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PROBLEMS OF THE GERMAN ANTI-FASCIST RESISTANCE, 1933- 1945

Allen Merson

I. Was there a German Resistance?

In most countries in which fascist regimes prevailed before and during the second world war, whether as native growths or as an aspect of foreign occupation, broad anti-fascist resistance movements developed and played an important role in the country's liberation. Only in Germany, according to a widely held view, did fascism maintain its hold on the people till the end and liberation come entirely from outside.

Can it be true that there was no opposition in Germany, except for isolated individuals and tiny groups? Or was there, in Germany too, something which could fairly be described as a broad anti-fascist resistance movement, but which failed, for special reasons, to attain decisive proportions? And in that case, what were those reasons?

These questions have both a historical and a contemporary political importance. That fascism could conquer an advanced nation so easily, corrupt and degrade it so quickly and thoroughly, and maintain its hold amid unparalleled crimes and disasters, still puzzles and disturbs liberals and Christians. Socialists face further questions rising from the failure of what had been the strongest working-class movement in the capitalist world first to prevent and then to overthrow fascism; and these lead to the heart of the key problem of the delay of the socialist revolution in the west, which has been responsible for so many of the specific features of the world process of transition from capitalism to socialism and thus for so many of the familiar political problems of today.

On one contemporary problem - the political division of Germany - the history of the German Resistance has an immediate bearing. For both German states claim to be the heir of the Resistance - the German Democratic Republic directly, and emphatically, the Federal Republic belatedly, equivocally and with many reservations. Which claim is historically valid and how far? It is particularly necessary that this question should be asked, because the widespread tendency to underestimate the German resistance to fascism and the part played in it by the working-class has led to a dangerous underestimation, 'even among sympathisers, of the historical roots and the moral and political strength of the G.D.R.

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The most influential accounts of the German Resistance to appear in English have been versions of books by West German scholar, notably Hans Kothfels' The German Opposition to Hitler (1948, expanded 1961) and Gerhard Ritter's The German Resistance (1958). The briefer and often incidental references to the subject by British and American scholars, as well as the more comprehensive treatment attempted by the journalist Terence Prittie in his Germans Against Hitler (1964) have also been based mainly on West German published work.

All these accounts in English, for all their differences of emphasis and judgment, agree in one fundamental respect. For all of them the German Resistance means the bourgeois opposition, as represented primarily by conservative officials like Goerdeler, Hassell and Popitz, or professional officers like Beck and Witzleben, and by the assassination plot of 20 July 1944. Some attention is also paid to the resistance offered on religious issues by sections of the protestant and catholic churches; to the Munich students' protest of 1942/3; and to a number of individual Social-Democratic leaders and liberal aristocrats who were in touch with the July plotters. But working-class resistance is neglected and Communist or Communist-led resistance is either dismissed or simply ignored.

It is here that the conclusions of British and American writers most clearly reflect their dependence on West German sources. For in West German academic circles it has become a dogma, applied with ruthless thoroughness by conservative and 'liberals' alike, that Communist resistance was not resistance at all - either because it was allegedly inconsistent, spasmodic, futile or ineffective, or because it was 'totalitarian' or 'treasonable' and therefore not to be counted. By such arguments some of the leading West German academic experts on recent history have sought to expunge the story of Communist resistance from the historical record and have written chapters entitled "The Resistance" in which no reference is made to Communists. *

It is only possible to accept this absurd and disingenuous fiction if one ignores the extensive historical literature published in the G.D.R., as so many "bourgeois writers do. Not a single work published in the G.D.R. is included, for instance, in the list of 88 works appended to Professor Ritter's The German Resistance (1958)

* See, e.g. H. Mau & H. Krausnick, German History 1933-1945 (London, 1959); 'Erich Hofer, Der Nationalsozialismus, Dokumente 1933-1945 (Fischer-Bucherei, 1957); Golo Mann, Deutsche Geschichte 1919-1945 (Fischer-Bucherei, 1961).

or in the bibliography of 281 works printed at the end of W.L. Shirer's Rise and Fall of the Third Reich and Mr. Prittie's extremely inadequate and biased discussion of Communist resistance in his Germans Against Hitler seems to be based solely on a single G.D.R. publication which he includes in his bibliography of 90 works.

Within this framework of almost exclusive concern with bourgeois opposition, there are differences of emphasis among British historians between those who can be regarded as continuing the Vansittart-Churchill war-time line of rivalry with German imperialism and those who represent in modern ("European") form the tradition of the appeasers and of co-operation with German imperialism.

The former, notably Namier, Wheeler-Bennett and to some extent also Trevor-Roper and A.J.P. Taylor, and the American W.L. Shirer, all question the extent and sincerity of the bourgeois opposition to Hitler and attribute its failure to a half-heartedness whose real cause lay in sympathy with some of Hitler's aims and reluctance to break away from the traditions of German militarism and reaction; but this school, while having the merit of drawing attention to the continuity of German imperialism, tends to identify the German people with the imperialist bourgeoisie and to fall into 'anti-Germanism'. The 'Europeans' on the other hand, anxious to find respectable partners among the ruling class of the present-day Federal Republic, generally accept the West-German bourgeois version of the Resistance.

In West Germany the historical assessment of the anti-Hitler resistance has formed one aspect of the process of fundamental reconsideration of German history which was first precipitated by the catastrophe of 1945 and has since been kept from being broken off by the increasing challenge of Marxist historiography in the G.D.R. Those progressive bourgeois historians who, after 1945; attempted to break with the tradition of militarism and imperialism, often devoted special attention to the investigation of working-class resistance to fascism; and contributions to this study have continued to be made by some semi-Marxist writers in trade-union journals, by some survivors of the anti-fascist resistance (1) and by one or two academic historians. (2) work, however, is little known outside Germany.

(1) e.g. Gunther Weisenborn, author of Der lautlose Aufstand

(2) e.g. Prof. W. Abendroth of Marburg University.

The "orthodox" version of recent German history, which dominates the academic fields is that which was worked out after 1945 by Friedrich Meinecke, Ludwig Dehio, Hans Rothfels and Gerhard Ritter. Its essential feature is the attempt to rescue the tradition of German imperialism and militarism from the catastrophe of 1945 by denying the continuity of the Hitler-fascist state with the imperialist state before 1933 and after 1945; that is, by isolating Hitler-fascism and treating it as a unique historical phenomenon, attributable in large measure to the "demonic personality" of Hitler,

It follows from this that the task of the Resistance is seen, not as that of breaking with the whole militarist-imperialist tradition, of which fascism was but the latest and most inhuman manifestation, but rather as that of rescuing this tradition from its Hitlerian "distortion" by ousting the Nazi leadership.

Among exponents of this line of interpretation there has been much argument on such points as how far it was legitimate to carry opposition in war-time; whether the July plot was treasonable because directed "against the Head of State or immoral because it involved assassination; and whether soldiers could be considered absolved from their military oath because Hitler himself had broken his oath to the constitution. Most such arguments imply acceptance of imperialist-militarist assumptions and most academic writers have concluded with fence-sitting judgements, praising the courage and idealism of the July plotters while abstaining, on the plea of 'humility', from condemning those who helped Hitler to destroy them - a conclusion ideally suited to the requirements of present-day Bonn.

There is also a noticeable tendency to shift the blame for the failure of the movement from the generals and big bourgeoisie on to the masses for continuing to support Hitler or on to the Western powers for not promising the plotters territorial concessions, especially in the east. It would have been unreasonable, it is implied, to expect these opponents of Hitler to renounce the whole policy of aggression and conquest. Indeed the Communists and those who joined with them in calling for the defeat of the fascist aggression and support for the liberation struggle of the subjugated peoples are commonly excluded by the dominant school of West German historians from the record of the German Resistance as "agents of the enemy", traitors not resisters.

How is "Resistance" to be defined? West (German bourgeois historians, while themselves virtually excluding Communists', 'criticise Marxist historians for using the term "anti-fascist resistance" in such a way as to exclude all those opponents of Hitler who did not "take the Communist path" or otherwise qualify as "progressive". But this is to miss the point. Everyone agrees that some criterion is necessary.

