated or alternatively, owing to the enormity of the crime, was received with incredulity. Gerstein's special merit, however, was the fact that he deliberately involved himself in crime, accepting responsibility thereby, in order to discover, to broadcast and, if possible, to sabotage the most secret and most appalling processes. In this he was only partially successful.

The killing of alleged incurables was a different matter, since a far smaller number of potential victims was involved than in the 'Final Solution', the term for the liquidation of the Jews. The latter was carried out primarily on Polish territory, whereas the euthanasia programme was pursued in Germany itself and involved direct interference with charitable institutions, almost all closely connected with one of the two main churches. Knowledge of the murder programme ordered by Hitler on 1 September 1939 was therefore widespread and the leading personalities of the ecclesiastical opposition could count on considerable support. Dr Theophil Wurm, Bishop of Württemberg, and Graf von Galen, Bishop of Münster, both called the programme what it was – murder. By means of petitions and courageous public protests they and other church leaders succeeded, by and large, in bringing the operation to a halt by the end of 1941.³³

If resistance was to be more promising than this, its focus had to be nearer the centre of power, in the higher levels of the *Reichswehr* for instance. Hindenburg had long since been pushed on one side. During the last days of January 1933 rumours of a *putsch* had in fact circulated here and there. It was whispered that the *Reichswehr* intended to use force to prevent the installation of a government with Hitler as Chancellor. In fact Colonel-General Kurt Freiherr von Hammerstein, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and Lieutenant-General Erich Freiherr von dem Bussche-Ippenburg, Head of the Army Personnel Office, had had a personal interview with Hindenburg on 26 January and had attempted to dissuade the President from appointing Hitler, emphasizing the dangers.³⁴ During this interview Hindenburg referred to the 'Austrian corporal' whom he would never appoint as Chancellor.³⁵ On 29

January, however, Hammerstein and Schleicher agreed that there could be no question of anyone other than Hitler as Chancellor, since, as Hammerstein and Schleicher saw it, a Papen-Hugenberg government would have had to rule with the support of only 7% as against 93% of the German people. Nevertheless they only visualized a Hitler government on condition that Schleicher was *Reichswehr* Minister in it. They had no thought of a *putsch* in their minds.³⁶ Hammerstein was far more concerned to avoid a general strike and civil war, involving the employment of the *Reichswehr* against the Nazis and the political Left. Rumours of a *putsch* involving an alleged proposal to declare a state of emergency and lay hands on the person of the President seem to have stemmed from circles interested in justifying the formation of a Hitler-Papen-Hugenberg government and extracting Hindenburg's agreement to it.³⁷ Be that as it may, when Hitler was appointed *Reich* Chancellor, the *Reichswehr* took no action.

Very soon after the 'seizure of power', however, people began to wonder how the Hitler government could be overthrown; Dr Heinrich Brüning, the former *Reich* Chancellor, was involved together with Schleicher and Hammerstein.³⁸ The true nature of the new regime had naturally become obvious soon enough, but no 'counter-action' was taken. A major obstacle was the new *Reichswehr* Minister, Werner von Blomberg; he was naïve, weak and somewhat unrealistic; he was also favourably disposed to the Nazis. So, in July 1933, Hammerstein found himself deprived both of his influence and command authority in the Army.³⁹ At the end of 1933 he handed in his resignation and on 1 February 1934 was succeeded by General Werner Freiherr von Fritsch.⁴⁰

With Hammerstein retired the conflict between the SA and the *Reichswehr* became increasingly acute and in the spring of 1934 certain people in Papen's entourage were thinking of seizing the opportunity, when the anticipated SA revolt came, to persuade Hindenburg to proclaim a state of emergency.⁴¹ To bring this about Generals von Witzleben, von Bock and von Rundstedt, who were obviously prepared to act, were to use their troops against the SA and Hitler was to be forced to 'go along'. Tension was to be raised to boiling point by a major speech drafted by Edgar J. Jung, the Munich lawyer and 'young conservative', and actually delivered by Papen in Marburg on 17 June 1934; it was in fact an indictment of the whole course of events since January 1933.⁴² Hopes centred on Fritsch; Major-General von Schleicher, Hitler's predecessor as Chancellor, considered that Fritsch must 'under all circumstances strike' as soon as Hindenburg died.⁴³ Fritsch, however, had been utterly opposed to Schleicher's pre-1933 political activity and subsequently stated spontaneously: 'Politics pass me by totally.'⁴⁴ He did not adopt this blinkered attitude merely as a matter of duty; it was in line with his character and his lack of comprehension of the criminal nature of the entire Nazi movement, including its *Führer*.

At this time, therefore, before the bloodbath of 30 June 1934 carried out by the SS, no one 'struck', not even the SA leaders, who perhaps had planned to do so. Hitler was the one who struck and he had two generals shot in the process,

The Background

an action accepted by the *Reichswehr* without noticeable protest.⁴⁵ 'The *Reichswehr*' as such possibly had no objection to the murder of Röhm and his SA leaders; it was perhaps glad to see its competing army thus emasculated and the danger of its encroachment on the *Reichswehr* removed – it numbered, after all, well over three million, many of whom now proposed to enter the *Reichswehr* ranks.⁴⁶ It is certain, however, that Hammerstein and other senior *Reichswehr* commanders were pleased by the elimination of Röhm and his friends and, at least initially, raised no objection to the methods used. Hammerstein was only 'much affected' when he heard that Schleicher too had been murdered, saying: 'So they are now starting to murder gentlemen as well.'⁴⁷ He went to Blomberg, his immediate superior as *Reichswehr* Minister, in order 'through him to bring about some opposition on the part of the *Reichswehr*'. Even at this point, however, no one was really thinking of an attempt at a *coup d'état*. Blomberg 'did nothing'; he could not even be persuaded to adopt a threatening attitude or make a serious protest. This is not surprising since he had prior knowledge of the planned action against the SA and was in agreement with it.⁴⁸ Lieutenant-General Walter von Reichenau, Head of the Ministerial Office in the *Reichswehr* Ministry from 1 February 1934, had also been informed beforehand of the planned preventive action against the SA; he placed no more credence than did Blomberg in the story that a *putsch* had been nipped in the bud. Both in fact knew perfectly well that the SA's attempts to arm itself and its readiness to take precautions were no more than defensive reactions to the military measures ordered by Hitler on pretext of a threatened SA revolt.⁴⁹ It may even be assumed that both, and particularly Reichenau who was the more adroit, were among the string-pullers working for an aggravation of the tense situation.⁵⁰

In fact, therefore, both Blomberg and Reichenau, and through them the senior officers of the *Reichswehr*, were indirectly involved, and a significant factor, in Hitler's success on 30 June 1934. Blomberg had given his agreement to the arrest of Schleicher and Reichenau drafted the text of the official announcement saying that Schleicher had been shot when resisting arrest.⁵¹

With hindsight it is easy to reproach the *Reichswehr* leaders for their attitude on 30 June and thereafter. Undoubtedly, as Helmut Krausnick says, the circumstances and the *Reichswehr*'s position must be taken into account in their entirety.⁵² Krausnick is equally correct, however, when he says: 'In fact 30 June faced the army leaders for the first time with the stark choice between obedience and acceptance of partial responsibility, between compliance with orders and their conscience.'⁵³

General von Fritsch, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and his Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Ludwig Beck, can hardly have realized beforehand what Hitler's real intentions were.⁵⁴ But later – ? The murders lasted two days and it may be taken as certain that Fritsch and Beck were accurately informed. Even taking account of all the circumstances it is difficult to see any satisfactory explanation for the absence of some determined reaction, not only to these arbitrary murders in general, but to the shooting of Major-Generals von Schleicher and von Bredow in particular.

On the afternoon of 30 June Erwin Planck, the former State Secretary of the Reich Chancellery, went to Fritsch and urged him to act in view of Blomberg's failure to do so. Others, including Major-General von Witzleben, his Chief of Staff Colonel von Lewinski (alias von Manstein), General Ritter von Leeb and General von Rundstedt, demanded that Blomberg institute a military inquiry. Blomberg, however, declared that an inquiry was impossible and thus matters remained. Krausnick says: 'Not even at this point could people muster the courage to take action of political significance, still less with a political objective, as was called for by the monstrous nature of the proceedings.'⁵⁵

So the 'non-political army' in reality renounced its neutrality and became both a part and a servant of the National-Socialist system of domination. At the same time 30 June 1934 put an end to the potential bourgeois conspiracy against Hitler. Not until 1937–38 did any real insurrectionist movement reconstitute itself.⁵⁶

The way was now open for a typical *coup d'état* by Hitler himself. Only one prerequisite was still lacking – the death of old President von Hindenburg which was expected daily. It occurred on 2 August 1934 when the President died at his country seat in Neudeck. On the previous day the government had passed a law whereby, on Hindenburg's death, the offices of Reich President and Reich Chancellor were to be combined. So by unconstitutional methods Hitler obtained constitutional authority over the *Reichswehr*.⁵⁷ A 'law' had been passed in January enabling the government to 'lay down fresh constitutional legislation'.⁵⁸ The *Reichswehr* had been relieved of the threat of the SA, but it was also brought more fully under the control of Hitler and the Nazi Party.

On the very day of Hindenburg's death Hitler took a further step in the consolidation of his authority over the armed forces of the Reich. On 2 August he ordered the entire *Reichswehr* to be sworn in afresh, taking an oath not to the people, the country or the constitution but solely to him by name. Under a law promulgated by the Nazis only a few months before (1 December 1933) the oath read: 'I swear by Almighty God this sacred oath: I will at all times loyally and honestly serve my people and my country and, as a brave soldier, will be ready at any time to stake my life for this my oath.'⁵⁹ Now, however, the oath ran: 'I swear by Almighty God this sacred oath: I will render unconditional obedience to the *Führer* of the German Reich and people, Adolf Hitler, Supreme Commander of the *Wehrmacht*, and, as a brave soldier, I will be ready at any time to stake my life for this oath.'⁶⁰ For soldiers, therefore, loyalty to the constitution or the country no longer existed; there was only loyalty to the '*Führer*'. Henceforth the only valid order or channel of command was that approved by the '*Führer*'; this was now the law. The new legislation met with no opposition of any significance, and Hitler had succeeded in releasing the *Reichswehr* from all previous traditional obligations and in attaching it to himself personally.

This new hurriedly organized oath-taking process was more than a mere *coup* by Hitler, analogous to a *coup d'état*, designed to take the *Reichswehr* by surprise as in the Fritsch crisis of 1938; it was also intended as a powerful

The Background

obstacle to any form of resistance to the deified 'command'. Of course, many of the generals subsequently took refuge behind their oath when asked to cooperate in an attempt to overthrow the regime. In fact they knew perfectly well that such an oath is only valid if it presupposes some moral and political obligation and loyalty on the part of the man to whom it is sworn; they also knew that this man, Hitler, was guilty of a thousandfold contravention of his obligation to the German people and a thousandfold misuse of his followers pledged to him by oath. For many others, however, this oath constituted a real problem; they still felt themselves bound by it, even when the immorality and illegality of the whole system had long since become clear. Many maintained that its content must be valid, since the form existed and persisted. Form was given precedence over meaning, the meaning being thereby destroyed. Recipients of orders, however, were not permitted to harbour such thoughts; they must think solely on the lines of the 'leadership'.

Having thus laid hands on all important positions of power in the *Reich* (he did not observe till later that the army was unwilling to be his complete tool and he dealt with this situation by removing its Commander-in-Chief), Hitler was able to announce complacently that the National-Socialist revolution was at an end. In a proclamation read by *Gauleiter* Adolf Wagner at the Party Rally in Nuremberg on 5 September 1934 it was stated: "The violent phase of the National-Socialist revolution is now at an end. As a revolution it has fully accomplished all that could be hoped from it."⁶¹ All subsequent difficulties could be dealt with as problems concerning personalities.

The expected harmony between Party and *Reichswehr*, however, did not materialize. Hitler had promised the *Reichswehr* that it would be the nation's sole bearer of arms, but from and immediately after 30 June 1934 the SS was further expanded; friction continued between the *Reichswehr* on one side and the Party and SA on the other. Finally the realization that 30 June 1934 had not been an isolated instance of revolutionary over-enthusiasm but could be repeated at any moment helped to clarify the minds of many soldiers. A further factor was the increasingly obvious trend towards a purposeless war which, in the light of Germany's foreign policy successes, was clearly 'unnecessary'.

It took four years, 1934 to 1938, before the true conscientious opponents of Nazism had emerged from the ranks of the fellow-travellers, the indifferent and the undecided. In the administration, in the judiciary, in the teaching profession, in the churches, in factories and offices, in the *Reichswehr*, among the educated, among artists and authors, in other words in all conceivable walks of life, the like-minded formed groups and circles; gradually they learnt not to disclose their views at once but nevertheless to be recognizable to other opponents of the regime. All this required time and the process occupied the years preceding 1938. Greater activity on the part of all these various groupings could obviously only be expected if the impulse was strong enough. The general atmosphere of oppression did not suffice; the anti-Jewish atrocities of November 1938 and Hitler's aggressive war policy during the Sudeten crisis were required to evoke more intensive efforts to overthrow the

regime. In addition to the misgivings in military circles already mentioned, however, a number of sincere attempts were made prior to 1938.

