

poetry of RESISTANCE

GERMAN NATIONAL REPORT

CERV • Project n° 101090114

Work Package 1: Research and Reflect

When it was reported for the first time, that our friends were slowly being slaughtered, there was a scream of horror. Then a hundred were slaughtered. But when a thousand were slaughtered, and there was no end to the slaughter, there was general silence.

When the atrocities come as thick as rain, then no one any longer calls out, 'stop!'

When the crimes stack up, they become invisible. When the sufferings become unbearable, the screams become inaudible.

The screams, too, fall like rain in summer.¹

Berthold Brecht

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The rise of Hitler to the power

The German Workers' Party, which assumed the extreme right, was created in 1919, Adolf Hitler was tasked by the army to monitor it, but quickly adhered to its ideas and became its leader. In 1920 the party changed its name to the National Socialist German Workers' Party. The conjuncture was favorable to the rise of the party, the fears provoked by the revolutionary waves favored the rise of right-wing authoritarian movements. In 1922, the March on Rome took place, the spread of authoritarian movements a little everywhere led Hitler to try the Munich Putsch.

In November 1923 ,approximately two thousand Nazis marched on the [Feldherrnhalle](#), in the city centre, but were confronted by a police cordon, which resulted in the deaths of 16 Nazi Party members and four police officers. Hitler was arrested and charged with [treason](#). Hitler caught the attention of the German nation for the first time and generated front-page headlines in newspapers around the world. He was found guilty of treason and sentenced to five years in [Landsberg Prison](#), where he dictated [Mein Kampf](#) to fellow prisoners [Emil Maurice](#) and [Rudolf Hess](#). On 20 December 1924, having served only nine months, Hitler was released, and he reorganised the party imposing his leadership.

¹ Wenn die Untat kommt wie der Regen ([when atrocities come as thick as rain](#)) 1934

the number of affiliates grew and slowly his rise to power was prepared. The financial crisis of 1929 brutally hit Germany. There were cuts in wages, unemployment and inflation were on the rise, Germans were increasingly disillusioned with the Weimar Republic.

In September 1930 nazi party won 18 percent of the votes by promising to fix the economy and put people back to work; by promising to return Germany to the status of a great European, and regaining territory Germany had lost in World War I; by promising to create a strong authoritarian German government; and by promising to unite all Germans along racial and ethnic lines. the Nazis insidiously played with people’s hopes, fears, and prejudices.

In July 1932 parliamentary elections, the Nazis won 37 percent of the vote. Political instability continued to grow Hitler demanded to be appointed as chancellor. President Paul von Hindenburg hesitated but Hitler was finally nominated.

The German parliament was, meanwhile, set on fire. The Reichstag fire had a confessed author, who was captured by the police forces. It was a young Dutch communist, named Marinus van der Lubbe, who claimed to have caused the fire for political reasons, that is, as a way to alert and unite German workers against the fascist government. At that point, Adolf Hitler had been chancellor for less than a month and immediately took advantage of the event to convince the president to declare a state of emergency in the country, claiming that a communist conspiracy was in progress.

This gave rise, therefore, to a wave of repression against the members and sympathizers of the German Communist Party, which was the main force of opposition to the Nazi party. Hitler managed, in this way, to control the parliament and consolidate his power in a decisive and irreversible way. The day after the fire, February 28, 1933, President Hindenburg, at Hitler’s urging, issued two emergency decrees designed to make such arrests legal, even those that had already taken place. Their titles—“For the Defence of Nation and State” and “To Combat Treason against the German Nation and Treasonable Activities”—reveal how Hitler used the fire to further his own goals. The two decrees suspended, until further notice, every part of the constitution that protected personal freedoms. The Nazis claimed that the decrees were necessary to protect the nation from the “Communist menace.”