"Resistance" means more than silent disapproval or occasional grumbling; and to count everyone who ever opposed Hitler would be to include Strasser and Rohm and ultimately even Himmler and Goring. The more deeply one considers this problem the clearer it becomes that the significant distinction is between those who opposed Hitler only in matters- of tactics, timing or methods, or for his "excesses" and miscalculations, while agreeing with his essential aims, and those who rejected the aims as well as the methods of fascism and wished to change the social conditions that had produced it. Admittedly this distinction is not easy to make in individual cases.

There were bourgeois liberals and even conservatives who started by supporting the militarist-imperialist system and even the fascist regime, but later reacted against Hitler's atrocities and fought their way to the successive realisations, first that atrocities were characteristic of the fascist regime, then that fascism was deeply rooted in the system of militarist-imperialism, and finally that the struggle against it could only be conducted successfully by involving the masses and co-operating with the Communists. To distinguish those who were moving in this direction from those who were primarily concerned with saving the militarist-imperialist system from the consequences of the approaching fascist debacle may not be easy, but is nevertheless fundamental to a correct historical assessment. The crucial test was, in fact, willingness to co-operate with Communists and to envisage mass revolutionary struggle.

To define anti-fascist resistance one has to define fascism itself, to analyse its social content. The more superficial bourgeois writers, content to define fascism as 'a form of totalitarianism', assert that Communists, as alleged advocates of 'another form of totalitarianism' could not be genuine and consistent anti-fascists - and this in the teeth of overwhelming evidence that the Nazi state, from beginning to end, never ceased to direct its main repressive measures against the Communists. Other bourgeois historians, recognising the need for a class analysis of fascism, represent it as a revolutionary movement of the petty bourgeoisie. But this theory, too, is utterly incompatible with some of the main historical facts of 1935-45 - the decline of the German petty bourgeoisie, the concentration of wealth and economic power in the hands of the biggest monopoly-capitalist groups and the ever-increasing interlocking, of those monopoly concerns with the Nazi state and the S.S.

West German bourgeois accounts of the Resistance are not only distorted, by an inadequate or mistaken analysis of the class basis of fascism; they reflect the ideological trends among the

imperialist bourgeoisie. One effect is to deny the G.D.R. any genuine historical roots in the form of a popular anti-fascist resistance movement; another is to provide the Bonn regime with a 'respectable' historical ancestry. At first all the different bourgeois and social-democratic groups associated with the July conspiracy were included in the heritage to which the Federal Republic laid claim, though the continued influence of ex-Fazis caused doubts and differences of view about whether all the conspirators' actions should unconditionally endorsed.

Since the mid-fifties, with the resurgence of militarism and revanchism, there has been a gradual change of emphasis. "The Resistance" had been identified more exclusively with the most reactionary groups, while the more progressive bourgeois groups have been pushed into the background, inasfar as their radical tendencies could not be concealed. At the same time neo-fascist voices, condemning all resistance and openly justifying those who backed Hitler to the end, have become louder. (1)

An extensive literature has piled up, and controversy has raged, in West Germany, Britain and America, round the German bourgeois opposition and especially the 20th July conspiracy. But "the real question", as Professor Barraclough has observed(2) "is whether historians have been right in singling out the Twentieth of July as the core, or even the high point of the German resistance". He went on to say that "the emphasis on the right wing and the army, and the prejudice against the communists, so evident in Mr. Prittie's book, are unlikely to be the last word ... In fact there is evidence of resistance in Germany from the beginning, but it came from the left...." And though enough of this evidence has been published in West Germany to suggest that resistance came at first almost exclusively, and to the end predominantly from the working-class and the left, "no more has been done", according to Professor Barraclough, "than scratch the surface of the vast documentation". The real history of the anti-fascist resistance, in short, remains to be written.

In fact, much more than surface-scratching has been done by research-workers in the G.D.R., whose publications, largely unknown in Britain, have already illuminated many obscure or neglected aspects of the German resistance. The aim of the present essay is to give some account of this work and to indicate briefly the main conclusions to which it seems to be pointing,

1, See D. Melnikov, Der 20 Juli. Legende und Wirklichkeit (Berlin, 1964)

2. "New Statesman", 24 July 1964

II. Historical Work on the German Resistance in the G.D.R.

Historical investigation of the anti-fascist resistance is beset with difficulties. Resistance fighters, communicating by word of mouth, guided by broadcasts, and knowing no more of their organisation than was necessary, kept few records. Many were killed; and survivors, who began to record their recollections in 1945, were often forced by urgent calls of reconstruction to postpone the task, and died before they could resume it. Police reports and trial proceedings - another main source - abound in gaps, distortions and pitfalls, yet can rarely be checked against other evidence. The voluminous Nazi security records were largely destroyed in 1945, and what survived has only gradually been assembled and made accessible, with limitations due to the division of Germany and to the continued influence in the west of former Nazi judges and police officials.

For such reasons research into the resistance developed comparatively slowly, even in the G.D.R., until the late 1950's. Then the results of work on a broad front began to appear. A report presented to the 12th World Congress of Historical Sciences in 1965 listed some 320 books and articles published in the G.D.R. during the previous five years on the German anti-fascist resistance, 1933-1945. (1)

This Marxist work started with the recognition that the anti-fascist resistance struggle was complex and many-sided, fought on different fronts with a variety of weapons by people of almost every social class. There was resistance by illegal organisations of the Communist Party and other working-class parties, and by improvised local groups, resistance in the factories against intensified exploitation and suppression of democratic rights; resistance by artists and intellectuals and by sections of the protestant and catholic churches. Alongside the direct challenge by chalked slogans, home-mads leaflets or imported news-sheets there was the indirect struggle within the Nazi mass organisations, beginning with whispered criticism of food-supplies, piece-rates or deductions, achieving sometimes a lightning strike or a boycott of the works elections.

Prisons and concentration camps, too, formed an important front of political struggle on which conscious anti-fascists not only fought back against the attempts of the Nazis to break their spirit, integrity and solidarity by the most terrible forms of

Historiographie der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik
liter den deutschen antifaschistischen Widerstandskampfe .
in den Jahren 1933 bis 1945 (Berlin: Institut für Marxismus-
Leninismus beim ZK der SED. Als Manuskript gedruckt, June
1965).

pressure, but built up the prototype of an anti-fascist front which would ultimately spell the political defeat of fascism. Another front was the emigration. From Czechoslovakia, France, Denmark, the U.S.S.R. and other countries, German anti-fascists organised and supported the illegal struggle in Germany, exposed Nazi tyranny and war preparations, and mobilised international opinion. After Hitler's attack on Republican Spain some 5,000 Germans joined the International Brigade, forming one of its strongest contingents; and every subsequent Nazi aggression opened up a new front of German anti-fascist resistance.

Some fought back by acts of solidarity with foreign prisoners-of-war and deportees in the labour camps of Germany itself; others by participating in the resistance or partisan movement (1) of occupied countries to which they had come as soldiers or civilian workers or as emigres. Finally the Wehrmacht itself was a front on which the struggle was carried on in the most difficult conditions, leaving few clear traces. Much is known, of course, about the "Free Germany" movement and the associated German Officers' League, which won considerable support among prisoners-of-war in the U.S.S.R. from 1943 on, and engaged in many-sided anti-fascist struggle at the front and behind the German lines. Accounts have been written, too, of the work of German anti-fascists in the "Punishment-battalion 999" in Greece. But much probably remains to be discovered about acts of solidarity by German soldiers with resistance movements in other occupied countries. The huge number of military executions in the final months of the war also points to widespread resistance to "fight-to-the-end" orders.