Among these must be counted the activities of Edgar J. Jung, the Munich lawyer already referred to; he is usually described as a member of the 'Young Conservatives' group and even before 1933 was an uncompromising opponent of Nazism.⁶² After Hitler's appointment as Chancellor he seized every conceivable opportunity to bring about the fall of the regime. In November 1933, together with Herbert von Bose, Vice-Chancellor von Papen's Press Officer, he proposed to use Papen's and Hindenburg's influence to put forward eighty non-Nazi candidates for the next *Reichstag*, the object being to undermine the position of the National-Socialists. When this attempt failed he made feverish attempts to concentrate and coordinate various opposition circles.⁶³ Jung is generally thought to have been the principal author of the famous speech made by Papen in the University of Marburg on 17 June 1934; it was intended as the signal for a rising and general upheaval, hopes being centred on Hindenburg, Papen and the *Reichswehr*.⁶⁴

In his speech Papen pleaded for religious freedom, rejecting any 'unnatural totalitarian aspirations' in the field of religion; he warned against the use of force and regimentation of the life of the people outside the political sphere, in other words against any attempt to set up a totalitarian state.⁶⁵ This warning was not lost on Hitler; publication of the speech was banned, but a number of clandestine copies circulated and it did in fact create a sensation both at home and abroad.⁶⁶ Papen protested and offered his resignation, but then allowed himself to be pacified by Hitler.

A few days later there followed the murders of 30 June, 1 and 2 July. Admittedly the SA had been eliminated as a possible competitor of the *Reichswehr*; admittedly violent social upheaval on the lines of Röhm's 'second revolution' had been prevented.⁶⁷ At the same time, however, it had been made plain in unmistakable terms to every German what fate awaited him, should he in any way oppose the 'National-Socialist revival'. The warning was clear; in addition to the SA leaders one hundred or more actual and potential oppositionists had been shot, including Jung and Bose. Papen himself was also possibly due to be murdered.⁶⁸ Apart from his speech, however, he had not been willing to take part in plans for a *coup*⁶⁹ and he came to terms with the Nazis once more. When Jung was arrested on 25 June, he had again protested and again allowed himself to be pacified;⁷⁰ when Jung and Bose were murdered, he protested yet again, but nevertheless went off to Vienna as Hitler's special representative. Even in 1938, when Freiherr von Ketteler, his personal assistant, was murdered by the *Gestapo*, he once more allowed himself to be pacified (if indeed he had ever been indignant) and settled with his *Führer* for the post of Ambassador in Ankara.⁷¹ From a man such as this it was clearly futile to expect opposition or even any display of character when confronted with Hitler. Jung and Bose were the victims of their illusions about Papen.

Despite the brutally naked totalitarian threat to which, as a result of these murders, all those in any way displeased with the ruling regime were exposed,

The Background

many continued to work against the system and the government. In the following year, on 16 April 1935, the poet Ernst Wiechert made a speech against government policy in the Great Hall of Munich University; he protested against the government's attitude to the visual and other arts, against production of poets in 'Poets' Training Camps', which he characterized as equivalent to 'spiritual murder', and against politically-motivated art criticism; he pleaded for truth, freedom, the law, compassion, love and respect. Youth, he said, should not allow itself to be seduced into silence when its conscience commanded it to speak; nothing was more corrosive of the essence of man or of a people than pusillanimity.⁷² Wiechert was taken forthwith to Dachau concentration camp.

Eight years later, in 1943 the Scholls (brother and sister), Professor Huber and their friends met their deaths for these same ideals. In the mid-1930s, however, the voices raised were primarily those of the older generation. Ernst Niekisch was still active. He was in touch with Otto Strasser, who was one of Hitler's most dangerous adversaries in the 1930s; working from Vienna, Strasser directed a 'Black Front' with adherents inside Germany; primarily, however, he was trying to sabotage Hitler's policy from outside.⁷³ Rudolf Pechel refers to a 'Markwitz Circle', composed primarily of Social-Democrats, which distributed forbidden literature and assisted in escapes by opponents of the regime threatened with arrest. The entire circle was arrested by the *Gestapo* in May 1935 after an informer had infiltrated himself into its courier service. Some of its members were done to death, others escaped or succeeded in obtaining release by means of adroit defence before a court. One of these was Dr Mischler, who was arrested but acquitted owing to lack of evidence; he was expelled and emigrated to Prague, where he was again arrested in 1938; once more he was acquitted but was nevertheless confined in a concentration camp until 1942. No sooner was he released than, via the Social-Democratic journalist Theodor Haubach, he made contact with Wilhelm Leuschner and so eventually was one of those involved in the conspiracy of 20 July 1944.⁷⁴

Another group was led by Dr Joseph ('Beppo') Römer, a First World War warrior and commander of the Free Corps 'Oberland'.⁷⁵ This man's activities are to some extent, and very understandably, obscure; only a few details are known. Römer was arrested on several occasions, the first time in 1933 and then again after 30 June 1934 when he was held in Dachau concentration camp.⁷⁶ On his release in July 1939, which he owed to his regimental fellow-officer: General Robert Ritter von Greim, his thoughts immediately turned once more to a *coup* and attempted assassination.⁷⁷ Römer was finally arrested on 4 February 1942 and executed on 25 September.⁷⁸

The overlapping which occurred both before and during the war between the Römer group and other resistance organizations was almost incredible. Some 150 other people were involved in Römer's trial before the People's Court, the majority belonging to communist or other working-class-based groups.⁷⁹ The most important was that run in the Osram Works by Robert Uhrig, a Berlin worker; it was known as the 'Robby Group'. Uhrig had been expecting war since 1938, and he had prepared his group for communist

propaganda activity and for espionage for the Soviet Union through conspiratorial methods.⁸⁰ From the summer of 1941 his group was active as a regular part of the war organization of Soviet military intelligence. This involved the group not only in the gathering of military and war-production information, but also in infiltration preparatory to forming governmental structures that were to cooperate closely with the Soviet Union after the defeat or collapse of Hitler's regime.⁸¹ Römer also worked towards this end. With this purpose in mind, he resumed his connections with his friends of the former Free Corps 'Oberland', many of whom favoured national-bolshevist tendencies. Römer also told his communist friends of his good connections with *Wehrmacht* circles, and early in the summer of 1941 he impressed Willy Sachse by his correct prediction of Hitler's attack on the USSR.⁸² The 'Robby Group' eventually combined with the Römer circle and another workers' group led by Walter Budeus, an engine fitter; it was broken up by the *Gestapo* in 1942 and 1943 after being infiltrated by informers. Its remnants joined the communist group under Anton Saefkow, Franz Jacob and Bernhard Bästlein, which was directed from the Soviet Union.⁸³

Römer was also in contact with a group in the Foreign Ministry, with an industrialist, with the famous 'Solf Circle' and, from 1941, with leading army circles.⁸⁴ These people included Nikolaus Christoph von Halem, a businessman and industrialist, who had been in touch with Niekisch via Schlabrendorff even before 1937; he was able to obtain many foreign contacts for the resistance movement and was also largely responsible for turning Josef Wagner, the *Gauleiter* of Silesia, against Hitler.⁸⁵ Far to the Right a group had formed around the former industrial entrepreneur, leader of the Party of the Radical Middle Class, and editor, since 1930, of the weekly *Die Parole der radikalen Staats- und Wirtschaftsreform*, Dr Helmuth Mylius. The group was joined by members of *Jungdeutscher Orden*, *Schwarze Front*, *Stahlhelm*, the group of the former SA leader Walther Stennes, by one of the murderers of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, First Lieutenant von Rittgen, and by Captain Ehrhardt. They all agreed that Hitler must go. Ehrhardt and Mylius arranged in 1935 to infiltrate former members of *Brigade Ehrhardt* into the SS and then to organize a *putsch*. Approximately 160 men were thus organized and armed, and information was collected on Hitler's habits and on conditions in the *Reich* Chancellery. But the plan to arrest or assassinate Hitler was never carried out, mainly because the loyalty of the infiltrators seemed dubious to Mylius, and because they were in turn infiltrated by *Gestapo* informers. A friend of Mylius, Oskar von Arnim, was arrested and sentenced to a term in a penitentiary. Mylius himself escaped arrest only narrowly; when the war broke out, he managed to 'emigrate' into the Army, with Manstein's assistance, and ended up as Quartermaster II to General Busch in the rank of a Major on the reserve.

Also far to the Right there were groups of the *Schwarze Reichswehr* and of the *Stahlhelm* such as the *Stahlhelm* University group in Königsberg led by Arnold Bistrick. Bistrick was arrested in 1935 and afterwards only managed to turn over part of his group to Major Wilhelm Heinz in 1938. Heinz had a

The Background

special plan for the assassination of Hitler during the Sudeten crisis. Bistrick's group also had connections with Dr Goerdeler, who later, in 1943 and together with Count Schwerin von Schwanefeld, helped Bistrick to join the *Abwehr* regiment 'Brandenburg' which was to be used in the occupation of Berlin during a planned *coup*. This became impossible when most of the regiment was sent into action against the Yugoslav guerrillas early in 1944.

Römer also had contacts with Field Marshal von Bock, Adam von Trott zu Solz, Karl Ludwig Freiherr von und zu Guttenberg; he was later in touch with Catholic circles, Justus Delbrück and during the war, via Schlabrendorff, with the group in Headquarters Army Group Centre.⁸⁶ During the war Halem worked in the Ballestrem coal concern in Upper Silesia and was able to give Römer cover in the firm's Berlin office.⁸⁷ Through Gertrud von Heimerdinger Römer was also in touch with the Headquarters of the Commandant of Berlin, through which he obtained information on Hitler's travels and movements in 1939 and 1940. His source was Lieutenant-Colonel Holm Ertel, aide to the Commandant, Lieutenant-General Ernst Seifert.⁸⁸

Equally, through Gertrud von Heimerdinger, Römer had a link with the Foreign Ministry. His contacts here included Dr Richard Kuenzer, a Counsellor (*Legationsrat*), who was arrested after 20 July 1944 and murdered by the SS in April 1945.⁸⁹ Through Kuenzer the links ran to Albrecht Graf von Bernstorff, a retired Senior Counsellor (*Botschaftsrat*), murdered at the same time as Kuenzer, and to the 'Solf Circle'.⁹⁰ Bernstorff was one of the most courageous opponents of Hitler; he concentrated mainly on helping émigrés and Jews to escape and saving their belongings. For this purpose after 1933 he joined an ex-Jewish bank, A. E. Wassermann.⁹¹

The 'Solf Circle' consisted of a group of like-minded people who simply wished to oppose and counter the oppression, persecution, humiliation and degradation of human beings by the regime. It included Halem, Graf von Bernstorff, Kuenzer, Fanny von Kurowsky, Irmgard Zarden, Dr Herbert Mumm von Schwarzenstein (retired Legation Counsellor), Dr Otto Kiep (Minister in the Foreign Service), Dr Hilger van Scherpenberg (Legation Counsellor) and Elisabeth von Thadden. They used to meet in the house of Frau Hanna Solf, widow of Dr Wilhelm Solf who had been German Ambassador in Tokyo and had died in 1936. They were all arrested in 1944, some as having been present at a tea party given by Fräulein von Thadden on 10 September 1943 when certain statements hostile to the regime had been made, some merely because they were members of the circle. Certain of them were subsequently executed, simply because they had stood up for humanity.⁹² Owing to continual postponement of proceedings against them Frau Solf, her daughter Lagi Gräfin von Ballestrem, Dr van Scherpenberg (Schacht's son-in-law) and Irmgard Zarden survived the war; Fräulein von Thadden, Kiep, Mumm and Halem were executed; Kuenzer, Bernstorff and Guttenberg were murdered by the SS.⁹³ Helped by a recommendation given in all good faith, a *Gestapo* spy, presenting himself as Dr Reckzeh of the Berlin Charité, had wormed his way into the tea party.⁹⁴ From this circle, which was in no way really subversive, links ran to the remaining opponents of Nazism in

the Foreign Ministry and to other centres of power in the Third *Reich*.

Kiep, who was a Major on the reserve, was Foreign Policy Desk Officer in OKW (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* – High Command of the Armed Forces) from 1939.⁹⁵ He was therefore one of the most important links to the Foreign Ministry and the resistance existing there. It included Ernst Freiherr von Weizsäcker, the State Secretary (Permanent Secretary) and Ambassador Ulrich von Hassell, together with Dr Fritz von Twardowski, Drs Theo and Erich Kordt, Dr Hasso von Eitzdorf, Bernhard von Bülow and Dr Paul Schmidt.⁹⁶ Others were Dr Eugen Gerstenmaier, Georg Federer, Gottfried von Nostitz, Albrecht von Kessel, Hans-Bernd von Haefen and Adam von Trott zu Solz – even this by no means completes the list. Further contacts led to the so-called ‘Kreisau Circle’ which had been in existence, at least as a social group, since 1937; it included Helmuth James Graf von Moltke, Peter Graf Yorck von Wartenburg, Horst von Einsiedel, Carl Dietrich von Trotha, Adolf Reichwein, Hans Peters, Hans Lukaschek, Carlo Mierendorff, Theodor Steltzer, Adam von Trott zu Solz, Hans-Bernd von Haefen, Harald Poelchau, the Jesuit Fathers Augustin Rösch, Alfred Delp and Lothar König, and Theo Haubach, Eugen Gerstenmaier, Paulus von Husen, Julius Leber, Hans Schönfeld and many others on a less intimate and permanent basis.⁹⁷ There were further cross-connections to many socialists and trade unionists.

The name of Albrecht Haushofer is also coupled with that of the Foreign Ministry; being in close contact with Rudolf Hess, Hitler’s ‘Deputy’, he was able to alleviate or stop many things.⁹⁸ He was a conservative, in many respects more closely allied to the group centred on Popitz and Langbehn; via his pupil Horst Heilmann he was in contact with ‘Red Orchestra’, a primarily communist-orientated group which had been built up as a Soviet wartime intelligence service under Harro Schulze-Boysen, a Lieutenant in the Ministry of Aviation, and Dr Arvid Harnack, a senior civil servant in the Ministry of Economics. It went into action on the outbreak of war with Russia in June 1941 and by the time it was destroyed in 1942 included numerous groups and cells scattered all over Western Europe. This organization passed its intelligence to Russia by radio; its finds included Hitler’s decision to pursue the offensive in Southern Russia in the spring of 1942.⁹⁹

It is not possible to quote all the names but it is clear that, starting in the second half of the 1930s, a complex and widespread conspiracy was gathering.