On March 5, 1933, the government held an election for control of the Reichstag. The Nazis won 288 seats (43.9% of the vote). The Communists won 81 seats (12.3%), even though

their representatives were unable to claim those seats—if they appeared in public, they faced immediate arrest. Other opposition parties also won significant numbers of seats. The Social Democrats captured 119 seats (18.3%), and the Catholic Center Party won 73 seats (11.2%). Together, the Communist, Social Democratic, and Catholic Center Parties won nearly as many seats as the Nazis. But their members distrusted one another almost as much as they feared the Nazis. As a result, these parties were unable to mount a unified opposition to the Nazi Party. On March 21, 1933, a new law was promulgated making it a crime to speak out against the new government or criticize its leaders. This law is known as the Malicious Practices Act. Those who were accused of “gossiping” or “making fun” of government officials could be arrested and sent to prison or a concentration camp.

Only three days after, on March 24, 1933, the Reichstag passed the Enabling Act by a vote of 141 to 94. It “enabled” the chancellor of Germany to punish anyone he considered an “enemy of the state.” The act allowed “laws passed by the government” to override the constitution. Only the 94 Social Democrats voted against the law. Most of the other deputies who opposed it were in hiding, in prison, or in exile.

Also on the same day of March Nazi leader Heinrich Himmler, then police commissioner for the city of Munich, held a news conference to announce the opening of the first concentration camp near Dachau, Germany. The camp would have the capacity to hold 5,000 people, including Communist Party members and Social Democrats “who threaten the security of the state.”

Throughout the spring and early summer of 1933, the Nazis used the new laws to frighten and intimidate Germans. By May, they forced all trade labour unions to dissolve. Instead, workers could only belong to a Nazi-approved union called the German Labor Front.

Hitler feared that the SA and Ernst Röhm, their leader, were a potential threat to his leadership. The Night of Long Knives, also known as the Röhm Putsch, was the purge of the SA leadership and other political opponents from 30 June 1934 to 2 July 1934. Over 150 people were murdered and hundreds more were arrested. Hitler ordered these executions to consolidate his power. On July 3, the Reich Cabinet issued a law legalizing the murders after the fact as an emergency action to save the nation.

President Paul von Hindenburg died on August 2, 1934. Hitler and his supporters abolished the title of President and combined the offices of President and Chancellor. Hitler became Führer (leader) and Reich Chancellor of the German Reich. On August 19, 1934, a plebiscite vote confirmed this change. As Führer, Hitler's authority was supreme.

The elites, made up of members of Hitler's trusted party, considered the best of their race, were chosen to lead the government and guide the destinies of the masses. The elements that made up the elite were not chosen by the people.

On September 15, 1935 the Nuremberg laws legitimized the persecution of Jews and the prohibition of liaison between Germans and Jews with: the Reich Citizenship Law; the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor.

Nazism assumed racism as a right of principle, defending the purity of the race, the elimination of Germans considered impure or degenerate, the promotion of marriages and birth rates among Aryans as a form of selection and genetic improvement (eugenics), physical and mental improvement of the Aryan race

Other discriminatory laws followed: the Law on the Alteration of Family and Personal Names (August 1938); the Decree on Passports of Jews (October 1938)

On 8 and 9 November 1938 Kristallnacht pogroms occurred all over Germany, carried out by the [Nazi Party's Sturmabteilung \(SA\) paramilitary](#) and [Schutzstaffel \(SS\) paramilitary](#) forces along with some participation from the [Hitler Youth](#) and German civilians throughout. The German authorities looked on without intervening. The name Kristallnacht (literally 'Crystal Night') comes from the shards of broken glass that littered the streets after the windows of Jewish-owned stores, buildings and [synagogues](#) were smashed. The pretext for the attacks was the assassination of the German diplomat [Ernst vom Rath](#) by [Herschel Grynszpan](#), a 17-year-old German-born [Polish Jew](#) living in Paris.

Jewish homes, hospitals and schools were ransacked as attackers demolished buildings with sledgehammers. Rioters destroyed 267 synagogues throughout Germany, Austria and the [Sudetenland](#). Over 7,000 Jewish businesses were damaged or destroyed, and [30,000 Jewish men were arrested](#) and incarcerated in [concentration camps](#).

CENSORSHIP

In 1926, Hitler appointed Goebbels Nazi Party chief (Gauleiter) for Greater Berlin. Goebbels built the Nazi Party organization from the ground up in Berlin. He established himself as a Master of Political agitation and propaganda.