If a correct estimate is to be formed of the achievements and limitations of the German Resistance, and of the reasons why it was unable to overthrow the fascist regime, all these forms of struggle must be investigated. In the G.D.R. a many-sided approach has been made. Central materials, such as the archives of the German Communist Party (K.P.D.) and such records of the Gestapo and people's Court as survive in the G.D.R. (at present deposited with the central S.E.D. archives in the Institute for Marxism-Leninism in Berlin) have been studied by groups of professional historians. The local evidence of anti-fascist resistance has been further explored by the (partly non-professional) Commissions for the Study of the Local Working-Class Movement and by the collective authors of histories of important enterprises, such as the Zeiss optical works or the great Leuna chemical works (2).

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1. See Heinz Kuhnrich, Der Partisanenkrieg, 1939-1945 (Berlin; Dietz, 1965), esp. pp. 329-370
 2. E.g. Kampfendes Leuna (1933-45) (Berlins Tribune-Verlag, 1961)

Biographies of many anti-fascists have also recently appeared, and individual memories, ranging from those of the Communist Fritz Selbmann to those of the former Lt-Gen. Vincenz Muller and of Col. Adam, once Paulus's adjutant at Stalingrad and later active in the German Officers' League. (1)

International co-operation has also proved fruitful. Joint conferences with Soviet historians (1957, 1959) have clarified basic questions of the second world war; while Polish historians have not only contributed by their research into the former Silesian archives at Wroclav to an understanding of the final stages of the Nazi regime, but have produced new evidence of co-operation of German soldiers and civilian employees with Polish partisans; and similar evidence has come from Czechoslovak sources.

Comprehensive treatment has only been given, so far, to the histories of the Communist resistance and of the "Free Germany" Committee (2); but the proliferation of monographs on other aspects has now reached a point at which the preparation is soon to be undertaken of a comprehensive Marxist history of the German Resistance. It is intended here only to indicate some of the main conclusions which seem to be emerging concerning the character and extent of the German Resistance.

III. Stages of development of the German Resistance

(A) 1933-1935. The first period of the anti-fascist resistance (3)

The 'First German Resistance' (A) was almost entirely a resistance of the class conscious core of the working class, that is, above all, of the Communist Party. In 1933, while all bourgeois

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1. F. Selbmann,, Die lange Nacht (Halle, 1961);
V. Muller Ich fand das wahre Vaterland (Deutscher Militarverlag, 1963); W. Adam, Der schwere Entschluss (Berlin, 1965)
 2. Sec Otto Winzer, Zwolf Jahre gegen Faschismus und Krieg (Berliru Dietz. 1957)¹ Erich Weinert, Das Nationlkomitee "Freies Deutschland" (Berlin, 1957).
 3. The situation in these years cannot be properly understood without an analysis, in class terms, of the process of transition to fascism- from 1930 to 1933 and, especially, of the reasons why, the German working-class movement did not more effectively resist the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship in January 1933. This analysis has unfortunately had to be omitted here for lack of, space.
 4. The phrase is Weisenborn's.

parties accepted fascist 'co-ordination' and the Social Democratic organisations were paralysed by divisions, the K.P.D., after the first shock, fought back. The transition to illegality of a mass party of over 300,000 members, whose cadres were public figures, was an unprecedentedly difficult operation.

Successive central and district leaderships were destroyed; casualties were terrible. Yet on May 7th Goering, in a circular to provincial administrations, stated that the attempt to "destroy the embryo illegal apparatus of Communism in Germany before it could be developed into an affective mass organisation" had failed, and that reports from nearly all parts of the state indicated a "surprisingly rapid recovery after the first, almost complete collapse" and "an appreciable intensification of the ... political activity of the K.P.D." (1); and this impression is confirmed by local police reports and memoirs of the period. This costly struggle, though doomed to defeat, had an importance which has been insufficiently recognised. It disproves the myth that fascism triumphed without resistance; and it initiated an illegal anti-fascist resistance which could never be completely crushed and which, in subsequent years, won adherents and allies in other sections of the population.

This first resistance led to the development of united actions on two main fronts. One was in the factories, where co-operation between Communist, Social-Democratic and other workers culminated in the boycotting or vote-spoiling campaign in the 'Vertrauensrate' elections of 1934 and 1935. The other was in the overflowing prisons and concentration camps, where thousands of members of different working-class organisations learned the necessity and value of co-operation, on what became one of the most important resistance fronts. The Nazis' aim was to break the strength of organised labour by 're-educating' its cadres. The prisons were the scene of a ceaseless political battle, in which the fighting quality of the working-class organisations, especially the K.P.D., was tested and proved. Proletarian leaders like Edgar Andre or Fiete Schulze of Hamburg, or Thalmann himself, were only the best-known of thousands whose political firmness through years of torture stimulated resistance. Most important of all such victories on the "scaffold front" (2) was Dimitrov's conduct in the Reichstag Fire trial, which not only shook the prestige of the fascist rulers and encouraged the illegal workers' resistance, but also gave impetus to the process of drawing lessons from the defeat of 1933.

1. Printed in Ursachen und Folgen; vol. IX, p. 172. (W.Berlin, n.d.); (present translation is mine A.M.)
2. Weisenborn's phrase.

Among the first to draw far-reaching conclusions were a section of the Social Democrats, While part both of the S.P.D. leadership and of the rank-and-file abandoned the struggle after the banning of the party in June 1933, the most active local groups reacted strongly against reformist illusion,; and play-safe passivity and pressed for a return to revolutionary marxism and, in some cases? for co-operation with the Communists. It was under press-ire from these groups and the threat of break-away movements that the party leadership in exile ('Sopade') issued the Prague Manifesto in February 1934. This re-affirmed many Marxist principles and called for revolutionary class struggle to overthrow the bourgeois state, establish working-class power and carry through a socialist revolution. The way seemed open for formal, central collaboration between Communists and Socialists. But the chance was missed, for reasons not yet fully clear. By the time the sectarian trends in the K.P.D., still strong in this period, were finally defeated in 1935, Sopade had retreated from the position of the Manifesto. The pressure from the illegal organisations appears to have slackened. Why? Several reasons have been suggested. The most militant and radical Social Democratic underground groups were soonest arrested; the less active maintained contact longer. Again the Nazi purge of June 1934 may have stimulated illusions about disintegration of the fascist regime, while the later appearance of a bourgeois opposition revived reformist hopes of an alliance with the liberal, conservative and monarchist bourgeoisie. There may also have been a change in the attitude of the solid core of social-democratic skilled workers, as the armaments drive stimulated demand for their labour and brought some economic advantages. Moreover, the Nazis, alarmed by their weakness in the factories revealed by the Vertrauensrate elections, seem to have changed their tactics and begun to admit social democratic workers to minor positions in the Labour Front while tolerating a measure of organised contacts among old Social-democrats, as long as it did not take the form of active struggle.

The Communists, meanwhile, had also been digesting the lessons of 1933- This was not so much a matter of increasing the already existing emphasis on united anti-fascist action as of bringing the rest of the party's strategic conceptions into line with that emphasis. That the K.P.D. was grappling with this task was shown by hints in Thalmann's speech to the central committee on 7th February 1933, in which, after stressing the need for anti-fascist unity, he remarked that the overthrow of the Hitler government and the victory of the proletarian revolution need not necessarily be one and the same. But the conception implied was not yet clearly developed. In some passages of the same speech and in party propaganda of the next two years the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat continued to be presented as the immediate task.