Whether their names have been quoted or not, all these people ‘did’ something to sabotage the government and assist in bringing about the fall of the regime. It must also be remembered that many of the subsequent participants in the various plots spent years in prisons or concentration camps – as representatives of those still at large, so to speak. Between 1933 and June 1934 Wilhelm Leuschner was detained for months either by the police or in a concentration camp; his last place of confinement was Börgermoor concentration camp. Immediately on his release he began to work with Jakob Kaiser, the former leader of the Christian trade unions. Their object was to remove Hitler and then form a united trade union, thus eliminating the cleavage between the Marxist and Christian trade unions. Max Habermann, leader of

The Background

the German White-collar Workers Union, joined them and together they drafted memoranda in 1936 and 1937 addressed to General von Fritsch stressing the degrading and brutal treatment meted out to workers and Jews. Leuschner was executed on 29 September 1944 as a participant in the 20 July plot and died with the call 'Unity' on his lips. Habermann was also executed. Kaiser, who became the focus of many opposition circles and one of Goerdeler's most valuable partners, succeeded in hiding in Berlin after 20 July. He played an important political role in 1945 in connection with the formation of the Christian-Democratic Union and subsequently in discussion with the Russian and their German satellites, finally becoming Federal Minister for All-German Questions.¹⁰⁰

Carlo Mierendorff was arrested in 1933 and then held in a concentration camp until 1938.¹⁰¹ Theodor Haubach was arrested time and again between 1933 and 1939 and spent two years in Esterwegen concentration camp.¹⁰² Dr Julius Leber, the former Social-Democrat *Reichstag* deputy, was arrested, ill-treated and released; then, on 23 March 1933, he was once more arrested at the entrance to the *Reichstag* and handcuffed on the spot.¹⁰³ He spent many miserable years in prisons or concentration camps between 1933 and 1937.

'Out in the open', however, various groups and individuals such as those referred to above did everything possible to undermine the Nazi tyranny. Pechel refers to a 'Stuermer Group' under Dr Paul Joseph Stuermer, which was active against Hitler from 1932, was then in close touch with the circles centred on Edgar Jung and Dr Römer, and was even an accessory to their plans for an assassination. The group included members of the *Stahlhelm*, a university professor, a Jesuit Father, a Social-Democrat and a number of officers; it had connections in southern Germany where its contacts were Dr Arnulf Klett, Theodor Bäuerle, a government architect named Albrecht Fischer, and the industrialist Robert Bosch.¹⁰⁴

Admittedly in many cases these people did no more than 'merely' express their abhorrence of the regime and talk about ways and means of dealing with it. According to their rulers, however, even this was tantamount to conspiracy; under the notorious 'Treachery Law' it was a punishable offence, meriting even the death sentence.¹⁰⁵ To understand the courage required, one must always bear in mind what it meant to live under a dictatorship, where the individual had no rights in practice and lived permanently under threat of mental and physical ill-treatment, officially sanctioned and practised, of blackmail, loss of liberty and livelihood and an agonizing death. It is of course unreasonable today to require every opponent of the regime and of Nazism to have been a potential fanatical assassin, if he is to be accepted as a member of the opposition. Only a few possess the capability to translate convictions into action of such intensity. Finally, although before 1938 there were many of the conspirators who regarded the physical elimination of Hitler as the only effective solution, the majority still hoped to bring about his fall by less violent methods, by gradual erosion of the Nazi tyranny, by blunting its edge or stealthily drawing its teeth. Slowly, however, a single colossal danger began to loom – war. So the forces of the resistance became increasingly concentrated

on preventing the threatened war and later on ending it. Naturally, therefore, in the first instance those anti-Nazis active in the field of foreign policy played the most important role. Even before the outbreak of war, however, the military element could not long remain aloof from developments.

3 Top-Level Crisis

In 1937 far-reaching changes were under way in Germany, and in the succeeding years they were destined to convulse the world. Hitler's single-minded determination to go to war can be proved with convincing clarity from his own utterances between 1920 and 1945.¹ The important point here is that towards the end of 1937 Hitler made concrete statements showing that he was set on a course of aggressive and violent foreign policy; he actually laid down the stages leading to war; he set the immediate objectives and the methods to be employed to attain them, and these, as he himself explicitly emphasized, led inevitably to war.

On 5 November 1937 Hitler held a conference with the senior *Wehrmacht* leaders in the *Reich* Chancellery; it lasted from 4.15 to 8.30 p.m.; Freiherr von Neurath, the Foreign Minister, was also present. Of the military those present were Field Marshal von Blomberg, Minister of War, and the Commanders-in-Chief of the Army, Navy and Air Force, Colonel-General Werner Freiherr von Fritsch, Admiral Erich Raeder and Colonel-General Hermann Göring; in addition Colonel Friedrich Hossbach, the 'Führer's and Chancellor's *Wehrmacht* Aide', who was also head of the Coordinating Section (Personnel Branch) of the Army General Staff, was there. During the meeting Colonel Hossbach had made notes and these he reduced to writing five days later; they were incorporated in the War Ministry files.² During his first five years in office it had not been Hitler's habit to expatiate on his day-dreams or fantastic ideas in front of his military entourage or even in personal interviews with Commanders-in-Chief of the Services. On military matters he had shown great reticence when faced with experts. In conferences or discussions he had only rarely expressed his own views and had generally confined himself to listening and giving more or less silent agreement.³ Up to 1937 he had seldom taken important decisions on military matters without previous discussion with his advisers. Now, however, he had summoned the most senior *Wehrmacht* leaders in order to tell them that he would shortly be leading the German *Reich* into war.

The German people's *Lebensraum*, Hitler said, was too small; in certain important aspects, particularly that of food, self-sufficiency could not be achieved. The German *Lebensraum* must consequently be expanded and this was best done 'in areas immediately contiguous to the *Reich* in Europe and not overseas'. This expansion of territory could only be achieved by 'breaking

resistance'; since untenanted areas did not exist, the attacker would always be confronted by those in possession. Such intentions would be opposed by Britain and France; a moment for action must therefore be chosen when Britain and France would be prevented from intervening by other – internal or external – difficulties. In no case, however, should one wait longer than until about 1943 to 1945 since thereafter the potential enemies would have perceived German intentions and would also have armed themselves to resist. If one could be ready by about 1943, Austria and Czechoslovakia must be eliminated with extreme rapidity in order then to be able to face the most dangerous enemy, France, without the flanks being threatened. Should France, however, be paralyzed by something like a civil war, the situation must be exploited at any time in order to 'strike against Czechoslovakia'. It was naturally not possible to say with any certainty how the other powers – particularly Poland, Russia and Britain – would react to such action on the part of Germany. Hitler tried to suggest, however, that they would not intervene before Germany was ready to strike them down also.

According to Hossbach's minutes the reaction of the Commanders-in-Chief to Hitler's disquisition was antipathetic and cold. Blomberg and Fritsch stressed that Britain and France should not be turned into enemies of the *Reich* since, at this point, Germany was in no position to deal with them, not even with France alone; they also emphasized the strength of the Czech fortifications. Hitler countered these objections by expressing his conviction that Britain would not intervene, also with the comment that he did not anticipate tension increasing before about summer 1938. The argument, Hossbach recalls, was 'at times very sharp', primarily between Blomberg and Fritsch on one side and Göring on the other; Hitler listened attentively and was visibly impressed. He saw that 'instead of being met with acclamation and agreement, his political ideas encountered sober, factual objections. He also now knew full well that the two generals were opposed to any warlike development instigated from our side.'⁴ No one, however, refused to implement Hitler's plans; no one characterized them as unlawful or criminal. No doubt the soldiers felt that they were not called upon to express an opinion on such matters.⁵

On at least two subsequent occasions Hitler revealed his plans for assaults on Germany's neighbours to a similar, but even larger, military assemblage – on 23 May 1939 in the new *Reich* Chancellery, Berlin, and on 22 August 1939 in the 'Berghof' near Berchtesgaden.⁶ He was as explicit as on 5 November 1937. On 23 May 1939, for instance, sentences such as these were to be heard: 'Further successes can no longer be won without bloodshed.' 'It is not Danzig that is at stake. For us it is a matter of expanding our *Lebensraum* in the east.' 'No stock can be taken of declarations of neutrality.' 'Everybody's armed forces or government must strive for a short war. The leadership of the state must, however, also prepare itself for a war of ten to fifteen years' duration.' 'We shall not be forced into a war but we shall not be able to avoid it.' And on 22 August: 'A showdown which one cannot be sure of postponing for four to five years, had better take place now.' 'The moment is now favourable for a

The Background

solution [of the Polish Question], so strike!' 'Object: Destruction of Poland . . . Start: Method a matter of indifference. The victor will not be questioned afterwards whether his reasons were just. What matters is not to have right on our side, but simply to win.' 'Execution: Harsh and ruthless! Close your hearts to pity!' In face of such monstrous self-revelations no objection was raised, still less were resignations offered or compliance refused.

Apart from the audiences at these conferences only a few knew of the ideas and intentions revealed by Hitler. Considering it to be his duty, however, Colonel Hossbach had shown his memorandum on the meeting of 5 November 1937 to Colonel-General Ludwig Beck, Chief of Staff of the Army, and had also reported verbally on the course of the discussion. Hossbach records that the effect of his report on Beck was shattering.⁷ Beck followed his usual habit on such occasions; he seized his pen and wrote to clarify his thoughts. On 12 November he noted that Germany did in fact have a territorial problem, particularly from the strategic point of view; 'minor changes' seemed possible, certain revisions of the Treaty of Versailles, for instance; for the sake of these changes, however, 'the homogeneity of the German people, of the German racial core, must not be jeopardized afresh'.⁸ Looking at the situation realistically, Beck then demolished Hitler's reasons and arguments, saying that his conclusion regarding the necessity of solving the German territorial problem by 1943 to 1945 at the latest was 'shattering in its lack of sound reasoning'; France would always have adequate defensive forces facing Germany; from the point of view of food imports, the economy, the military and the political situation Germany's position would not be noticeably improved by the incorporation of Austria or Czechoslovakia. Then: 'The expediency of dealing with the Czech problem (possibly also the Austrian) when opportunity offers, of planning therefore and making such preparations as may be possible is not contested'; but a more thorough and comprehensive examination must be made of the conditions giving rise to such an opportunity. In Beck's view as given above, however, such 'conditions' would not obtain. As early as 3 May 1935 he had written to Fritsch offering to resign should preparations be made for an offensive war against Czechoslovakia.⁹

Meanwhile the fall both of Blomberg and of Fritsch was being engineered; it was caused primarily by their negative attitude to Hitler's disquisition of 5 November 1937.¹⁰ Intrigues against Fritsch had long been in progress, as he observed in a memorandum dated 1 February 1938, looking back over just four years in office as successor to Colonel-General Freiherr von Hammerstein.¹¹ Göring's ambition to become Commander-in-Chief of the *Wehrmacht* was well known.¹² The War Minister (Blomberg) had too independent a position, liable to impede Hitler's progress; moreover he had just raised objections to Hitler's policy. Hitler subsequently made an oblique reference to the reason for his action:¹³ a political leader, he said, could not do with a Commander-in-Chief who raised not only military but also political objections to all proposals and so failed to serve the leaders of the State.¹⁴

Both an occasion and an opportunity to replace by more pliable men the

military leaders who had proved so sceptical about Hitler's plans were soon available. During the funeral ceremonies for General Ludendorff on 22 December 1937 Blomberg asked Hitler casually for his permission to marry. Hitler gave his agreement and, together with Göring, appeared as a witness at the wedding on 12 January 1938. Simultaneously, however, rumours began to circulate and eventually documents were found: Eva Gruhn, now the wife of Field Marshal von Blomberg, had a disreputable past; she had been a prostitute and a model for lewd photographs; she was known to the vice squad.¹⁵ Göring played a particularly shady role in this affair; knowing the facts and fully aware of the probable consequences, he had done his utmost to bring about Blomberg's marriage.¹⁶ Immediately after the wedding rumours about Blomberg's wife were circulating in *Wehrmacht* circles; mysterious telephone calls to the *Wehrmacht* Adjutant's Office made action essential; Blomberg himself sought an audience with Hitler. The dictator pretended to be disillusioned and to feel that he had been duped. Perhaps he actually had; in any case he acted accordingly. Blomberg had to go and here was an opportunity to remove Fritsch at the same time.

Hitler may merely have seized his moment and used the refurbished evidence against Fritsch provided by Göring and Himmler as a handy instrument – he had known about it for some time since it was already two years old and, when first produced, he had himself given orders for its destruction.¹⁷ It is not possible to say how far he had simply been searching for an occasion of this nature. False evidence was now to prove that Fritsch was a homosexual and therefore unacceptable as head of the Army or as a candidate for the succession to Blomberg.