Hitler was so impressed with Goebbels' mastery of modern propaganda techniques that he appointed him Reich leader of propaganda for the Nazi Party in 1929. He relied on Goebbels in the critical Reichstag and presidential elections in 1932.

On March 13, 1933, Hitler established the [Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda](#). He appointed Goebbels as his minister.

On May 10, 1933, Goebbels spoke during the [burning](#) of s "un-German" books in Berlin. He proclaimed the "cleaning of the German spirit" in front of Humboldt University. Nazi activists and members of the National Socialist German Students' Association (Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund, or NSDStB) organized nationwide [book burning](#) ceremonies in which they threw into the flames the works of writers as [Bertolt Brecht](#), [Thomas Mann](#), [Erich Maria Remarque](#), and the texts of Jewish authors, including such famous German writers as [Franz Werfel](#), [Lion Feuchtwanger](#), and Heinrich Heine.

The Ministry's aim was to ensure that the Nazi message was successfully communicated through art, music, theatre, films, books, radio, educational materials, and the press. Films in particular played an important role in disseminating racial antisemitism, the superiority of German military power, and the intrinsic evil of the enemies as defined by Nazi ideology.

[The Eternal Jew](#) (1940), directed by Fritz Hippler, portrayed Jews as wandering cultural parasites, [The Triumph of the Will](#) (1935) by [Leni Riefenstahl](#), glorified Hitler and the National Socialist movement.

Newspapers in Germany, above all [Der Stürmer](#) (The Attacker), printed cartoons that used antisemitic caricatures to depict Jews

The Nazi regime used propaganda effectively to mobilize the German population to support its wars of conquest until the very end of the regime.

Mechanisms of control

The Nazi Party wanted to increase their influence and reach with Germany's youth. They expanded the Hitler Youth to include both boys and girls. By 1931, it had four sections organized by gender and age:

German Youngsters (Deutsches Jungvolk) for boys 10 to 14 years old;

Young Girls' League (Jungm delbund) for girls 10 to 14 years old;

The League of German Girls (Bund Deutscher M del, or BDM) for girls 14 to 18 years old;

Hitler Youth (Hitlerjugend) for boys 14 to 18 years old.

Through these organizations, the Nazi regime planned to [indoctrinate young people](#) with Nazi ideology.

NC Gemeinschaft *Kraft durch Freude* ([German](#) for 'Strength Through Joy'; KdF) Born in November 1933 as a tool to promote the advantages of [Nazism](#) to the German people and to compensate for the poor increases in wages and for the loss of trade union rights. Through its structure of organized events and promotion of propaganda, it was also intended to prevent dissident and anti-state behavior. By 1939, it had become the world's largest tourism operator.

On February 22, 1933, SS and SA become auxiliary police units, less than a month after Adolf Hitler is appointed chancellor of Germany. The SS, initially Hitler's bodyguards, and the SA, started to have official police power.

On June 17, 1936, Hitler appoints SS chief Heinrich Himmler chief of all German police units. All police powers became centralized. The Gestapo (German secret state police) comes under Himmler's control.

These non-uniformed police used unorthodox methods throughout Germany to identify and arrest political opponents and others who refused to obey laws and policies of the Nazi regime.

The Reich Chamber of Culture (Reichskulturkammer) was established by law on 22 September 1933 in the course of the [Gleichschaltung](#) process at the instigation of Reich Minister [Joseph Goebbels](#) as a professional organization of all German creative artists. All

creative artists had to be a member of one of the sections for literature, the press, music, film, theatre, radio, or the fine arts.

DEFYING THE REGIME

Resistance “widerstand”

The Kreisau Circle

The Kreisau Circle aimed to draft basic principles for an intellectual, political, and social new order after the end of the “Third Reich”. The mentors were Helmuth James Graf von Moltke and Peter Graf Yorck von Wartenburg. Catholic and Protestant Christians and clergymen, Social Democrats, conservatives, and liberals developed shared positions in mutual respect.