Elements in the leadership maintained sectarian views and underestimated the seriousness of the 1933 defeat. Illusions about the imminence of crisis in the fascist regime were partly responsible for the repeated counter-attacks against the fascist terror, heroic but terribly costly, in which the flower of the party's cadres was expended in these years, under the direction of an underground leadership which was repeatedly destroyed and replaced until the middle of 1935*

It was not until the 'Brussels Conference' of the K.P.D. in autumn 1935, following the 7th World Congress of the C.I., that the section of the leadership (represented by Pieck and Ulbricht) which had been pressing for further recognition of the seriousness of the 1933 defeat and for corresponding revision of the party's strategy, tactics and organisation, finally prevailed. Workers' power and socialise were no longer -seen as the immediate strategic aim, but a new anti-fascist, democratic republic. This conception, elaborated in the Brussels decisions, laid the basis for a programme round which a real antifascist popular front might be built up: appeals for unity were no longer regarded as a tactic aimed at winning over the social-democratic rank-and-file and exposing the right-wing leadership. At the same time recognition of the consolidation of the Hitler-regime led to a re-appraisal of Communist tactics. In place of open counter-attack, which had exposed Communists to partial isolation, maximum use was to be made of the opportunities offered by Nazi mass-organisations such as the Labour Front to defend the workers' interests and to keep alive their class consciousness and solidarity, finally, the attempt to maintain a central underground leadership was abandoned; the struggle in different regions of Germany was henceforth to be directed by 'sector-leaderships' based in neighbouring foreign countries.

(B) 1936-1939- Second period of anti-fascist resistance. The struggle for the popular front against the threatening war

In these years German anti-fascists faced changed conditions. The Nazi regime, now consolidated, was furiously preparing for war. Unemployment fell and some skilled labour even became scarce. On the other hand the workers faced material shortages and further attacks on wages, hours and conditions. Fear of war grew, checked however by Hitler's foreign policy successes, which fostered the illusion that chauvinist aims would be attained without major war. The K.P.D. and other illegal working-class organisations had been weakened by the imprisonment or murder of most of their cadres; and the ruthless efficiency of the police made new methods of resistance necessary. The invasions of Austria and Czechoslovakia further destroyed important bases from which illegal struggle had been organised. They marked, too, a second stage

of the process, begun in Spain, by which the German anti-fascist struggle broadened into an international struggle.

Surviving local Gestapo reports and the quarterly national situation reports in which they were summed up give a vivid and, despite reservations, revealing picture of the resistance at this period. In the eyes of the Gestapo resistance came overwhelmingly from the working-class and was inspired, led and conducted mainly by Communists. The great majority of those arrested for political offences were workers and most were described as Communists in 1937, for instance, the number of Communists arrested in the Reich was given as 8,068, as against 817 'Marxists' - i.e. Social Democrats and members of the smaller socialist parties. Communist illegal groups were reported to be having difficulty in maintaining their organisation and links with the 'sector leaderships' abroad, especially after the occupation of Czechoslovakia, and to be concentrating on oral 'whispering propaganda', joint radio-listening and political discussion, rather than leaflets and chalking. 'Marxist' circles were consistently portrayed as maintaining a 'waiting' posture, keeping social or business (1) contacts with one another, but not otherwise engaging in political activity, except perhaps transmission of information to emigre organisations. This illegal information service maintained by the Social Democrats should not be underestimated, but it seems probable that inasfar as Social democratic workers were drawn into more active anti-fascist struggle within Germany, it was usually in association with Communist groups.

At first sight the effectiveness of the illegal struggle in this period might appear small and its prospects of overthrowing Hitler's government or preventing war negligible. The Gestapo reports, however, give a slightly different impression. They were closely concerned with the conditions of the working class and the dissatisfaction caused by intensified exploitation. In autumn 1938, for instance, the Berlin Gestapo, after a systematic enquiry into the wages and conditions of workers in large factories, concluded that their real wage for a given working day was appreciably lower than in 1932 and that only considerable overtime enabled many to live. Though discontent was not yet judged to be serious, widespread grumbling was reported about increased deductions, about taxes that took away most of the overtime earnings, and about the particularly unfavourable position of unskilled workers and workers with large families. Since, as the Gestapo observed in one of many reports which reveal it as fighting the class struggle with a kind of inverted marxism, the workers' economic position ultimately determined their political outlook, Communist activity on the economic front was feared, especially where

1. e.g. in connection with former trade-union insurance schemes.

large masses of workers were concentrated. Propaganda round economic issues, based on intimate knowledge of local grievances, was considered to have had a real effect in mobilising discontent and producing actions among the autobahn workers, in the Volkswagen factory, in the mines, and in 1939 on the western frontier fortification works.

This economic discontent, combined with widespread fear of war, might have led to more important opposition movements within Germany, if a more effective and comprehensive united front had been formed; and this was the second question on which Gestapo reports show special interest and sensitivity. There were strong impulses towards unity of the working class and the formation of a wider popular front, both within Germany and in the emigration, in the period following the Brussels conference and the victories of the Popular Front in France and Spain. Some prominent Social Democrats and many progressive intellectuals joined with Communists in the People's Front declaration of December 1936, in forming popular front committees in France, Mexico and other countries, and in supporting the German battalions of the International Brigade in Spain. But these beginnings did not develop into a comprehensive united front. The right-wing Social Democratic leaders stood aloof and, though weakened both financially and politically following the move from Prague to Paris after Munich, they became more determinedly anti-Communist and more inclined than ever to adopt a waiting posture and to base their hopes on divisions in the German bourgeoisie and on the eventual support of western capitalist powers. ~~The~~ Soviet purges of 1936-8 also exercised a negative influence, still to be assessed.

The illusions of the right-wing Social Democratic leaders in exile were stimulated by the appearance of some opposition trends in bourgeois circles in this period. The Nazi attempt to turn the Evangelical Church into an organ of the fascist state had provoked resistance as early as 1933 from a militant minority of the pastors, and the Confessional Church movement which they had founded enjoyed a limited support in certain bourgeois and aristocratic circles and represented a focus of opposition on religious issues until the arrest of Niemoller and other Confessional leaders in 1937. In the Catholic areas, too, in the middle and late 'thirties, the Nazi attempts to curtail the church's influence on youth called forth a resistance which, though confined to issues directly affecting the claims of the church, was potentially dangerous. The hierarchy, however, did its best to restrain priests and lay Catholics from political opposition to a regime with whose authoritarian principles and chauvinistic foreign policy they generally sympathised.(1)

1. See Guenter Lewy, The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany (1964)

A further trend of opposition emerged towards the end of 1937 as a result of differences of interest and opinion within the bourgeoisie. Until then nearly all sections had united round the general policy of rapid armament and demands for 'revision of Versailles'. Some alarm had been felt in 1936 in professional military circles at the risks Hitler took when he re-occupied the Rhineland, but it was not until late in 1937 that the adventurism of his policy caused serious uneasiness. This was expressed on the one hand by generals like Beck and Haider who here appalled by the risks involved in the plan of unlimited military conquest outlined by Hitler at the famous 'Hossbach' conference in November 1937, and who wanted a more cautious plan of expansion which would involve less risk of a two-front war. At the same time bourgeois economic experts like Goerdeler and Schacht favoured an armament programme which would take more account of the possibility of a long war and a strategy more in keeping with Germany's economic weaknesses. Behind these differences of opinion lay the world capitalist 'recession' of 1937 and a certain division of interest between landowners and consumer-goods capitalists on the one hand and the more aggressive, reckless and reactionary sections of monopoly capital, headed by the armaments magnates. It was because his policy enjoyed the support of the latter that Hitler was able to assert his control over both military and economic policy by the removal of Blomberg and Fritsch, and also Schacht, early in 1938. In the ensuing months there was some talk among dissatisfied generals of deposing Hitler by a coup d'etat; but, since their criticism was essentially aimed not at the direction of Hitler's policies but at their recklessness, it collapsed completely when Hitler's immediate calculations were proved, in September 1938, to have been well-founded - thanks to Chamberlain's collaboration. Though General Beck had resigned in the course of this dispute, the rest of the generals were so far from forming any 'resistance movement' that they preferred in future to trust to Hitler's judgment.

The real resistance movement reacted far differently to the imminent approach of war. Gestapo reports of the spring and summer of 1939 indicated an increase of Communist illegal activity in many parts of the Reich. The whole situation had been reviewed at the 'Berne Conference' of the K.P.D. in January 1939, and it had been decided, not only to intensify the anti-war struggle in Germany, but to prepare by a reorganisation for the eventuality of war, which was certain to increase the difficulties which already impeded communications between the emigre sector-leaderships and the illegal groups.