The 'witness' against Fritsch was a professional criminal drop-out named Otto Schmidt. He was head of a group of blackmailers and had made his living for years by starting affairs with homosexuals so that he could blackmail them later. On 28 December 1936 he had been sentenced to seven years imprisonment and ten years loss of civil rights for fourteen cases of blackmail and nine cases of contravention of paragraph 175 of the legal code (on homosexuality). He was finally executed in the summer of 1942 while an inmate of Sachsenhausen concentration camp; on 29 July 1942, at the end of a report on Schmidt, Himmler wrote to Göring: 'I request your agreement, dear *Reich* Marshal, that I should submit Schmidt's case to the *Führer* for his authorization to execute'; Göring's marginal comment was: 'Ought to have been shot long ago'.¹⁸ Hitler's early relationships with Röhm, whose homosexuality was notorious long before 1934, his nomination of Dr Walter Funk, another notorious homosexual, as *Reich* Minister of Economics on 5 February 1938 (no less), his indifference when the first accusations against Fritsch were made and his order at that time for the destruction of the files – all this was clear proof that Hitler was quite unmoved by the presence or absence of homosexuals among his adherents.¹⁹ Now, however, he had a comparatively convenient opportunity to rid himself, admittedly by the use of extremely underhand methods to which he was not averse, of two subordinates who were primarily desirous of serving their country rather than him; Hitler knew that

The Background

he had no hope of overcoming Fritsch's opposition to his plans.²⁰ Moreover he also had an opportunity, which he seized at once, of appointing as successor to the Ministry of War not some more faithful follower but himself and thus very considerably increasing and consolidating his control over the military. During the course of 1938 and 1939 certain successes in the exercise of military command confirmed Hitler in his growing conviction that he knew how to use the armed forces as an instrument of power as well as, if not better than, the experts.

So, on 4 February 1938, the great changing of the guard took place. Blomberg and Fritsch were relieved of their posts, in both cases 'for health reasons'; the *Reich* War Ministry was in effect turned into the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) which henceforth served as Hitler's military staff under the 'Chief of OKW' who ranked as a Minister of the *Reich*. Hitler himself took over supreme command of the entire *Wehrmacht*; as Commander-in-Chief of the Army he nominated General Walther von Brauchitsch, who was promoted Colonel-General. Göring, already a Colonel-General and Commander-in-Chief of the *Luftwaffe*, was promoted Field Marshal. General Wilhelm Keitel became Chief of OKW.²¹ During February, March and April changes were made in more than forty senior command positions; some fourteen generals found themselves summarily retired.²² In this way the monstrosity of the proceedings was largely camouflaged. Finally, a number of German ambassadors were recalled – Ribbentrop from London, Hassell from Rome, Dirksen from Tokyo and Papen from Vienna. Ribbentrop was appointed Foreign Minister in succession to Freiherr von Neurath who was relieved of his office. This change of Foreign Minister was a particularly striking illustration of the switch from willing assistants to sheer minions; in this sphere Hitler knew his personalities better than he did in the military.

It will rightly be asked why the Army accepted almost without comment the insult administered to its Commander-in-Chief. The main essential for any counter-action was absent, however – the necessary unanimity in the officer corps.²³ Its numbers had increased enormously since 1933; in 1932 there had been forty-four officers of the rank of major-general and upwards; in 1938 (1 October) there were 275, not counting 22 medical and 8 veterinary officers of general's rank. By May 1943 there were over a thousand officers of general's rank.²⁴ Only one method of opposition seemed possible, the simultaneous resignation of all generals – there was no other legal method; but the necessary conditions simply were not present; the officer corps had not the requisite internal solidarity. Without unanimity, without the participation of at least the majority of senior officers, any measure of protest would have been ineffective and might even have represented a form of mutiny. Ever since the end of the First World War naval officers had been suffering from a sort of trauma; the *Luftwaffe* had been built up by Göring and under the Nazi regime; it was unlikely, therefore, that any significant number of naval or Air Force officers would have joined those of the Army.²⁵ All this presupposes that the officer corps, and particularly that of the Army, was adequately informed of these happenings, of the accusations made against its Commander-in-Chief

and of the scurvy treatment meted out to him. There was, however, an almost complete lack of such information; even senior officers and their staffs had to rely on supposition and such occasional news or rumour as filtered through.²⁶ By 18 March 1938, when a Court of Honour under the presidency of Göring had pronounced on Fritsch's complete innocence and the mendacity of the evidence against him, Austria had been occupied and an ostensibly major success had therefore been scored with the assistance of the *Wehrmacht*. How, at such a moment, could anyone mutiny against his supreme warlord, to whom moreover he had sworn a personal oath? Concepts of honour, loyalty and morality were blurred and ambiguous, corrupted by an unscrupulous but successful and scintillating government.

Fritsch himself thought long and hard how he might defend himself – in the interests of the Army and the honour both of the officer corps and of himself. But against whom was he, perhaps in concert with senior officers of the Army, to take action? Göring and Himmler worked in the background and were unassailable so long as Hitler covered them and refused to make up his mind. It was, of course, both possible and conceivable that Hitler would realize the absurdity of the case against Fritsch, with its elementary slovenly emendations.²⁷ But on his own admission to Hossbach on 25 January 1938 he had long known about the file. The point was not whether he did or did not believe Göring, Himmler and the documents, but whether he should be so ready to believe them just at this moment – the opportunity to be rid of a tiresome Army Commander-in-Chief being a favourable one. Fritsch probably felt this but was unable fully to appreciate it. He believed in the *Führer* and his sincerity – 'until this case', as he put it.²⁸ This was not mere well-bred reticence; it was naïveté. Only considerably later did he realize that Hitler had been consciously and deliberately determined to remove him, using the most despicable methods. Even so, however, the foreboding remained that the use of force to defend his honour and that of the Army might lead to bloodshed and civil war – and that Fritsch did not want.²⁹ It was a long time before Fritsch really grasped Hitler's villainy, although the latter's refusal to accept his word of honour as even provisional proof of his innocence against a statement by the criminal Schmidt should have been warning enough; it was even longer before he realized that in this crisis his personal fate was largely identical with that of the Army and of Germany. He did realize this at the end of February but then it was too late.

On 13 June 1938, on Barth airfield near Stralsund, Hitler addressed the same assemblage of officers to which he had revealed Fritsch's 'shortcomings' on 4 February. Now he declared Fritsch rehabilitated and both Fritsch and himself to have been victims of a tragic error. Naturally, he said, he could not reinstate Fritsch since he, Hitler, could not expect Fritsch to have further confidence in him; moreover as *Führer* he could not recant before the nation.³⁰ On 15 June, therefore, Fritsch was simply nominated 'Chief' of No. 12 Artillery Regiment.³¹ In September 1939 he took his regiment to Poland, where he was killed in action.³²

In certain places efforts were indeed made to set in motion some counter-

The Background

action to the intrigue against Fritsch, but those principally involved were not prepared to act with the necessary energy. Admittedly Fritsch did challenge Himmler, who was suspected of being the main string-puller behind the whole dirty business, to a duel with pistols but the challenge never even reached Himmler. Fritsch was persuaded to withdraw it, since it might have done the Army more damage than all the preceding crisis.³³

After the war General Wilhelm Ulex, who was commanding XI Army Corps at the time, told of a meeting in May 1938 with Viktor Lutze, Chief of Staff of the SA; Lutze had promised the full support of the SA in the event of action by the Army against Himmler and the SS; should Hitler side with Himmler his life must if possible (but not under all circumstances) be spared. Ulex had asked for concrete proof that Schmidt, the 'witness', had been forced to give false evidence by Himmler; without this, Ulex, said, he could do nothing. Lutze had produced the proof a fortnight later and Ulex had gone to Achterberg to see Fritsch; the latter, however, had refused to do anything, saying that Hitler knew the whole story and so any action against Himmler would be futile. Ulex finally went to Brauchitsch, who merely advised him that 'if these gentlemen want this, then they must do it on their own'.³⁴

After the completely inadequate rehabilitation of Fritsch by Hitler in June 1938 a number of generals wished to tender their resignation. At Brauchitsch's request, however, they did not do so; Brauchitsch said that there would inevitably be war over the Sudeten question in the next few weeks and a man could not therefore leave his post. As might be expected, according to Ulex, Fritsch was also of the same opinion.

Rumour was rife and news of the crisis in the higher levels of the *Wehrmacht* filtered through by various channels – via Canaris and Oster in the OKW office '*Ausland/Abwehr*' (Military Intelligence), via Nebe, Director of the *Reich* Criminal Police Office, via Dr Gisevius who had been with the *Gestapo* and was now working in the *Reich* Ministry of the Interior, and via Dr Hans von Dohnanyi, a senior civil servant (*Oberregierungsrat*); as a result several of those who later became resistance leaders attempted to initiate some counter-action, but without success. They all now felt that nothing could be achieved except 'from outside', since at this time (end January 1938) no real leadership existed in the Army any more. Goerdeler, together with Schacht, accordingly visited General Wilhelm List, commanding IV Army Corps in Dresden, Chief of Staff of which was Major-General Friedrich Olbricht; after a brief description of events in Berlin Goerdeler urged List to act at once.³⁵ The *Gestapo*, he said, must be 'smoked out' and Hitler be faced with a *fait accompli*; this must include the removal of Göring, Himmler and Heydrich to ensure that Hitler was no longer under the influence or even control of these dangerous paladins. Lieutenant-Colonel Oster, who was in touch with Goerdeler either direct or via Gisevius and equally considered that the 'smoking out' of the *Gestapo* and the elimination of Himmler were the first essential measures, thought that Hitler would be most likely to recognize and accept a *fait accompli*; after all, he said, the *Gauleiter* were doing what they liked and getting away with it.³⁶

Goerdeler really thought it possible that IV Army Corps would act. In some ways, as with all his subsequent efforts until summer 1944, he was not entirely wrong; a military *putsch* was not quite so difficult as most of the generals approached invariably made it out to be. Wielding an instrument like the Army, however, was not quite so simple as the impetuous Dr Goerdeler thought. For both personal and practical reasons any action from Leipzig was more than unlikely; Olbricht was no go-getter; on the contrary, although those who knew him invariably stressed his extreme intelligence, he tended to be at a loss if rapid and exceptional decisions were demanded of him.³⁷ General List did not feel able to decide, still less to take revolutionary action, on the basis solely of Goerdeler's report, which in any case was second-hand. When Goerdeler again urged the 'smoking out' of the *Gestapo*, Olbricht replied that in the first instance only the troops around Berlin, in Potsdam, Spandau and Döberitz, could be of any use. To this Goerdeler could only reply that at the time there was no leadership in Berlin. General von Witzleben, who commanded the troops around Berlin (III Army Corps), was sick in Dresden.³⁸ In fact it was almost inconceivable that the *Gestapo* in Berlin could have been attacked from Dresden, even if General List had been prepared to do it. The Army was no longer a homogeneous, united and reliable instrument; it had been diluted and permeated by reserve, ex-police and so-called replacement (*Ergänzung*) officers and the junior ranks had come from the Hitler Youth. Moreover troops could not in practice be moved to Berlin without the whole affair becoming known. As Lieutenant-Colonel Röhrich, Operations Officer of IV Army Corps, said, the move of a division by rail would take at least three days and in any case it had first to be reported to and approved by Berlin.³⁹

Finally List decided to go to Berlin with his Operations Officer and there obtain first-hand information.⁴⁰ This produced nothing more definite and all agreed that they were working 'completely in the dark'. Fritsch had of course demanded legal proceedings; the whole affair was obviously a dirty trick. Beck, however, found their suspicions 'incomprehensible'; back-stage work by Göring and Himmler was only a supposition; Hitler's attitude was unknown and no motive could be seen for him to participate in an attack on Fritsch. List and his staff officer therefore returned to Dresden.

In those days following 25 January 1938 other parallel efforts to initiate counter-action were being made. According to Gisevius, Schacht, Goerdeler, Nebe, Graf von Helldorf, the Police President of Berlin, and Gisevius himself were involved together with Beck, Canaris and Oster on the military side. Of this small group only Schacht and Gisevius escaped execution or, in Beck's case, suicide. Again according to Gisevius and a statement by Schacht recorded by Colonel Jodl, head of the OKW Operations Staff, all were quite clear what game was being played and what should happen: the SS was trying to lay hands on the Army; the *Wehrmacht* must therefore forestall the *Gestapo* and occupy its headquarters at No. 8 Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse, Berlin.⁴¹ But how was this to be done?

One can only guess who of all these was primarily responsible for bringing pressure to bear on Brauchitsch. Gisevius made at least one of the many

The Background

attempts.⁴² At times it was said that Brauchitsch was ready to act if backed by a memorandum from the Minister of Justice. As later experience showed, he invariably had some good reason for wishing to 'make sure first'. Nothing, of course, came of it. According to Gisevius, Schacht tried to persuade the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy to act but he said that this was outside his competence; Schacht then enquired of General Gerd von Rundstedt, C-in-C of No. 1 Group Headquarters (Berlin), but all he would say was that everyone knew what he had to do. Again according to Gisevius, people gradually gained the impression that the *Wehrmacht* leaders were allowing the moment for action to slip by. Yet Goerdeler had made the approach to List already referred to; Gisevius himself had gone to Münster to see General Günther von Kluge, commanding VI Army Corps, and Ferdinand Freiherr von Lüninck, the Governor (*Oberpräsident*) of Westphalia. He had urged both the latter and Carl Christian Schmid, the senior government official (*Regierungspräsident*) in Düsseldorf, to bring pressure to bear on Kluge.⁴³ The object was to bring about a combined *démarche* by commanders of Military Districts (*Wehrkreis*).⁴⁴

Nothing came of all these attempts and all these efforts. They hardly merit use of the term 'plans for a *coup*', although the *Gestapo* refers to them as such in its interrogation reports following 20 July 1944.⁴⁵ In February 1938 Fritz-Dietlof Graf von der Schulenburg, then Vice-President of Police in Berlin, negotiated with Witzleben for some intervention on the part of the *Wehrmacht*.⁴⁶ Major-General Paul von Hase, then commanding No. 50 Infantry Regiment in Landsberg on Warthe, was prepared to use his regiment against the government in Berlin or at least against the *Gestapo* and SS.⁴⁷

Practical realistic plans were in fact out of the question; none of those involved could be sure what was fact and what was slander; no explanations were given even of the little that was known and Fritsch was guilty of much ineptitude in his handling of the matter. When, on 4 February 1938, Hitler was the one to produce the *fait accompli*, Brauchitsch, the C-in-C of the Army, said that Fritsch's court-martial must now be awaited for the affair to be cleared up.