The Red Orchestra

It primarily referred to a loose network of resistance groups, connected through personal contacts, uniting hundreds of opponents of the [Nazi regime](#). They printed and distributed prohibited leaflets, posters, and stickers, hoping to incite civil disobedience. They aided Jews and resistance to escape the regime, documented the atrocities of the Nazis, and transmitted military intelligence to the Allies. The organization was a network of groups and individuals, often operating independently. To date, about [400 members](#) are known by name.

The white Rose

The White Rose is a circle of friends centered around the students Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell. Beginning in the summer of 1942, they write and distribute leaflets calling for opposition to the National Socialist (NS) dictatorship and an end to the war all over Munich. Supporters join the resistance group in other German cities, too, including professor Kurt Huber in late 1942. Seven members of the White Rose resistance are sentenced to death and executed by the NS judiciary beginning in February 1943.

The poets

Reinhold Schneider, 1903 - 1958

Reinhold Schneider is born in Baden-Baden. After his parents lose their property, he becomes a clerk in 1921. He gives up his job in 1928 and devotes himself completely to working as a writer. From the mid-1930s on his writing shows a strong religious influence. His historical works are understood as a protest the National Socialist regime. When Schneider is no longer allowed to publish from 1940 on, his widely read works in which he describes the present as the “advent of the apocalypse” and as a “catastrophe”, can now only be privately printed or illegally duplicated. In 1945 Schneider is charged with “preparing to commit high treason” because a Wehrmacht chaplain uses a collection of Schneider’s sonnets in his ministry work. However, the death sentence anticipated for Schneider is averted by the end of the war.

Jens Mungard, 1885 - 1940

"I won't write [...] hymns to Hitler," Jens Mungard told a friend. The poet, linguistics scholar, and farmer lived in poverty on the island of Sylt. He wrote poems and plays in the local Friesian language. Mungard was convinced that Friesian culture should remain independent of German influences. He maintained contact with writers in the Netherlands in the hope of preserving a community for all Friesians. Mungard was placed in "protective custody" for the first time in 1935, on the grounds of "severely damaging the reputation of the German Reich abroad." He was banned from writing in 1938 because he was considered "nationally unreliable." Jens Mungard was not deterred. He was therefore arrested again in March of 1939 and imprisoned in Sachsenhausen concentration camp, where he perished on February 13, 1940.

Friedrich "Fritz" Georg Jünger, 1898 – 1977

He was a German writer and lawyer. He wrote poetry, [cultural criticism](#) and novels. He was the younger brother of [Ernst Jünger](#).

The younger brother of [Ernst Jünger](#), he volunteered for military service in 1916 and was seriously wounded in the [Battle of Langemarck](#). After the [First World War](#) he studied [law](#) and [cameralism](#) at the universities of [Leipzig](#) and [Halle-Wittenberg](#). After moving to Berlin, he

and his brother became involved with the [nationalist](#) magazine [Widerstand](#) and the people around it such as [Friedrich Hielscher](#) and [Ernst Niekisch](#).

His stance against [National Socialism](#) is explicit in the poem "Der Mohn", published in the collection Gedichte (1934), and he was interrogated by the [Gestapo](#) because of it. He was interrogated again in 1937 when Niekisch was arrested.

Werner Bergengruen, 1892 – 1964

He was a [Baltic German novelist](#) and [poet](#). He was nominated for the [Nobel Prize in Literature](#).

Bergengruen started writing novels and short stories in 1923 and decided to become a full-time writer in 1927. The [Nazis'](#) rise to power led him to write more political works. His most successful novel, Der Großtyrann und das Gericht (The Grand Tyrant and the Judgment), published in 1935, was often seen as a clear allegory on Germany's political situation. In 1937 he was expelled from the [Reichsschrifttumskammer](#) for being unfit to contribute to German culture. Although Bergengruen was politically conservative, his Catholicism—as well as the fact that his wife was of partly Jewish heritage—contributed to his alienation from the Nazi regime.

Emil Erich Kästner, 1899 – 1974

He was a German writer, poet, screenwriter and [satirist](#), known primarily for his humorous, socially astute poems and for children's books including [Emil and the Detectives](#). He was nominated for the [Nobel Prize in Literature](#) in six separate years.