It was consequently decided to rebuild party district leaderships and eventually a national leadership within Germany and to send representatives of the central committee ('Instrukteure') to Germany to carry through the briefing and education of these cadres. The Gestapo reported the arrival and arrest of a number of these 'Instrukteure' and claimed to have discovered the nature of the advice they had to give, which was generally to concentrate on large factories and key enterprises and to put the fight against war in the forefront. This was also the main theme of the powerful K.P.D. transmitter which operated first from Spain and, in 1939, from the U.S.S.R.

C) 1939-1941. Third Period of the Resistance. The period of Hitler's easy victories

With the launching of war on 1st September 1939 the German resistance struggle was faced with sharply changed conditions and entered a new phase. At first the collapse of the illusions of the 'conquest without war' period, the shortages and economic difficulties imposed on the workers, and the fear of a long war, seemed to create conditions for a growth of opposition, but soon Hitler's blitz victories in Poland, Scandinavia and the West fostered new illusions, let loose an epidemic of chauvinist fever in Germany and involved growing sections of the German people in the corruption and guilt of the occupation and plunder of other countries.

In these circumstances the divisions which had existed within the ruling class faded into the background. Dissident generals mostly grasped the opportunity of medals and promotion. The bourgeois civilian critics of Hitler, such as Hassell and Goerdeler, confounded in many of their expectations, raised the 'peace terms' they put forward in contacts with the western powers. Far from condemning and repudiating Hitler's conquests or showing solidarity with the oppressed peoples, they were determined to retain many of the fruits of Nazi aggression (1). Their attitude had nothing in common with true anti-fascist resistance.

West German bourgeois historians and those who follow them often allege that the German Communists also abandoned their active resistance and in some cases even supported the Nazis in the period from the German-Soviet non-aggression pact of 24 August 1939 to Hitler's invasion of the U.S.S.R. on 22 June 1941*

1.. Coerdeler even proposed to keep Alsace Lorraine, annexed by Hitler after the fall of France.

So far as the present writer is aware, however, there is no evidence whatsoever for these allegations either in surviving Communist documents or in the considerable body of secret Gestapo reports of this period. The German Communist Party leadership issued a statement on 25 August 1939 in which it called for a continued struggle for the overthrow of the Hitler-fascist regime and declared that if the Nazis launched a war they must be exposed as aggressors. Then the war began, the Communist Party called for the ending of the war on the basis of the self-determination of all peoples. These principles continued to be applied in all the policy statements issued by the party in this period. It denounced any tendency to sit back and wait for the western powers to remove Hitler; and from the beginning it expressed support for the liberation movements in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and other occupied countries, and called on Germans to co-operate with them. The rain influence of the German-Soviet pact was tactical, in that it furnished an unprecedented, if limited, opportunity to spread knowledge of Soviet achievements while Gobbels' anti-Soviet propaganda was temporarily muted.

A number of Gestapo surveys have survived in which the results of comprehensive and searching investigations into Resistance throughout the Reich were summed up for the highest Nazi leaders at various dates in this period. No hint is to be found in them that any reduction of Communist activity took place or was expected to take place as a result of "instructions from Moscow" following the pact. On the contrary, the reports show clearly that inasfar as there was active resistance to the fascist regime in the years 1939-41, it came, as it had come before 1939, mainly from Communists. There was, if the reports are to be believed, considerable confusion in illegal Communist circles about the significance of the pact (as there was also among the emigre leaderships in France and Denmark); but the general tendency was to see it as a temporary tactical affair, not as a reason for abandoning the struggle for Hitler's overthrow. So far were the Nazis from expecting Communist opposition to be suspended following the pact that they arrested over 2,000 of the more 'dangerous' Communists then at liberty as a precautionary measure at the outbreak of war. And in fact the K.P.D. attempted in the subsequent months to continue the efforts begun after the Berne Conference in January to rebuild through Instrukteure new party leaderships in Berlin and other main centres.

These efforts of the K.P.D. seem to have been largely frustrated by the Gestapo, and the struggle against the war and the fascist regime, though it never ceased, did not attain a high level in the period 1939-41. The main reasons for this, in the Gestapo's own view, were that the mass arrests and destruction of cadres in

1933 and the following years had dealt the K.P.D. blows from which it was still crippled; that the occupation of Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and France, and later of Yugoslavia, enabled the police not only to destroy most of the remaining outside bases of illegal work, but to uncover their connections within the Reich itself; and finally because so large a part of the German people felt committed by the war, either intoxicated by Hitler's victories or fearing the consequences of defeat. In these circumstances anti-fascist activity was particularly difficult and tended to take the less conspicuous forms of joint radio-listening, political discussion-classes and oral propaganda. Nevertheless a number of considerable illegal organisations were maintained or extended, such as the Lechleiter group in Mannheim or the Uhrig organisation centred in Berlin, which had ramifications in several parts of the Reich and laid the basis for heightened activity at a later stage.

Gestapo reports give a clear if incomplete and biased picture of the anti-fascist struggle at this period. Now, as in pre-war years, its centre was in big factories and it was in mobilising and voicing the workers' discontent with their economic conditions that it came nearest to achieving a mass influence in some areas. It was this danger that caused the Gestapo most concern, especially in Austria, where economic conditions were worse than in Germany, and where the element of national resistance to foreign oppression added weight to economic discontent. A careful analysis of the cost of living in the Vienna area, made by the Gestapo in 1940, showed that a considerable proportion of the population were living below subsistence level. The influence and activity of the Austrian Communist Party was reported to be of real significance and particular concern was aroused by some indications that the Revolutionary Socialists and Catholic anti-nazis might be about to overcome their reluctance to co-operate with the Communists as a result of pressure from their own following. In Germany itself the influence of the Communists was thought by the Gestapo to be small at this period, and this may have been why, when the victories of 1940 seemed to have put the Nazis in a stronger position, they released from concentration camps some Communists who were later to play leading parts in the resistance.

(D) 1941-1945. Fourth period of the resistance. The Anti-Hitler Coalition

A fourth and final period of German resistance opened with the changed situation brought about by the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941. The puzzling contradictions and tactical complexities of the previous period were resolved into simpler issues

The formation of a broad anti-fascist coalition of powers and the growth of the national liberation movements in the occupied countries created more favourable conditions for the development of a German anti-fascist people's front. At the same time the period of Nazi blitzkrieg victories came to an end with the repulse of Hitler's armies before Moscow and Leningrad in the autumn of 1941. It became necessary for the German fascist rulers to mobilise military and economic resources for a long struggle and with this the situation in Germany itself changed decisively. This, transformation of the character of the war did not show itself all at once, but in several stages. The offensive of 1942 renewed the old illusions, even in the high command. That finally destroyed them was the Stalingrad disaster in January 1943 and the failure of the attempt to mount a 'spring offensive' in the early summer of 1943. For the first time widespread doubts of German victory and of Hitler's infallibility spread in the army and behind the front. The Nazi government had to resort to drastic measures of 'total mobilisation' far beyond anything previously done (1). All but the most essential skilled workers, and hundreds of thousands of small artisans, peasant farmers and small business men, were called up and replaced by foreign workers, deportees and prisoners of war, whose number in Germany alone had risen by the end of 1943 to over 12 million.