Brauchitsch proved completely inaccessible to the conspirators.⁴⁸ He came with the reputation of being a determined 'strong' man,⁴⁹ but all the hopes placed in him by the opposition were doomed to disappointment – this should have been realized. Both by his fellow-officers and by historians he has been accused of lack of determination, weakness, instability and corruption.⁵⁰ Brauchitsch may perhaps have succeeded Fritsch 'with mixed feelings' but he did so willingly and, at least at the outset, without any attempt to reject the proposal indignantly or make his decision dependent on the outcome of the proceedings against Fritsch. On 29 January 1938 Jodl noted in his diary that Brauchitsch had told Hitler that he was 'ready for anything'.⁵¹ He allowed Göring and Hitler to help him persuade his wife to agree to a divorce so that he could marry Frau Charlotte Schmidt, an ardent Nazi.⁵²

During the critical days from 24 January to 4 February the *Wehrmacht*, particularly the Army, was to some extent leaderless. General Beck, the Chief

of Staff, was still firmly in the saddle and still occupied a key position. His attitude was potentially significant. What Beck did in this situation, however, is characteristic both of the state of uncertainty in which senior Army officers found themselves on the subject of their Commander-in-Chief and also of the personality of the Chief of Staff himself.

After Fritsch, at his interview on 26 January, had failed to convince Hitler of his innocence, with Hitler's permission Hossbach had informed Beck during the night and had asked him to come to the *Reich* Chancellery from his house in Lichterfelde.⁵³ There Beck was told by Hitler of what he (Hitler) regarded as proved and which seemed to Beck highly improbable. Beck thereupon went to Fritsch who indignantly denied all the accusations. Beck returned to the Chancellery the same night and informed Hitler. Hitler remained unconvinced and told Beck that he wished to appoint him to succeed Fritsch. Beck refused and insisted on court-martial proceedings to take place under all circumstances before Fritsch's removal from office.⁵⁴

It was not Beck's habit to act on emotion. Naturally he was now extremely suspicious of Hitler and even more of Göring, Himmler and Heydrich. Yet however strong his inclination to believe Fritsch's protestations – the concept of honour characteristic of the officer corps left him no choice but to do so – he found it equally difficult to believe that men could be capable of so dirty a trick as that constituted by the intrigue against Fritsch. Moreover at the time neither Hossbach nor Fritsch, and perhaps not even Hitler himself, knew the full details of the intrigue or of the web of falsehood woven with the assistance and knowledge of the *Gestapo*. It was therefore all the more difficult for Beck to construct an accurate picture of events. Since his habit was to draw conclusions only after due consideration and exercising great caution on the basis of the available evidence, it was utterly impossible for him to conclude that the whole affair was a trumped-up racket without the smallest basis of truth. In the light of Fritsch's undoubted honesty and Hitler's inconceivable dishonesty he was literally forced to the conclusion that there must be some misunderstanding. Even later, when he had realized the role played by Göring and Himmler, he was still prepared to concede that Hitler had acted in good faith.⁵⁵

This was really the sum total of Beck's attempts to intervene in connection with the Fritsch crisis. In the succeeding weeks he kept himself in the background and concentrated on the initiation of court-martial proceedings, although his relationship with Canaris and particularly Oster became closer and closer.⁵⁶ At this time, however, there was no question of Beck considering plans for a *coup d'état*. Lieutenant-General Franz Halder, who was then Deputy Chief of Staff I (Operations) in the Army General Staff, was urged by Oster and others to persuade Fritsch and Beck that, if catastrophe was to be avoided, Hitler and the Nazis must be dealt with by methods other than mere submission of realistic views followed by polite silence and trust in the force of argument and common sense. At the time of the Fritsch crisis Beck had clearly not grasped this.⁵⁷ Halder records that when, speaking in the name of his fellow-officers, he asked for an explanation of events during the crisis, Beck

The Background

replied that people must wait and hold their tongues until informed by him. Halder objected and said that the senior officers of the Army must be assembled now and that it was Beck's duty to do so in place of Fritsch. The argument finally ended with a remark by Beck which has become famous: 'Mutiny and revolution are words not to be found in a German officer's dictionary.'⁵⁸ So at this time all efforts to move Beck or to form a group to act against Hitler or at least against Göring and Himmler, failed. Beck's attitude did not change until the start of the Sudeten crisis.

**PART II/THE SUDETEN
CRISIS AND THE
ATTEMPTED COUP OF 1938**

This page intentionally left blank

4 Operation 'Green'

The court-martial of Fritsch took place almost simultaneously with the move of German troops into Austria. On 12 February 1938 Dr Kurt Schuschnigg, the Austrian Chancellor, visited Hitler on the Obersalzberg and, by means of threats, Hitler forced him to amnesty Austrian Nazis under sentence, to allow much greater freedom of action to National-Socialism in Austria and to appoint a Nazi, Dr Artur Seyss-Inquart, as Minister of the Interior.¹ By this means Hitler thought that he would ensure an internal Nazi seizure of power in Austria. Schuschnigg had no choice but to accept Hitler's demands. Austria was in practice impotent in face of the German *Wehrmacht*; Britain had made up her mind in 1937 not to oppose an Austro-German union and France was torn by government crises.

Despite this desperate situation, however, Schuschnigg attempted to prevent the annexation of Austria. Surprisingly and at short notice, on 9 March he announced a plebiscite in which Austrians were to decide in favour of an independent, social and Christian Austria. Thus in the event of a 'seizure of power' or a German invasion, the rape of Austria would have been plain to all the world; there was no doubt that the result of the plebiscite would be in Schuschnigg's favour. Under renewed massive pressure, both internal and external, however, Schuschnigg abandoned the project. Austria could no longer be saved from annexation.

On 11 March the Vienna government was presented with an ultimatum demanding the immediate nomination of Seyss-Inquart as head of government in place of Schuschnigg; otherwise German troops would march into Austria. Once more Schuschnigg was isolated. Italy, Austria's traditional enemy who had no wish to see an expansion of the German *Reich*, now led by an Austrian, was unwilling to act at this time; as a *quid pro quo* Italian sovereignty over German-speaking South Tyrol was later confirmed. Unless, therefore, Schuschnigg was willing to risk a hopeless war, he could only give way; many would have regarded such a war as an internecine struggle and conflicting loyalties would undoubtedly have led to terrible atrocities. Seyss-Inquart took over the government in Vienna that very evening; nevertheless, on pretext of a call for assistance from the new Austrian government, German troops moved in next day.²

Mass jubilation greeted the German troops; a sense of community prevailed and ostensibly brought a happy ending to all external and internal difficulties.

Union of the two countries was announced on 14 March and confirmed by a plebiscite held in both Germany and Austria on 10 April. For Austria disillusionment soon came but it was too late. Hitler had gained an unparalleled success and the *Wehrmacht* had played an important part in this international coup. Who was therefore likely to draw any conclusions from the exoneration of Fritsch, which finally took place on 18 March?

Hitler had long had his eye on a 'solution' of the Czech question. Czechoslovakia was a product of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the Peace Conference of 1919. As a result of the Austrian *Anschluss* the problem was now acute; the Sudeten Germans and the Sudeten German Party under Konrad Henlein were demanding the *Anschluss* of the Sudetenland, which was primarily German-speaking.³ All Europe was expecting Hitler to press for a solution of this question and none of the great powers could or would come to the assistance of the hard-pressed Czechoslovak State. Britain in particular was largely sympathetic to German demands for a revision of the Treaty of Versailles and for other reasons – economic, political, military and strategic – was not prepared to go to war to preserve intact a multi-nation state which had never worked harmoniously. France was Czechoslovakia's ally but, without British support, was in no position to fulfil the obligations of her alliance. If Germany infringed the territorial integrity of Czechoslovakia, France had no other course but to attack Germany and for this she felt herself too weak; moreover she was far too disunited politically and in practice incapable of acting. In 1935 the Soviet Union also had concluded an assistance pact with Czechoslovakia but subject to the condition that France fulfilled her obligations. Poland wanted to extract from Czechoslovakia the Polish minority together with a sizeable piece of territory; in addition she was by no means willing to allow the Red Army, against which she had fought in 1920, to move across Polish territory. Czechoslovakia was therefore just as isolated as Austria had been before the *Anschluss* and in addition was surrounded by hostile neighbours.

Immediately after the occupation and incorporation of Austria Hitler started preparations for the destruction of the Czechoslovak state. He was not particularly interested in the Sudeten Germans, but their distress (which was real) and the agitation by their extreme nationalist elements provided him with a convenient pretext. On 28 March Hitler personally instructed Konrad Henlein to make unacceptable demands on the Czechoslovak government.⁴ On 24 April in its 'Karlsbad Programme' the Sudeten German Party demanded full autonomy for the Sudetenland, removal of all obstacles to agitation and compensation for economic losses suffered since 1919.

Shortly thereafter the Czechoslovak government thought, wrongly, that a German attack was imminent and on 20 May it mobilized its army. Hitler was furious and the world at large thought that the Czechs were in the wrong. Hitler may well have regarded the Czech measures as a challenge or alternatively merely as an extra argument presented to him as a windfall; the fact remains, however, that concrete planning for 'Operation Green', a surprise attack on Czechoslovakia, had started long before 20 May. The main lines of the

operation had been laid down with complete clarity and in writing on 22 April 1938, and on 20 May General Keitel submitted to Hitler a fully prepared draft of the strategic directives to be issued.⁵ The Czech government's information was therefore to some extent correct. Finally on 30 May Hitler informed the Commanders-in-Chief of the Army, Navy and Air Force in writing that: 'It is my unalterable decision to destroy Czechoslovakia by military action within a foreseeable time.' The time factor was given as 'a suitable moment from the political and military points of view'. All preparations were to be ready by 1 October 1938 at the latest.⁶

Throughout the summer the crisis deepened. In late June Hitler was present at manoeuvres in the Grafenwöhr training area in Franconia, near the Czechoslovak frontier.⁷ Construction of fortifications in the west was accelerated and on 22 June compulsory civil defence service was introduced; the press devoted itself to whipping up a war fever.⁸ On 10 August, having taken note of a memorandum from Beck opposing the war plan, Hitler held a further conference with his senior military commanders, this time in the 'Berghof'.⁹ When Hitler again made known his intentions, certain generals were bold enough to voice doubts about the *Wehrmacht's* capacity to withstand the anticipated attack from France and even Britain, but this was ill received by Hitler. His answer was an outburst of rage against the 'pusillanimity' of which he accused the General Staff. Jodl's explanation was that the General Staff did not 'in the last analysis believe in the genius of the *Führer*'.¹⁰

Between 21 and 26 August Admiral Horthy, the Hungarian Regent, paid a state visit to Germany with Kania von Kanya, his Foreign Minister, and Rácz von Nagylak, his Defence Minister. They were told that in no case would Germany accept another provocation from Czechoslovakia and that 'if it should happen tomorrow, it was for them to decide whether they wished to participate or not'.¹¹

At the end of August further details of 'Operation Green' were fixed, in some cases under cover of exercises and manoeuvres.¹² For military reasons it seemed advisable that the 'incident' which was to 'give Germany cause for military intervention' should take place on the day before invasion and 'be officially known here by midday on D-1'. On 26 August Jodl noted in his diary: 'If on technical grounds it is desirable that the incident should occur *in the evening*, the following day could *not* be D-Day; it would have to be the day after that.' This, however, would dangerously reduce the level of surprise. In any case, the note concludes, the *Wehrmacht* must learn of the *Führer's* intentions in good time – 'if the Intelligence Section [of OKW] is not entrusted with organizing the incident'.¹³ On the next day Beck handed in his resignation.

But such setbacks were not enough to deter Hitler, particularly seeing that the other generals were carrying out his orders with the utmost alacrity. On 3 September he held a further conference with Brauchitsch and Keitel in the 'Berghof' and again laid down the timing of the attack as end September or early October. During the night of 9–10 September a further discussion was held in Nuremberg; those present were Hitler, Brauchitsch, Halder, Keitel

and the aides, Schmundt, Engel and Below. Halder, the new Chief of Staff, explained the plan for 'Operation Green' and expressed confidence in its success.¹⁴ Numerous military measures were then taken, so that foreign intelligence services could have been in no doubt of Hitler's determination. On 15 September the Labour Service was placed under orders of the *Wehrmacht*; the railways were instructed to 'hold large quantities of empty rolling stock available'; a Sudeten German Free Corps was formed under Konrad Henlein to 'protect Sudeten Germans and maintain the series of disturbances and clashes'.¹⁵ During September Hitler made a number of inflammatory speeches, referring to battle more frequently than usual; finally on 12 September he announced to the Nuremberg Party Rally that Germany would no longer tolerate 'the oppression and persecution of three-and-a-half million Germans' in Czechoslovakia; statesmen of other European countries should note that in the case of the Sudeten Germans 'the free right of self-determination' should take the place of oppression by the Czechs.¹⁶ In a speech in the Sports Palace in Berlin on 25 September he emphasized his determination in an intemperate outburst of hate, coupling it, however, with the statement that his claim for the Sudeten area constituted 'the last territorial demand which I have to make to Europe'.¹⁷

In the light of this growing crisis Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, took the lead and made every conceivable effort to bring about a peaceful solution. At short notice he proposed that Hitler receive him for a discussion on 15 September, and in fact it took place on the Obersalzberg on that day.¹⁸ The Sudeten Germans' right of self-determination, or to be more precise the German *Reich's* right to annex the Sudetenland, was recognized by Chamberlain in general terms; France, Czechoslovakia's ally, supported the British proposal. What could the Czechs do other than submit? From 22 to 24 September Chamberlain was in Germany again to settle the problem completely; the Czechs were prepared for far-reaching concessions. The Godesberg conference, however, ended without agreement, since Hitler announced his determination to march in at once, a plebiscite to follow in an area yet to be decided; a German ultimatum in this sense was despatched on 28 September. The Czechs mobilized; France called up reservists; Britain put her fleet on a war footing. World war was at the door.