In the autumn of 1928, he published his best-known children's book, [Emil und die Detektive](#), illustrated by [Walter Trier](#). The book sold two million copies in Germany alone and has since been translated into 59 languages.

Kästner was a [pacifist](#) and wrote for children because of his belief in the regenerative powers of youth. He was opposed to the [Nazi](#) regime but did not go into exile. He wanted to be able to witness events.

The [Gestapo](#) interrogated Kästner several times, the national writers' guild expelled him, and the Nazis burned his books as "contrary to the German spirit" during the [book](#)

[burnings](#) of 10 May 1933, instigated by [Joseph Goebbels](#). Kästner witnessed the event in person and later wrote about it. He was denied membership of the new Nazi-controlled national writers' guild, *Reichsverband deutscher Schriftsteller* (RDS), because of what the "culturally [Bolshevist](#) attitude in his writings prior to 1933."

In 1944, Kästner's home in Berlin was destroyed during a bombing raid. In 1945, he fled from Berlin to avoid the Soviet assault on the city. He had also received a warning that the [SS](#) planned to kill him and other Nazi opponents before arrival of the Soviets.

Berthold Brecht, 1898 – 1956

He was a German [theatre practitioner](#), playwright, and poet. He had his first successes as a playwright in Munich and moved to Berlin in 1924, where he wrote [The Threepenny Opera](#) with [Kurt Weill](#) and began a life-long collaboration with the composer [Hanns Eisler](#). Influenced by [Marxist](#) thought during this period, he wrote didactic [Lehrstücke](#) and became a leading theoretician of [epic theatre](#).

During the [Nazi Germany](#) period, Brecht fled his home country, first to Scandinavia, and during [World War II](#) to the United States. He returned to [East Berlin](#) after the war, where he established the theatre company [Berliner Ensemble](#) with his wife, actress [Helene Weigel](#).

Gertrud Kolmar, 1894–1943

Gertrud Kolmar was a German-Jewish poet. She published three collections of poetry during her lifetime, primarily detailing the experiences of women as mothers, childless women, lovers, mourners, travelers, and the persecuted. In 1943, Kolmar was deported to Auschwitz and died there.

Kolmar's experiences of isolation and loneliness as a woman and Jew are expressed vividly in the poetry she wrote during the time of growing antisemitism.

Nelly Leonie Sachs, 1891–1970

Born in Berlin in 1891 he and her mother fled to Stockholm in 1940. Her writing in exile bear witness to the victims of the Holocaust. After her father's death in 1930, Sachs lived with her mother and became an active member of the Berlin Jüdischer Kulturbund (Jewish Cultural Society) where she gave poetry readings along with Gertrud Kolmar. As antisemitism was

growing, she was interrogated by the Gestapo and her apartment was ransacked. In Sachs's poem *Als der große Schrecken kam* (When the Great Terror Came), the narrator is silenced by horror like a fish, a "fish with its deathly side/turned upward" (O The Chimneys).

Sachs's 1947 poetry collection *In den Wohnungen des Todes* (In the Dwellings of Death) is made up of early testimonial poems that focus on the suffering of Jews.

Ricarda Huch, 1864 - 1947

She was a German intellectual, an historian, and the author of many works of European history, she also wrote [novels](#), [poems](#), and a play. She was nominated for the [Nobel Prize in Literature](#) seven times.

When the [Nazis](#) seized power in 1933, she resigned in protest from the Prussian Academy of Arts. Huch and other members of the academy had in March 1933 received a letter from the president of the Prussian Academy of Arts, [Max von Schillings](#), asking them to sign a declaration declaring their loyalty to the new government, Huch refused to sign. She continued her work as an historian during the second World War. The poetic anthology *Herbstfeuer*, published by the publishing house Insel, in 1944, in commemoration of the eightieth anniversary of its author, brings together 63 poems in which Ricarda Huch expresses the feeling of pain and destruction in the context of war and the Nazi yoke, but also seeks to find signs of hope in better days, this was his last lyrical work.

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