The invasion of the U.S.S.R. in 1941 was followed by a heightened activity on the part of the illegal Communist-led resistance organisations which had already in the previous period been extending their network of contacts and had drawn in, in particular, some experienced anti-fascists who had been released from concentration camps after Hitler's victories in 1939-40. Space is lacking here even to summarise what has become known about these various illegal organisations; a few general points about them must suffice. They differed considerably in character and social composition. The most extensive were probably those built up out of groups in the factories and other centres of the traditional working-class movement. Such were the organisations in the Hamburg docks and factories led by Robert Abshagen, Bernard Bastlein and Franz Jacob, which was finally broken by the Gestapo in the autumn of 1942, and the Berlin-centred organisation led by Robert Uhrig, tool-maker and former K.P.D. official, which had connections with the Ruhr and other working-class centres and came - nearest to providing a central leadership at this period. Connected with the Uhrig organisation was the small group, led by former Communist editors John Sieg and Wilhelm Guddorf, who produced the newsheet 'Innere Front'. There were some small groups among

1. Sec A.S. Milward, The German Economy at War (London, 1965)

intellectuals, such as that headed by the doctor Georg Grosscurth and the physicist Professor Hausmann whose special emphasis was on contact and co-operation with foreign deportees and prisoners of war. There was a group, primarily middle-class, headed by the former soldier and 'free corps' officer Joseph Romer, which linked up with the Communist-led Uhrig organisation; and there was the small but heroic group of young, mainly Jewish, men and women led by Herbert Baum. Most varied and remarkable of all, perhaps, was the resistance organisation, which the Gestapo nicknamed 'Rote Kapelle' (Red Orchestra), led by Harro Schulze-Boysen and Arvid Harnack. These men were Marxist intellectuals of great ability who also happened to have influential connections and worked respectively in the Air Ministry and the Ministry of Economics, (1) Their organisation, which had contacts also in other military and government offices as well as in factories, had two more or less distinct activities: the collection and transmission of political and military intelligence to the Soviet Union and the promotion of sabotage and resistance within Germany. It was finally smashed, with up to 400 arrests and numerous executions, in the autumn of 1942.

These organisations were, of course, all anti-fascist organisations which aimed at joining hands with the liberation struggle of the oppressed peoples and with the anti-Hitler coalition to bring about the defeat of fascism. They arose, to some extent independently in the first place, in various social milieux, but tended to come under the leadership of experienced Communists. Many of these Communists had already endured many years of prison and concentration camp and had only experienced a brief spell of liberty when they threw themselves again into illegal activity, knowing full well that they faced almost certain death, probably after prolonged torture. Their heroism is therefore above praise. That their political understanding was also of a high order is shown by several surviving manuscripts containing analyses of economic or political developments. It was not only that they saw already in 1941-2 that the Nazis were destined to lose the war. They understood the vital importance, for the German people's own liberation, of solidarity with the oppressed peoples of Europe and with the U.S.S.R.

1. A unique case of an individual anti-fascist who penetrated the Nazi apparatus was that of Richard Sorge ~~who~~ used his position in the German embassy in Tokyo to supply information which may have significantly affected the course of the war.

Among the most characteristic, heroic and revealing actions of this period were the demonstrations, conducted independently by the Baum group and the Schulze-Boysen group, at suicidal risky against Gobbels's anti-Soviet 'Soviet Paradise' exhibition in Berlin in the spring of 1942.

Most of the groups already mentioned, and many others of which something is known, owed much to the local initiative of a few individuals; but efforts to give them help and guidance and to link them up into a wider network never ceased to be made by the K.P.D. leadership outside Germany; and the respective roles of spontaneous initiative and outside guidance are not easy to estimate correctly. That Radio Moscow was listened to by many illegal groups is known from Gestapo reports and trial records. More detailed guidance was given by K.P.D. 'Instrukteure' who either crossed the land frontiers, as Alfred Kowalke did from Holland, or dropped by parachute like Albert Hossler; and a group of such 'Instructors' under the leadership of Wilhelm Knochel, a member of the K.P.D. central committee, was working from Berlin, trying to unite the groups into a national organisation, in the last months of 1942. This was by then an urgent and important task for resistance had already assumed many different forms. New centres and groups were springing up in the camps of foreign labourers, in the concentration camps and in the prisoner of war camps, especially among Soviet prisoners, while the battle on the home front, even though it still involved only a small minority of Germans, was extending in scale and ferocity. What the Gestapo feared above all, as its reports show, was the linking up of these centres of resistance and their co-ordination. Hence their increasingly violent measures against contacts between the German population and foreign prisoners, and the continual increase in the number of political offences and in the severity of the penalties attached to them.

By the end of 1942 the Gestapo had succeeded in destroying the Uhrig and Schulze-Boysen organisations and in January 1943 Wilhelm Knochel and his comrades were arrested. The main illegal organisations had thus been put out of action and the resistance movement lay in a shattered state at the very moment when the Stalingrad disaster precipitated an acute crisis in Germany and opened up new opportunities for anti-fascist activity. Scepticism about the chances of a Nazi victory spread in the following months, and the total mobilisation measures which destroyed the security of hitherto 'privileged' workers and ruined a section of the middle classes, brought a shift in class relations favourable to a broad anti-fascist front. The widening of opposition was perceived by Nazis and anti-Nazis alike, especially in the elementary forms of absenteeism from work, lateness, reporting sick, and minor acts of sabotage.

The fascist government responded by strengthening its repressive machine and by new measures of terror. Gobbels was given enhanced powers as Gauleiter of Berlin, the Gestapo was strengthened and ordered to extend its informer network, Himmler was made Minister of the Interior, and in the spring and summer of 1943 a large number of death sentences, especially against intellectuals, were given unusual publicity. Anti-fascists, for their part, began to make efforts not only to rebuild and extend their illegal organisations, but to formulate a political platform which would serve to unite the various sections of the now potentially broad opposition. Four Leipzig Communists, for instance, began to discuss the drawing up of such a programme in the spring of 1943; and about the same time the Communist Franz Jacob (who had escaped after the destruction of the Hamburg organisation) and Anton Saefkow began similar discussion in Berlin and opened communication with the exiled K.P.D. leadership through a sympathetic chauffeur at the Swedish legation. Meanwhile the repercussions of the defeats at Stalingrad and Kursk showed themselves also within the swollen prisoner of war camps in the Soviet Union where the originally small nucleus of anti-fascists now found a more sympathetic hearing among disillusioned and betrayed soldiers and officers. On 13 July 1943, on the initiative of the K.P.D. leadership in exile, and after preliminary discussions in the camps, a National Committee of Free Germany (1) was founded at a meeting attended by soldiers and officers from several prisoner of war camps, as well as by emigre Communists. And as there were a number of officers who, though not yet prepared to identify themselves with the Committee, were ready to make an open stand against Hitler's regime, a separate League of German Officers was formed in September 1943 under the presidency of General von Seydlitz, who, however, also became a vice-president of the National Committee.

The National Committee of Free Germany (N.K.F.D.) was not a 'mere tool of Soviet propaganda' or 'collection of Communist dupes', as most bourgeois historians allege. As even a brief glance at its newspaper 'Freies Deutschland' shows, it was a genuine union of different social and political tendencies, which had in common only recognition of the need for a complete break with fascism and the building of a new democratic republic. Although all agreed that the war had been criminally mismanaged and was lost, not all had at the beginning a very strong sense of guilt about it and it was noticeable that Wilhelm Pieck devoted a significant part of his brief address to the opening congress to trying to convince the delegates that the main reasons for Germany's military defeat lay not in Hitler's foolish strategy but in his unjust aims.

1. Nationalkomitee 'Freies Deutschland'.

There were considerable bourgeois-liberal and Christian elements in the National Committee and indeed its formation had only become possible because the political bureau of the K.P.D., following up the decisions of the pre-war Brussels and Berne conferences, had put forward a programme which did not go beyond anti-fascist democratic aims. This programme envisaged a strong democratic state which would revoke fascist legislation and confiscate the property of war criminals, but it did not include any specifically socialist measures and was even described by an American commentator as a programme for a democratic but capitalist Germany. The Committee's subsequent statements, moreover, did not at first call on German soldiers to revolt or desert but to retire in orderly fashion to the frontiers of the Reich.