Finally, however, came the Munich conference of 29 September. At this Hitler, Chamberlain and Daladier accepted a 'mediation proposal' by Mussolini whereby German troops would move into the claimed area by stages between 1 and 10 October. The Czech delegation was simply told of the result of the discussions.

Relief at the preservation of peace was everywhere great, in Germany as much as in Britain and France. The majority failed to perceive that this was no peaceful settlement on a basis of mutual compromise but international blackmail of the first order. In addition to Czechoslovakia, Britain and France were in fact also victims of blackmail, because they did not feel able to arrest the course of events, because to a large degree they had not the means to do so and because they did not possess the will to resist – a will which they were ul-

timately forced to acquire when they realized that 'the last territorial demand' would always be followed by another one, that their turn would come one day and that Hitler was bent on making himself dictator of Europe.

Those in Germany who raised warning voices against Hitler's policy of brinkmanship in the early days were 'proven wrong'. But they could see further than Hitler either could or would see and in the long term they were proved horrifyingly right. The next point in Hitler's programme was the 'disposal of the remainder of Czechoslovakia', to use his own expression, and thereafter he proposed to demand even more extensive *Lebensraum*.¹⁹ The great war had only been postponed.

5 *Foreign Policy and Resistance*

It was the threat of war, a war unnecessarily initiated or provoked by Hitler with the object of overthrowing the European order and so inevitably leading to world war, which produced a German resistance movement whose object was to overthrow the regime by *coup d'état* or revolutionary measures and then face the leaders of the regime with responsibility for their crimes.¹ There were a number of politicians, senior officials in various ministries and in numerous other positions, senior army officers and captains of industry who used their influence to curb and restrain Hitler's foreign policy, working both from within and indirectly from outside; resistance to Hitler's internal policy of course continued. It goes without saying that, in Hitler's SS State, all such efforts entailed the greatest danger to life and limb.

The most intensive and extensive activity was displayed by Dr Carl Goerdeler, who subsequently, during the war, was largely recognized as the leader of the resistance movement. He came of a civil service family; his original home was in West Prussia, ceded to Poland in 1919. Goerdeler became a lawyer and administrative civil servant; in 1930 he was appointed Burgomaster of Leipzig.² In December 1931 Brüning, the Chancellor, persuaded Goerdeler to become *Reich* Prices Commissioner and, since the German National People's Party, to which Goerdeler belonged, continued to oppose Brüning and refused to support his essential measures aimed at improving the economic situation, Goerdeler publicly resigned from Hugenberg's party. In May 1932 Goerdeler was asked to join the Papen cabinet as Minister of Economics and Labour but he refused; he was incensed by the fall of Brüning and indignant with those backing Papen; Papen himself he regarded as a diplomatic failure without support, competence or political merit. When, therefore, Hitler became Chancellor Goerdeler was soon in conflict with the Nazis; he refused, for instance, to hoist the swastika flag on Leipzig City Hall when it was not yet the national emblem; he personally protected Jewish businessmen against looting by the SA.³

Nevertheless it still seemed possible to differentiate between Hitler himself and his followers; many still contrived to believe that various of the regime's manifestations, later proved to reflect its real nature, were no more than aberrations which Hitler would by no means wish to condone. Goerdeler was

one of such people; he possessed not only inexhaustible energy but an almost ineradicable optimism, bordering on inability to grasp the evil and depravity of Nazism. Always, until the very day of his execution, he believed himself capable of changing everything, or at least many things, for the better by means of commonsense, argument and explanation.⁴ This pronounced characteristic is a possible explanation for the fact that in November 1934, after the murders of 30 June, he was willing to be reappointed *Reich* Prices Commissioner, a position in which he remained until 1 July 1935.⁵ In personal interviews with Hitler, Goerdeler did in fact succeed on several occasions in asserting his views against those of the Party bosses and even of Hitler himself and in gaining Hitler's support for them.⁶ To the very end these experiences seemed to Goerdeler to provide some rational justification for his optimism; in his later years he even went so far as to think that he could persuade Hitler not to continue with the war.

In practice cooperation with the Nazis soon proved to be impossible. In 1936, on the expiry of his first term of office as Burgomaster, Goerdeler was re-elected for a further twelve years and, since he had had the support of the Nazi Party, he thought that sensible logical ideas would prevail.⁷ In his absence, however, behind his back and against his explicit instructions Haake, his deputy, had the Mendelssohn memorial in front of the Leipzig Gewandhaus removed; this was done at the demand of the Nazi Party which refused to rescind the measure despite a threat of resignation by Goerdeler. He accordingly took his leave and retired on 1 April 1937.⁸

Goerdeler now devoted all his efforts to the prevention of war, initially in concert with South German industrialists and opponents of the regime led by Robert Bosch.⁹ From this source he drew the financial support without which he could not have undertaken the numerous journeys which were of such importance for his role in the opposition. He left on one such trip as early as June 1937; it took him to Belgium and Britain, back to Berlin and then to Holland, France, Canada and the United States. In March and April 1938 he travelled again to France and Britain, in late summer and autumn to Switzerland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Rumania and Bulgaria. Then in 1939 he visited France, Algeria, Britain, Libya, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Turkey and returned through Switzerland.¹⁰

In all these journeys Goerdeler was at pains to explain to the ruling statesmen of the West the dangers which threatened and his ideas for averting them. He preferred to use economic arguments since these best illustrated the 'natural' conditions, in other words the commonsense reasons in which he placed so much confidence. But he had no success.

In Germany his reports served to convince the converted even more firmly that their views were right and they provided ammunition for some of their initiatives. But these had no influence at all on the government in power.

An astonishing number of foreign statesmen received and listened to Goerdeler. In the years before the outbreak of war he talked in Paris to Daladier and Reynaud, in London to Montagu Norman, Governor of the Bank of England, Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Robert

Vansittart, Permanent Under-Secretary of State in the Foreign Office, Frank Ashton-Gwatkin, a counsellor in the Foreign Office and head of the Economic Department, also to Lord Halifax and Winston Churchill. In the United States he had conversations with Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State, Henry A. Wallace, Secretary for Agriculture, Sumner Welles, the Under-Secretary of State, G. S. Messersmith, Assistant Secretary of State, Herbert Hoover, the former President, Henry Lewis Stimson, later Secretary for War, Henry Morgenthau Jr, Secretary of the Treasury, and Owen D. Young, the industrialist; in Canada he talked with the Prime Minister, William Mackenzie King.¹¹

Goerdeler was never regarded as representing a realistic, probable or even desirable policy. The French, British and American governments felt unable to follow up his proposals in any way. Goerdeler's reception in Paris in the spring of 1938 is a good illustration.¹² Dr Reinhold Schairer, a German jurist who had been active in affairs of academic education at an international level and who had been living in London since 1933 and had many connections in France and Switzerland, arranged Goerdeler's most important contacts in Paris. He recommended Goerdeler to Pierre Bertaux, Professor for German Studies, who was at that time *Chef de Cabinet* in the section *Education Nationale* of the French Ministry of Culture. Together with Schairer, Goerdeler was invited to Bertaux's house in Paris early in March.¹³ Bertaux listened to Goerdeler's explanation of the reasons why the French government should adopt a firm unyielding attitude on the Czechoslovak question and on all questions involving German territorial demands; he could hold out no hope, however, that such an attitude would be adopted, still less that Goerdeler's warnings would be taken seriously. Apart from this the two were entirely agreed on the dangers threatening Europe.

On 5 April Goerdeler reappeared in Bertaux's office, this time completely unexpectedly, and begged to be put in touch with French government circles. The same day Bertaux obtained for him an interview with the most senior official of the French Foreign Ministry, Alexis Léger the Secretary-General (known as a poet under the name Saint-John Perse); Bertaux was present and the conversation lasted two hours. Goerdeler again urged as unyielding an attitude to Hitler as possible. He stated that he might perhaps exert some influence on German policy, but only provided that he had support and backing from abroad. Léger, however, committed himself in no way; he spoke, Bertaux recalls, like a Radical Socialist from the Midi, without bluster but only in general non-committal terms. Goerdeler was given not the smallest assurance. Bertaux and Léger had no doubts of Schairer's good faith but they knew very little indeed about Goerdeler. It might well be that he belonged to the German resistance movement, but it equally well could be that he merely wished to pump the French government and would immediately report everything he was told to the German government. In addition there was the problem of whether anyone was prepared to take responsibility for initiating a major war in Europe; although France was relatively better prepared in 1938 than in 1939, she was hoping to overhaul Germany shortly in the arms race.

On 7 April Goerdeler and Bertaux dined together and Goerdeler reiterated his urgent request for a firm attitude on the Czech question. Next day, however, Leon Blum's government, which had only been in office since 13 March, resigned and on 10 April Edouard Daladier formed a government; Bertaux went to Toulouse University. Goerdeler's contact with the French government, never very effective anyway, was now severed.

Goerdeler did little better in London. Here at least the ground had been prepared in that Vansittart had not the smallest confidence in the Hitler government's policy. He also placed much trust in Goerdeler, whom he regarded as reliable, honest and patriotic, in fact the sole genuine opponent of Hitler among the many who presented themselves as such.¹⁴ In April 1938, however, talking to Vansittart, Goerdeler demanded the cession of the Sudetenland to Germany, just after Austria had been incorporated in a somewhat unseemly manner; at the same time he urged the British government to adopt a clear consistent policy, since otherwise Hitler's appetite for other people's territory would only be increased. Thus he was involuntarily working contrary to the efforts of the resistance and giving rise to even greater mistrust of the 'other Germany' than was anyway felt by foreign governments.¹⁵

The British gained the impression that Goerdeler might well be advancing the ideas of leading circles in the German opposition, not merely his own. The various emissaries who appeared during the Sudeten crisis all showed similar revisionist tendencies and their views seemed to tally with those of Goerdeler.¹⁶ Faced with conservatives, Prussians and monarchists on the one hand and on the other with memories of the Wilhelmine era (particularly 1900–14), the invasion of Belgium and the First World War, all now compounded by Hitler's 'neo-Prussianism', views about Germany held in leading influential circles in Britain could differentiate only vaguely between the unattractive alternatives. Such considerations must be remembered.¹⁷

Finally Goerdeler's demand for cession of the Sudetenland underlined another weakness in the position of the German opposition vis-à-vis the French and British governments; they were not vitally interested in the territorial integrity of the Sudetenland or indeed of Czechoslovakia as such; Hitler, on the other hand, might be satisfied with the German-speaking Sudetenland; after all, he was making no demand for colonies, participation in world policy or maintenance of a large fleet. Why, therefore, should France and Britain resurrect the spectre of imperial Germany and '1914'? To many Western statesmen in fact Hitler seemed the lesser of the two evils. If concessions were to be made, they thought, why not to Hitler? Why help overthrow his government and then grant the concessions demanded to another German government? This seemed both complicated and senseless. The British Ambassador in Berlin, who was obviously highly credible as an informant, contributed largely to these ideas about Germany and Hitler in London.¹⁸

Quite apart from this, the suggestion that Britain, working from outside and in time of peace, should attempt to overthrow the government of a major

European country was extraordinary. However determined Britain might have been, she would hardly have ventured on so foolhardy a policy; freedom of choice for other people in their own form of government was firmly rooted in British tradition.¹⁹ In international dealings, even with dictators, good faith was assumed. A government which negotiated and communicated with another on a basis of mutual recognition could not at the same time secretly pursue the overthrow of its partner without itself losing all credibility and confidence. In London people were only too well aware of this.²⁰ From this point of view it was entirely understandable that Vansittart should have said in reply to Goerdeler that what he was proposing amounted to treason.²¹ This basically disregarded the ethical motive, the subordination to humanity of loyalty to one's country. Nevertheless Goerdeler's revisionist demands, however well meant, raised an insuperable obstacle to any meeting of minds.

When Chamberlain compared the German opposition to the Jacobites (supporters of James II, exiled in 1688, who were trying to overthrow William of Orange and restore James to the throne by stirring up France against England), he was, of course, missing the point entirely.²² The German opposition was not primarily interested in its own power or position but in the maintenance of peace. For this purpose they made such proposals as seemed to them effective: they wanted Britain to give an unequivocal 'No' to Hitler's plans for conquest by blackmail. Both sides were agreed on the inadmissibility of Hitler's procedures; British military preparedness was not substantially inferior to that of Germany; equally both were agreed that Germany could not conduct a successful war on two fronts or even a successful war against Britain and France.

From the point of view of the German opposition they were by no means calling upon Britain to risk a world war, which commonsense and a readiness to compromise might well avert, but this might be the impression which they created in Britain. People there did not realize as clearly as did many in Germany that, consistently from the beginning, Hitler was demoniacally headed for war. In any case London could see no vast difference between the Nazi government and one that might possibly be formed by the opposition. Both would be 'nationalist' and revisionist; the British government, therefore, had no wish to deal with the German opposition; they wanted to reach some agreement with the legitimate German government.²³

The British and French, therefore, failed to appreciate the position in which German opposition politicians were placed if they were to avoid being accused of pursuing a Versailles Peace Treaty policy and betraying their national interests. Goerdeler was fully and painfully aware of this dilemma; on 11 October 1938, after the occupation of the Sudetenland, he wrote to an American friend: 'For myself I could say now: the power and *Lebensraum* of my country constantly increases. As a German I ought to rejoice at this. But I know that these dictators are criminals and that their economic policy leads to bolshevism; Hitlerism is poison for the German soul; Hitler is determined to root out Christianity . . . It will not be justice, reason and decency that will determine the world's future but naked force'.²⁴ Such an attitude was difficult

to understand for those in foreign countries, where people were not habitually involved in a conflict between their ethical principles and their patriotism.

The fact remains, however, that Vansittart did advise the British government to adopt a firm attitude towards Hitler, as he had been doing ever since 1930; he referred to previous conversations with Goerdeler in 1937, to memoranda by the German Heavy Industry Association and by Colonel Thomas, head of the War Economy Section in *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH).²⁵ He prepared a report for the cabinet stressing the weakness of the German economic and military potential, the failure of the Four-Year Plan, the shortage of raw materials and the desire for peace in Hitler's military entourage which merited support from outside. But Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister of the time, and his cabinet, which had only come to office at the end of May 1937, a few days before Goerdeler's first visit to London, never even received the report. When the draft was submitted to Anthony Eden, the Foreign Minister, he suppressed it and prevented its finalization and submission to the cabinet.²⁶ Chamberlain was already determined on a policy of compromise as regards Austria and Czechoslovakia and he was confirmed in his view by memoranda from the British Chiefs of Staff pointing out that Britain was in no way prepared for war with Germany.²⁷ He did not appreciate discussion on British foreign policy before taking his decision; he wished to be solely responsible for deciding what happened.²⁸ Vansittart's warnings, which gave a very accurate appreciation of the Hitler government, were accordingly disregarded.²⁹

Despite all these obstacles to an understanding by either side of the position of the other, many still saw value in warning the British government against Hitler's intentions as often and as emphatically as possible in the hope that an unyielding attitude might still prevent war. Through their own channels, particularly from their Embassy in Berlin and their intelligence services, the British government received a continuous stream of information and warning.³⁰ There were also numerous contacts with German emissaries.

In July 1938 Captain Fritz Wiedemann, Hitler's personal aide, travelled to London with Hitler's knowledge and talked to Lord Halifax. Through Wiedemann Halifax gave Hitler to understand that a solution of the Sudeten German question by force would not be calmly accepted by the British people. According to his own report Wiedemann indicated that the latest possible date for a solution was March 1939 – he had had the timing laid down by Hitler confirmed by OKW.³¹

On his return from London Wiedemann did not even manage to report in detail to Hitler. Accordingly in August he let the British government know 'through a third party' that Hitler was now determined to solve the Sudeten question 'by force in the immediate future'.

During August 1938 further approaches to London were made by a journalist, Captain (ret'd.) Victor von Koerber.³² On at least three occasions, the first time on 6 August, he contacted the British Military Attaché, who reported to his superiors.³³ Koerber said that the colours black-white-red were the only revolutionary colours and spoke about a restoration of the

monarchy; he indicated that the overthrow of the regime must of course be brought about from within but could be supported from outside. In his report the Military Attaché opposed these ideas, saying that, should an attempt fail, everything would be worse than before and Hitler's position would merely be strengthened. Moreover Koerber was proposing the Crown Prince as candidate for the throne; he had supported Hitler at the presidential elections of 1932 and did not have a good press abroad.³⁴

As a member of the exclusive Casino Club in Berlin, Ian Colvin, a British journalist, had made the acquaintance of Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin, landowner and conservative monarchist politician. At the end of March or early April 1938 (soon after the German invasion of Austria) Kleist spoke to Colvin, begging him to warn the British government of Hitler's plans for conquest. Hitler would not be satisfied with Austria, he said; he was aiming at world domination; he was mad of course but in full possession of his mental powers. Kleist could see only one possibility of stopping the next planned move against Czechoslovakia – a clear firm 'No' from Britain. For the moment Hitler did not possess the resources to fight Britain; he knew this and had admitted as much himself; the Army General Staff also wished to prevent war but needed a 'sheet anchor', some effective resistance from outside, if they were to restrain Hitler.

In May Colvin passed on Kleist's warning to Ogilvie-Forbes, Counsellor in the British Embassy, and he is convinced that Vansittart received it before mid-May.³⁵

In late July 1938 Colvin received word through an intermediary 'from one of the three highest generals in the German High Command' that military action against Czechoslovakia would begin on 28 September.³⁶ In a letter dated 3 August he reported this to his friend Lord Lloyd, Chairman of the British Council, who on many matters had the ear of Chamberlain and Lord Halifax; Lord Lloyd is said to have passed Colvin's report to Vansittart and certain members of the cabinet.³⁷ In a covering letter Colvin also announced that Kleist would be visiting London and doing so on behalf of the *Abwehr* with the object, if possible, of obtaining British agreement to intervene against Germany in the event of a German attack on Czechoslovakia.

Kleist did in fact travel to London with the blessing and support of Canaris and Oster.³⁸ On 16 August even Sir Nevile Henderson, the British Ambassador, himself recommended Kleist as an emissary of 'the moderates in the German General Staff'.³⁹ As Kleist told Colvin in November 1938, the specific purpose of his mission was given him by General Beck in these words: 'Bring me certain proof that Britain will fight if Czechoslovakia is attacked and I will make an end of this regime.'⁴⁰ The 'proofs' visualized were a public declaration of British support for Czechoslovakia and a military demonstration.

On 18 August, therefore, Kleist flew to London, where he stayed in the Park Lane Hotel.⁴¹ Late that afternoon he had a talk with Vansittart and told him that war was a certainty unless Britain, the only country able to do so, stopped it.⁴² As Vansittart stated with great clarity in his report to the Foreign Minister, according to Kleist the problem now was not the threat of war but

its complete certainty, since Hitler was totally determined to have it. When Vansittart asked for the planned timing of the attack, Kleist laughed and said that the British government had known that for a long time. He knew of course of Colvin's report to Lord Lloyd through Ogilvie-Forbes and therefore of the information which the British government had, part of which came from him.⁴³ Kleist then said to Vansittart that after 27 September it would be too late and in his report to Lord Halifax Vansittart referred to the letter which he (Halifax) had received from Lord Lloyd and in which 28 September was given as the final date.⁴⁴

As a method of deterring Hitler Kleist proposed some proof which would convince him that Britain and France were not bluffing, if possible a public speech by a leading British statesman including an appeal to all Germans who did not want war. In his report Vansittart added that, as Lord Halifax already knew, this was a proposal which had frequently been made to him in recent weeks by Germans opposed to war; the general political ideas put forward by Kleist were sensible; in Kleist's view, however, no reasonable German policy was to be expected while Hitler was in power; if Hitler suffered a defeat, this would be the prelude to the downfall of his regime – a view also supported by the British Military Attaché in Berlin.⁴⁵

Halifax sent Vansittart's report on to Chamberlain, and the Prime Minister commented upon it in writing on 19 August:⁴⁶ That very morning, he said, he had been informed by German military circles through Major-General Lord Hutchinson of Montrose that this time Hitler was not bluffing and must be restrained from taking extreme measures by some form of compromise; this view, he said, ought to be compared with what Kleist proposed! The Prime Minister, therefore, who either could not or would not see the reality, had to struggle hard to resist the obviously great impression made by Kleist's mission, emphasized by the enormous risk to Kleist himself – Kleist had said that he had left practically with a noose round his neck. As already mentioned, Chamberlain then compared Kleist and his friends to the supporters of James II, saying that Kleist was clearly anxious to stir up his friends in Germany to attempt to overthrow Hitler, that he was therefore prejudiced and that a good deal of what he said must be discounted.

The most that Chamberlain eventually declared himself ready to do was to make the gesture of summoning Sir Nevile Henderson, the British Ambassador in Berlin, to London for talks on the Sudeten question. In short Kleist's approach to Chamberlain had achieved nothing.

Henderson, however, whose duty it should have been to report to his government with unvarnished realism, was more of an admirer of the Nazis and of their remarkable organizational achievements than a cautious sceptic.⁴⁷ It is true that on 19 August 1938 he wrote to his superiors in London that, if Britain saw any utility in war, now would be the moment to make it rather than later.⁴⁸ He knew Chamberlain's views, however, and was certainly not prepared to advise determination and firmness. Telephoning from Berlin to his Foreign Minister on the afternoon of 19 August he urged him not to irritate Hitler unnecessarily or force him to yield further to the 'extremists' in

his own ranks; in conclusion he said that objectively the Germans had 'a strong case' over the Sudetenland.⁴⁹ After the war he said: 'Nothing but the direct and immediate threat of war would have stopped Hitler at that stage.'⁵⁰ War, however, was what people were trying to avoid.

On the evening of 18 August Kleist saw Lord Lloyd again and on the next day Winston Churchill. The meeting with Lord Lloyd does not seem to have led to the anticipated unanimity of view. Kleist was quite frank with Churchill about his own views and those of his friends – restoration of the monarchy and elimination of the Polish Corridor. Churchill did not think it opportune to deal with the Corridor problem, since Hitler himself had shelved it. He promised, however, to send a letter to Kleist giving his views – unofficial of course – on the risk of war which would result from the threatened German attack on Czechoslovakia.⁵¹

As an opposition leader Churchill could naturally make no binding agreements. In his letter he said that it was difficult for democracies like Britain to commit themselves in advance to a specific policy and on the basis of hypothetical situations. One must consider, Churchill continued, not what might happen in the first few months of a conflict, but where we should all be in the third or fourth year. It would be a great mistake to imagine that even the slaughter of the civilian population through air raids would prevent the British Empire from developing its full war power. All the major nations involved in such a war – and a crossing of the Czech frontier by German troops would undoubtedly entail a new world war – would fight it to the bitter end and Britain would have the support of the greater part of the world. For the moment the attitude of the British government, as Lord Halifax had recently confirmed to Churchill, was that set out by Chamberlain in his speech of 24 March.

With the best will in the world Churchill could not say more. Vansittart, however, was authorized to say that, should the situation deteriorate, Britain would make a naval demonstration and in any case Sir John Simon, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, would make a minatory speech in the next few days. (It was made on 27 August and reiterated that the content of Chamberlain's speech of 24 March was still valid.)⁵²

Taken as a whole, therefore, Kleist's mission was unsuccessful and he himself confirmed this.⁵³ Canaris and Oster, to whom Kleist reported on his return on 24 August,⁵⁴ could hardly hope that this would persuade the generals of Britain's will to fight, though Churchill's toughness was convincing enough. The letter found its way into Hitler's immediate entourage and so, whether via Canaris or the Foreign Ministry, reached its destination.⁵⁵ Without mentioning the recipient but specifying the author, Weizsäcker included an extract from it in a memorandum dated 6 September on foreign reactions to a possible conflict between Germany and Czechoslovakia.

Meanwhile the opposition renewed its attempts to persuade Britain to adopt a firm attitude. On 18 August, as a protest against Hitler's policy, General Beck, Chief of the General Staff of the Army, had handed in his resignation, which was accepted by Hitler on 21 August.⁵⁶ General Halder, his

successor, however, continued the efforts to prevent war. Halder assumed office on 1 September and as early as 2 September (the idea seems to have originated about 15 August while Beck was still in office) Lieutenant-Colonel (retd.) Hans Böhm-Tettelbach went to London in a further attempt to influence the British government.⁵⁷ His mission, as given him by Halder and Oster, was to press the British government with all urgency to stand firm in face of further demands by Hitler. Halder and Oster visualized Vansittart as the immediate recipient of this message. Böhm-Tettelbach knew nothing of Kleist's mission.⁵⁸ As one of the most elementary security precautions members of the opposition seldom knew of any initiative other than their own.

In London Böhm-Tettelbach did not succeed in penetrating into any leading influential circle. All he could do was to talk to Julian Piggott, whom he had known after the First World War and who was now in business, and with a Major of the Intelligence Service. Piggott had been Inter-Allied High Commissioner at Cologne in 1920 and still had some important contacts, but Böhm-Tettelbach's message, which was basically similar to that of Kleist, eventually reached Vansittart via the Major.⁵⁹ Naturally this 'warning' was no more effective than its predecessors or successors; Chamberlain's attitude and views were more or less fixed. On his return Böhm-Tettelbach reported to Oster, whom he met in Wuppertal, and Oster passed the report on to Halder.⁶⁰

Hardly had Böhm-Tettelbach returned than a fresh approach was made to London, this time from the Foreign Ministry but once more in collusion with the group centred on Canaris and Oster. Halder seems to have known nothing of it.⁶¹ As in the *Abwehr*, there existed in the Foreign Ministry a group of all ages whose conspiratorial activity was tolerated and to a great extent supported by their superiors, Canaris and Weizsäcker respectively.⁶² The Foreign Ministry group included Adam von Trott zu Solz, Otto Kiep, Hans-Bernd von Haefen, Eduard Brücklmeier, Albrecht Graf von Bernstorff, Albrecht von Kessel and the Kordt brothers. Dr Erich Kordt, a counsellor (*Legationsrat*), was on Ribbentrop's staff, first in the 'Ribbentrop Bureau' and then in the Embassy in London; since the spring of 1938 he had been in the Foreign Ministry in Berlin as head of the 'Ministerial Bureau'.⁶³ He worked closely with Freiherr von Weizsäcker, the State Secretary, both officially and because their views on Hitler and his policy of brinkmanship tallied; Weizsäcker was also in touch with Beck, after the latter's retirement, with Halder and also with Canaris.⁶⁴ Theo Kordt was Counsellor at the Embassy in London, where for a time he was acting as *Chargé d'Affaires*.

As a result of numerous deliberations, contacts and discussions the idea emerged that the Foreign Ministry's influence should be utilized to prevent the outbreak of war. Two possibilities were envisaged: action from within and the exertion of influence from outside.

The first thought was to bring influence to bear on Hitler via Colonel-General von Brauchitsch, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. At the end of August Oster asked Erich Kordt to seek an interview with Brauchitsch and give him a picture of the external political situation; Brauchitsch, he said, was not politically-minded but he might perhaps be impressed by the views of an

expert.⁶⁵ Weizsäcker, whom Kordt asked for advice, agreed that he should talk to Brauchitsch. He (Weizsäcker) could no longer do this himself, he said, since in these tense days such action might give rise to the most dangerous and possibly well-founded suspicions on the part of the rulers and also of the public.