The foundation of the National Committee evoked a considerable response among German emigres in Britain, the U.S.A., Mexico and other countries, and many bourgeois intellectuals and socialists expressed support for its programme. It seemed possible for a time that a broad anti-fascist unity might be achieved. But the right-wing Social Democrats rejected invitations to co-operate (on the grounds in at least one case that the N.K.F.D. programme made undue concessions to capitalism); and in December 1943 the Heads of the anti-Hitler coalition, meeting at Teheran, by adopting the policy of 'unconditional surrender', in effect postponed the difficult problem of giving joint recognition to any representatives of German anti-fascism. Shortly after, in January 1944, the National Committee, recognising the improbability of a revolt by the German generals, abandoned its previous military policy and began to call upon German soldiers and officers to come over to the side of the Committee and to bring about mutinies and desertions. Many representatives of the Committee were sent to the front or dropped behind the German lines on the eastern front and every kind of approach was made to influence members of the Wehrmacht. Despite many examples of heroism and no small casualties, the effect of this propaganda remained limited, though support for the Committee grew greatly during 1944 among the increasing army of prisoners of war. Most West German and British bourgeois historians assert that the impact of the National Committee on the German forces in the field was negligible; but the strong measures taken by the authorities to counter its influence - including the threat of reprisals against the relatives of soldiers who deserted or otherwise adhered to the Committee - show that it was very much feared.

In Germany itself the activities and statements of the Committee, gradually becoming known through broadcasts and leaflets, stimulated the movement which had already begun in 1943 to find a platform round which the various sections of anti-fascists could work, and to merge the regional resistance organisations into one centrally

directed organisation. Resistance groups usually had members and contacts among Social-Democrats and non-party anti-fascists, but the majority of the most active members were in most cases Communists, and the lead in working out a platform came from them. What took place in the cases about which most is known was a process by which active Communists, who had already spent years in prisons or concentration camps or in illegal struggle, overcame the last remnants of 'pre-Brussels sectarian views' and applied the ideas of the Brussels and Berne congresses to the situation facing them. (1) Saefkow and Jacob in Berlin drew up two documents in the autumn of 1943 in which they analysed the political situation carefully and correctly, and argued the need to overcome passivity and build an organisation which would take advantage of the more favourable turn of events to counter the ideological influence of the Nazi regime and work for its overthrow. They considered that such an organisation must be based firmly in the factories and should be centrally directed, while at the same time striving to unite anti-Nazis of all classes round a programme of peace and broad democratic reform like that of the National Committee. These proposals were a conscious application of the Brussels and Berne decisions, but at the same time traces of older sectarian attitudes, inconsistent with the Brussels line, were also to be found in the documents, which envisaged the 'neutralisation' rather than the winning over as allies of bourgeois anti-fascists and confused the new democratic republic with the dictatorship of the proletariat. These notions, which were inconsistent with the main argument of the documents, soon disappeared in the discussions that followed within the Saefkow-Jacob group. Similar ideas, however, had been embodied in a 'platform' drawn up by the Leipzig Communists Georg Schumann and Otto Engert, also in 1943, and these were only gradually eliminated in the course of prolonged discussions, partly by the influence of contacts with Berlin and Thuringia and partly because the majority of the active Leipzig anti-fascists were convinced, from their experience of illegal work, that the National Committee's programme was correct; and this view finally prevailed in February 1944, when the third version of the Leipzig 'platform' was adopted.

These theoretical discussions, though of vital importance if broad popular anti-fascist movement were to be built up, were only one aspect of the work of the groups. Between the spring of 1943 and July 1944 Anton Saefkow and Franz Jacob (joined later by Bernhard Bastlein who escaped from prison during an air raid) succeeded in building up a remarkably widespread illegal organisation in the Berlin region. It was based on active and well-organised 3-man groups in some two dozen of the principal factories, especially

1. See G. Rossmann, Der Kampf der K.P.D. um die Einheit aller Hitlergegner (Berlin, 1963)

the armament factories, of Berlin; and it had specialist sections for propaganda, Wehrmacht propaganda, intelligence and monitoring, forging of passes, provision of lodgings for those living illegally, etc. It had contacts with the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, from which it was capable of arranging the escape of a particular prisoner; with the ministry of economics; with foreign anti-fascists in labour camps; and with Sweden. Already in the autumn of 1943 its leaders established regular contact with the Leipzig organisation which was growing on similar lines, and with the leaders of a similar movement in Thuringia, Magnus Poser, a factory worker of Jena, and Dr. Theodor Neubauer, a former Communist Reichstag member. In the spring of 1944 these contacts, and others with Magdeburg, Dresden and the Ruhr, had developed so far that they constituted what could already be regarded as a provisional national directing centre of the anti-fascist resistance, controlling an organisation whose ramifications extended into many of the chief factories of central Germany and which had contacts almost throughout the Reich. Among the activities of the organisation were the production of considerable quantities of leaflets, some of which were posted to soldiers at the Front by a special branch of the organisation, while others were translated into French by Neubauer at Tabarz near Gotha, printed by Poser at Jena and passed on from Berlin to French deportee contacts. The accent in all the organisation's propaganda was on the need for the broadest possible unity to take action for the overthrow of the Hitler regime, beginning with absenteeism and going on where possible to sabotage, strikes and military desertion. What was envisaged was not individual terrorism or assassination, which were rejected as a method of struggle, (1) but the development of mass resistance both at home and at the front, and particular emphasis was laid on co-operation with the millions of foreign anti-fascists in Germany, whose resistance, as Gestapo records show, was causing the Nazi authorities growing difficulties and anxiety.

The local and factory groups which had been formed by, or brought under the leadership of, Saefkow and Jacob included, besides Communists, individual Social Democratic workers and a number of non-party bourgeois anti-fascists such as doctors, artists and engineers. But the aim of the leadership was no less than to unite all sections of the opposition on the basis of the National Committee's democratic anti-fascist programme. Therefore in the early summer of 1944 contact was established and discussions arranged with some of the leading figures of the Social Democratic illegal opposition, who, in turn, were linked with the bourgeois military opposition.

1. Whether this decision was correct in the circumstances is a question which deserves discussion.

This bourgeois-social democratic opposition movement, with whom negotiations were opened in May-June 1944, was composed of different social and ideological groupings. The Social Democratic group is the most difficult to estimate at present. It seems probable that the small number of active leaders represented a wide network of old Social Democrats and former trade union officials who had maintained contact with one another during the fascist period, but little more; their potential strength was therefore problematical. In the bourgeois opposition there were two main tendencies. On the one hand there were Christians and genuine liberals who had in many cases been supporters of the fascist regime at first, through mistaken idealism, but had subsequently revolted against its corruption and its crimes. Such had been Hans and Sophie School and their group of Munich students who had sacrificed their lives in courageous but suicidal protest at the time of the Stalingrad disaster. And rather similar moral revolt underlay the discussions of the 'Kreisauer Kreis' - the circle of liberal and Christian reformers who met at the Silesian estate of the aristocratic landowner Count Helmut von Moltke to plan the re-organisation of Germany after the war on principles akin to Christian socialism. Although Moltke and his friends remained confused, and in some respects deeply conservative, nevertheless they were feeling their way to a programme of genuine democratisation and they conceived the overthrow of fascism as involving a profound social change, in which the mass of the people must play a central role. In this respect more than any other they differed sharply from the conservative-military opposition led by Goerdeler, Beck, Hassell and Popitz. These bourgeois conservatives had all been high officials of the Third Reich, but had moved into opposition in the later 1930's and since about 1938 had been trying spasmodically to induce leading generals to remove Hitler from power on the grounds that his adventurist policies would lead to disaster. They had been frustrated repeatedly by Hitler's successes and by the refusal of either the leading generals or the western powers to take them seriously; but in 1943 and 1944 their previous warnings were being more than confirmed by the disastrous turn of the war and a growing section of the professional military leaders began to be receptive to ideas of removing Hitler by a coup. Hence the renewed activity of Goerdeler and his circle.

The numerous programmes and memoranda produced by Goerdeler and his associates, and the plans and proclamations which they drafted for the event of a successful coup d'etat, show clearly that their aim was not to lead any democratic popular movement against the fascist regime, but rather to prevent the development of such a movement and to preserve both the militarist-imperialist system in Germany itself and, as far as possible, Hitler's

territorial conquests, (1) Goerdeler, Schacht and Popitz in particular had close connections with some sections of monopoly capital. Their original aim had been the restoration of the Hohenzollern monarchy, though they had to abandon that in order to pursue the war in the east while attempting to make a separate peace in the west, but was to forbid all popular political activity. It was not even intended to release the countless victims of Hitler's concentration camps - only to 'review their cases'.