Kordt accordingly went to the War Ministry on the Tirpitzufer, where Oster had clearly taken precautions to ensure that no entry should appear in the visitors' book; Kordt was received at the entrance by someone he knew and conducted inside. He told the Commander-in-Chief of the Army that Germany was entirely isolated; there was no justification for the idea that Britain and France would not intervene if the *Wehrmacht* invaded Czechoslovakia. He knew the theory well, he said, and he was aware of its source, but he knew the material on which it was ostensibly founded and on the basis of that material he was forced to the opposite conclusion. He showed certain documents to Brauchitsch, who asked a number of questions; in particular he wanted to know on what Hitler and Ribbentrop based their hopes of victory. Kordt thereupon quoted a circular of Ribbentrop's which said that, should the Western Powers be so deluded as to intervene, seventy-five million Germans would fall upon them as one man and annihilate them.

On Oster's advice, Kordt volunteered no opinion; he simply set out the situation and left it to Brauchitsch to draw his own conclusions. When Brauchitsch asked what Kordt hoped to gain from his visit, he merely said that the fate of the Army and of Germany, and therefore entire responsibility, now lay with Brauchitsch. The General was taken aback.

The Foreign Ministry group considered that the second possibility of preventing war lay in massive pressure from outside and that this would best take the form of unequivocal threats and warnings from Britain. Many approaches had already been made to London for such warnings to be issued. Despite previous negative reactions, however, efforts were pursued.

On 1 September Professor Carl Jacob Burckhardt, the League of Nations High Commissioner for Danzig, passing through Berlin on his way to Berne, visited Weizsäcker to report and discuss the situation with him. Weizsäcker told Burckhardt of the proposal to send Theo Kordt secretly to Chamberlain and Lord Halifax and asked him urgently to act on the same lines as soon as he could. In his memoirs Burckhardt recalls that he was to contact the Foreign Office in London from Switzerland and say that 'with Hitler unambiguous language must be used since only this would deter him. He [Weizsäcker] was thinking some "uninhibited undiplomatic Englishman like some general with his hunting crop" might suddenly confront Hitler; only thus would the latter perhaps listen.' Burckhardt stresses that in so doing Weizsäcker was 'conspiring with a potential enemy for the purpose of preserving the peace – a double game of the utmost peril . . . Even as early as this, Weizsäcker was making no secret of his view that the preservation of peace and the salvation of Germany were only possible if the one ruinous figure, in whose hands all power was concentrated, should disappear.'⁶⁶

Burckhardt drove straight to Karlsruhe via the autobahn and on to Berne,

where the same morning he visited Sir George Warner, the British Minister, and spoke on the telephone to Lord Halifax's Parliamentary Secretary, passing on Weizsäcker's request. A few days later Burckhardt was able to explain it all in detail to Ralph Stevenson, specialist for League of Nations questions in the Foreign Office, and the latter passed it on to Sir William Strang, Head of the Central Department, in a letter dated 8 September.⁶⁷ This said that the only method of bringing Hitler to see the truth was a letter from the British Prime Minister which should be handed direct to Hitler by a courier;⁶⁸ care must be taken to ensure that Hitler was given an accurate translation. In his proposal Weizsäcker had said that he could not, of course, make such a request to the British Ambassador in Berlin and had therefore asked Burckhardt to act as intermediary; it was of the utmost importance that this letter reach Hitler as soon as possible, before the end of the Nuremberg Party Rally.

Finally, in his letter to Strang, Stevenson passed on Burckhardt's impression of the whole affair. Weizsäcker, he said, had undoubtedly told Burckhardt many things which, under normal circumstances, he would have kept secret out of loyalty to his superiors. Burckhardt had been so impressed by his interview that he had driven the 550 miles from Berlin to Berne without stopping in order to report at once to Sir George Warner. At the conclusion of his report and transmission of Weizsäcker's message Burckhardt added that senior officers of the German *Wehrmacht* and all members of the government to whom he had talked, including Göring, were opposed to war against Czechoslovakia. Admittedly the Army would march at Hitler's order, but the first set-back would lead to the collapse of the regime.

Before, however, action through Burckhardt could take effect, the men of the Foreign Ministry had initiated another approach on similar lines. Once more senior officials of the Foreign Ministry warned a potential enemy against their own government's policy and took the risk of divulging information which might produce an unyielding attitude on the part of that enemy to their own government's aggressive demands.

Lieutenant-Colonel Oster urged Dr Erich Kordt somehow to obtain from the British some unequivocal statement, not using the niceties of diplomatic language, but couched in terms which would impress even a semi-educated dictator who thought in terms only of force.⁶⁹ If this could be obtained, the military opposition would be in a position to prevent the outbreak of war – 'Then there will no longer be any Hitler. Do you understand me?'

Kordt, of course, knew the position of the British government; he knew that the British were inclined, rather than to use brave words, to act at the right moment, never too early; he knew that Britain's attitude was basically pacific and defensive; finally he knew that a government dependent upon parliament and the will of the electorate could not easily stipulate anything. Kordt and Oster, on the other hand, believed that Halder and his fellow-conspirators were ready for a *coup d'état*: at least they were convinced that Halder would act. Did the British government not know the mood of Germany and the *Wehrmacht* leaders, they argued? Did it not know how weak the Siegfried

Line was? Did it not know that that there could be no more than six to eight divisions facing some fifty French?⁷⁰ In 1938, therefore, the German generals had no choice but to lose the war and sink in terrible defeat or, in their own interests, overthrow Hitler. Could one therefore rely upon the generals being prepared for a *coup d'état*? The answer must be 'Yes', the opposition argued, since the generals had no other choice.

Kordt wished to remain as near as possible to the centre of affairs in order to provide a guiding hand if necessary. He therefore asked his cousin Susanne Simonis to learn by heart the message destined for the British government and transmit it verbally to his brother Theo in London.⁷¹ She arrived there on the evening of 5 September.

Previously, on 23 August, in the house of Philip Conwell Evans, Kordt had met Sir Horace Wilson, chief industrial adviser to the British government and actually one of Chamberlain's most important advisers on foreign policy; on that occasion Kordt had implored Wilson to urge Chamberlain to adopt a consistent policy towards Germany as the only method of preventing the outbreak of the war at which Hitler was aiming so ruthlessly.⁷² Conwell Evans, who had worked at Königsberg University, had certain leanings towards the Nazi regime but nevertheless played an important intermediary role between the German resistance movement and British government circles.⁷³

Kordt now turned at once to Wilson again and they agreed on a meeting which took place on the following day, 6 September. What Kordt had to say seemed to Wilson of sufficient importance for him to ask that it be repeated next day to the Foreign Secretary himself. To avoid attracting unnecessary attention this discussion, at which only Kordt and Halifax were present (Wilson left after having made the arrangements), took place not in the Foreign Office but in Wilson's office in 10 Downing Street. Kordt entered unobserved by the garden entrance.⁷⁴

Kordt told Halifax that he was the delegate of an influential group in German military and political circles which wished to prevent the war with Czechoslovakia planned by Hitler and, subject to certain conditions, had the power to do so.⁷⁵ Hitler was planning his attack on the assumption that France would not meet the obligations of her treaty of alliance with Czechoslovakia of 25 January 1924. If Hitler was now allowed to play fast and loose with his policy of force, then no further sensible international European relationships based on trust and good faith would be possible. The group for which he was speaking, Kordt continued, believed that in July 1914 the international situation would not have been so impossible had Sir Edward Grey stated clearly at the time that Britain would not stand aside in the event of a Franco-German war. If this was really the Prime Minister's view, then he must state it publicly and unequivocally so that everyone would realize Britain's determination. It must be made totally clear that war with Czechoslovakia would mean war with Britain. If, in spite of this, Hitler continued with his policy, then the German Army leaders would intervene by force of arms; German patriots saw no other method of stopping the crime of war. The prerequisite for such a step was a foreign policy defeat for Hitler,

which the declaration requested would imply; this would in practice signify the end of the Nazi regime.⁷⁶

Halifax promised to inform the Prime Minister and one or two of his cabinet colleagues; the request would be considered, he said, with the greatest care and discretion. Kordt left 10 Downing Street, again through the garden gate, feeling that an unequivocal British declaration would shortly be made. Even when Chamberlain flew to Berchtesgaden on 15 September, Kordt still thought that he was going to tell Hitler some home truths. After the Munich conference, however, Halifax said to Theo Kordt: 'We were not in a position to be as frank with you as you were with us. When you passed your message to us, we were already considering Chamberlain's mission to Germany.'⁷⁷

In the light of all these and other initiatives, including a further warning from Goerdeler whose efforts to oppose Hitler's policy were acknowledged by Vansittart in 1948,⁷⁸ what claim can the British government make to have offered resistance when it so definitely cold-shouldered the Kordt brothers?

The British did in fact issue a warning in unmistakable language. Late in the evening of 9 September a British government message to the German Foreign Minister arrived in the Berlin Embassy; it was to be passed immediately to Nuremberg. There the great Party Rally was taking place and Sir Nevile Henderson, who was also in Nuremberg, was instructed beforehand to seek an audience with Ribbentrop.⁷⁹ He was to say that, should force be used to solve the Sudeten question and should France, at Czech request, fulfil her duties as an ally, a general conflict must ensue, from which Great Britain could not stand aloof. Ribbentrop was to be asked to pass this message forthwith to Hitler.

Henderson received the message but, in a despatch to Halifax, advised strongly against its delivery, saying that it would not restrain Hitler but merely drive him to ill-considered measures.⁸⁰ He stated that he had already spoken to Göring, Goebbels and Ribbentrop and had pointed out the inevitability of British involvement in a general conflict; under no circumstances, however, did he wish to deliver a formal warning which might be reminiscent to Hitler of the *démarche* of 21 May. Halifax accepted this; if Henderson, he replied, had already represented the British viewpoint so unequivocally to Ribbentrop, there was no need for him to deliver the warning of 9 September.⁸¹ On 10 September, in a statement to the press, the British government even denied all reports of an intention to despatch a diplomatic note to the German government.⁸²

There was occasional talk of a secret letter from Chamberlain to Hitler, but this never materialized. The British 'warning' to the German government eventually consisted merely of a statement by Chamberlain to the press, which he explicitly described as unofficial.⁸³ Having thus reduced its effect, the Prime Minister then expressed his great confidence in the method of negotiation and in the discussion of differences; he referred to the British warning of 24 March, reiterated in Simon's speech in Lanark on 27 August: if Czechoslovakia were attacked and France, in fulfilment of the obligations of her alliance, were involved in war with Germany, Britain would not be able to

The Sudeten Crisis

stand aloof from a general conflict. British security was closely linked with that of France.

Erich Kordt was at the Party Rally in Nuremberg when, on 12 September, he received Chamberlain's press statement. He immediately had a translation and copies prepared, also of the much sharper-toned comments by a Foreign Office press officer. Copies of both these documents were immediately distributed to the Party dignitaries staying in the Grand Hotel. Even in the general confusion, however, a Foreign Ministry official remarked on the unofficial character of the press statement and pointed this out to those present. Hitler himself dismissed the whole manoeuvre as sheer bluff.⁸⁴ In his closing speech to the Party Rally he was as aggressive as ever, although he avoided totally committing himself.⁸⁵

The British government remained conciliatory and, as already indicated above, continuously made fresh concessions. On 15 September Chamberlain flew to Berchtesgaden; Britain and France volunteered to force Czechoslovakia to cede the Sudetenland, whereupon Hitler raised his demands and insisted on agreement to an immediate move of the *Wehrmacht* into the disputed area. Chamberlain then went to Germany once more – to the Godesberg conference of 22 to 24 September, which ended without result. The Western Powers would now be satisfied if Hitler marched into the Sudetenland, not against their will but with their agreement, and if the Czechs gave up the idea of resistance – so that there should be no war.

6 Beck's Plans

While the members of the German opposition, both inside and outside government service, were attempting to create the external political conditions conducive to the fall of Hitler, the military conspirators were developing plans for a *coup d'état*. Thoughts on this subject went back a long way. During the Fritsch crisis the idea had germinated in the minds of Oster, Gisevius, Schacht, Witzleben, Halder and others. Without the cooperation of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and his Chief of Staff, however, no military *coup* seemed practicable, and without the military, no *coup* at all. Brauchitsch's ambiguous position has already been mentioned; hopes that he would cooperate were not great.

Beck, however, continued to try to prevent war, at least by means of memoranda. Apart from a chance conversation lasting five minutes in March 1938, he had never had an opportunity to present his views to Hitler in person.¹ Hitler was not willing to receive Beck even to say farewell on his retirement.²

The first series of memoranda setting out the reasons why a war would inevitably lead to catastrophe for Germany and all Europe was handed by Beck on 5 May 1938 to his Commander-in-Chief, Colonel-General von Brauchitsch. To understand these and subsequent memoranda a short explanation of their antecedents must be given.

Beck initially hoped that he could influence Hitler and persuade him to moderate his views and this he might be able to do as Chief of the General Staff but not as a private citizen. For this reason he did not resign during the Fritsch crisis despite the fact that Brauchitsch willingly took over Fritsch's post and so became Beck's superior, when all the time unfounded accusations were being made against his former Commander-in-Chief. As we have seen, Brauchitsch made no conditions regarding the reinstatement of Fritsch after the latter's rehabilitation; it would have been mere loyalty had Beck handed in his resignation at that time. On the other hand Fritsch's rehabilitation could only be achieved from inside, not from outside; moreover Beck was convinced that he must remain in order to prevent further Nazi encroachments on the Army. Finally he stayed so that, in so far as lay in his power, he could stop the war announced by Hitler on 5 November 1937.³

Beck's attitude was, of course, largely dictated by his character. His custom was to reflect, to check, to consider and finally to take a carefully thought-out