The plans of the Goerdeler-Eassell group depended entirely on winning over decisive elements among the generals and, despite ever more urgent approaches, they had still not succeeded in this by mid-1944. Then, in July, events moved rapidly to a climax in a series of complex developments which are difficult to relate to one another precisely and may never be fully clarified. The rapid growth of the influence of the Communist-led resistance groups seems to have alarmed the conservatives, who told the American C.I.A. agent Allen Dulles that the masses were moving to the left and that there was a danger of the collapse of Hitler leading to a revolution. Though perhaps exaggerated in order to win concessions from the western powers, this fear was probably a genuine stimulus to precipitate action. Another stimulus was the fear that the advance of the allied armies after the landing in Normandy on June 6th would soon leave no bargaining counters in the hands of the German bourgeois opposition if they did not act. In order to bring about the coup, however, they were dependent on a group of relatively junior staff officers headed by Count Stauffenberg, who had genuinely democratic leanings and insisted not only on the bringing in of some Social Democrats and trade union leaders (Julian Leber, Wilhelm Leuschner, Adolf Reichwein and others), but also on an attempt to come to an agreement with the Communist-led resistance. That was the background to the meeting of Saefkow and Jacob with Reichwein and Leber on June 22nd and to the projected follow-up meeting early in July. It was at that point, when a united front of the anti-fascist resistance and the bourgeois opposition seemed to be within reach, that Himmler intervened and began the series of mass arrests which, beginning with the Communist and Social Democratic leaders, quickly broke the main connections of the Saefkow organisation and began to make inroads into the bourgeois and military opposition. It was this that forced

1. See D. Melnikov, 20 Juli 1944. Legende und Wirklichkeit. (Berlin, 1964); also G. Ritter, The German Resistance, (Allen & Unwin, 1958)

the latter to take hasty action before it was too late and precipitated the attempted assassination of Hitler and military putsch on 20 July 1944, the story of which (largely divorced from the vital question of its connection with the anti-fascist N.K.F.D. groups) has so often been told, according to the version usually given in the west, a Communist who accompanied Saefkow and Jacob to the crucial meeting on June 22nd was an agent of the Gestapo, which was thus enabled to get on to the track of the Social Democratic and bourgeois opposition. This explanation does not accord with the evidence available in the G.D.R. and is for several reasons improbable. More likely is that the arrest of Moltke in January 1944 had led the Gestapo to watch the Social Democrats who were connected with the Kreisau circle. Himmler may, indeed, long have been aware of the activities of the Social Democratic circles, but have allowed them to continue as long as their net effect was to keep an important section of the workers relatively passive and at arms length from the Communists; and he may also have been aware of the activities of the circle round Goerdeler (who was extremely indiscreet), but kept them in reserve as a possible bridge for negotiating with the west - as indeed he may even have continued to do in Goerdeler's case until the beginning of January 1945. What probably made Himmler intervene at the beginning of July 1944 was the threat of a union of the bourgeois opposition with the National Committee resistance movement.

The destruction of the anti-fascist Saefkow-Jacob organisation and of the military-bourgeois opposition in July and August 1944 was carried through with a completeness and ferocity which achieved its purpose for the time being. Though many illegal anti-fascist groups survived, it proved impossible to re-organise them into a nation-wide, centrally-directed resistance movement before the war ended. This does not necessarily mean that opposition was inconsiderable. It has been reckoned that about half a million persons were arrested in Germany in 1944, and although the majority of these were probably foreigners, many were Germans. Offences punishable by death had increased from 3 in 1933 to several dozen in 1944. The death sentence was inflicted for the most trivial expressions of criticism and the number of executions rose to an unprecedented level.⁽¹⁾ Moreover, a deliberate policy was adopted of

In 1944, 5,764 executions following judicial proceedings in civil courts were recorded in Germany. This excluded 'informal' executions by Gestapo and S.S. and also executions by sentence of court martial. The latter alone are estimated at 7,000 to 8,000 in the first four months of 1945 (pp. 12-13, 240)

murdering all potential leaders of opposition, beginning with the secret execution of Ernst Thalmann, on Hitler's personal orders, on 18 August 1944. These facts point to widespread political opposition and to desperation and fear on the part of the fascist rulers. There is evidence from some cities, such as Cologne, of 'counter-terrorism' aimed at the Gestapo and Nazi-party officials by armed groups in the spring of 1945. By and large, however, the Nazis retained the obedience and passive support of the great majority and this cannot be explained only as the result of terror and intimidation. It reflected the profound corruption of very wide sections of the people by fascist ideas, as well as the feeling of guilt shared and an acceptance of the Nazi propaganda line that the defeat of the Third Reich, especially by the Red Army, would bring the complete destruction of Germany. moreover the incipient divisions in the ruling class, revealed in July 1944, did not develop. Some of the big capitalists had tentatively encouraged Goerdeler as long as there seemed some chance that the elimination of Hitler could be combined with a link-up with the western powers against the Soviet Union. The leading elements of the German capitalist class, however, realistic as ever, considered that their interests were in the long run best served by a policy of holding out to the end, so that, in as large a part of Germany as possible, the authority of Hitler could be replaced directly by that of the Anglo-American armies with as little intermission as possible in which revolutionary mass movements might develop, as had happened in Italy in 1943. No-one who in 1965 surveys the events which followed 1945 can say that these calculations were unrealistic.

IV. Conclusion

The conclusions of this brief survey of some of the historical problems relating to the German anti-fascist resistance may be summed up as follows

- (1) Though resistance to German fascism came from persons in all social strata and classes, there is clear evidence that the main resistance came from the working class. A sociological analysis of the records of those arrested, imprisoned, or executed for political offences would show a quite overwhelming preponderance of workers, especially skilled factory workers. The class-conscious core of the working-class was never won over or put out of action by fascism.

- (2) The scale, the variety and the sheer heroism of this resistance struggle has been very greatly underestimated in the west. It has been reckoned that about a million Germans went through concentration camps before 1939, and thousands of communists and socialists were murdered. Yet the struggle continued on many fronts, from the factory bench to the Wehrmacht and the concentration camps.

- (3) Historical truth demands recognition of the fact that the German communists were the main organisers of this resistance and that, with terrible losses and not without costly mistakes, they were the only part which, from beginning to end of the Hitler-regime actively struggled for its overthrow.

The assessment of the German resistance is a particularly important historical task because of the present revival of aggressive militarism and imperialism in West Germany. The study of the resistance shows, contrary to what is generally assumed without argument in the west, that the G.D.R. has deep roots in the experience of the anti-fascist resistance. It was the bitter lesson of the price paid for working-class disunity that led the majority of Social Democratic workers in eastern Germany - and in some regions of Western German too - to insist on union with the communists after 1945; and it was the recognition that the roots of fascism lay in the whole militarist-imperialist tradition which brought important elements of the Stalingrad survivors and appreciable sections of the intelligentsia and liberal bourgeoisie to throw in their lot with the National Front. The programme of the National Committee of Free Germany in fact developed into the programme of anti-fascist democratic revolution round which, in eastern Germany there developed the broad anti-fascist front which might, if it had emerged at an earlier stage, have overthrown Hitler. To overestimate the anti-fascist resistance in the years 1933-45 is to make the events of 1944-5 unintelligible; to underestimate them is to falsify the events of 1945-9 for the sake of presenting the G.D.R. as the mere creation of Soviet occupation, without historical roots.

Abbreviations used

G.D.R. - German Democratic Republic
K.P.D. - The German Communist Party
S.E.D. - The Socialist Unity Party of Germany
N.K.F.D. - The National Committee "Free Germany" founded in 1943
N.S.D.A.P. - The Nazi party

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