

NAZI RACIAL POLICY AND FOREIGN WORKERS: GESTAPO ACTIVITIES TOWARDS  
POLISH LABORERS IN THE RHINE-RUHR, 1939-1944

THESIS

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By

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The completion of master's thesis is a challenging yet rewarding experience. Although the road may be difficult and at times daunting, once completed, a great sense of pride and satisfaction is felt. After all, only a few people are given the opportunity to pursue an advance degree, much less complete such an endeavor. That said, a student must be well prepared both mentally and physically to take on such a challenge. In order to finish, one must have the drive to succeed when adversity presents itself, a positive attitude to shake off setbacks, and a clear plan of action that outline one's future goals and how one plans to achieve them. Although these are very important, one cannot leave out a key that without which, success would be extremely difficult. In order to finish an advanced degree and all the duties such a task requires, one must have a number of individuals to that he or she can call upon to provide guidance, advice, and a kind word of encouragement when needed. It has been my privilege to have a number of such individuals and friends without whose assistance this thesis would have never been completed.

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## INTRODUCTION

“The Gestapo in Cologne was exceptionally weak. The calm, elderly officers let things come to them and did not undertake any of their own initiatives.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Emanuel Schäfer, former commander of the Cologne Gestapo, spoke these words at his trial before a Cologne court on 6 July 1954 for his role in the deportation of the Cologne Jews to extermination camps in the east during the Holocaust. Many of the defendants in the war crime trials of the rank-and-file Gestapo officers and post commanders used the same argument to exonerate themselves. They claimed they were simple police officers following orders, and they had no idea of the mass murder and executions. Few historians have considered the validity of Dr. Schäfer’s statement. Most scholars focused their criticism on the “leading perpetrators” such as Adolf Hitler, Herman Goring, and Heinrich Himmler who deserved such “unending guilt that their deeds could not be punished by any earthly court.”<sup>2</sup> As historians began to address statements Dr. Schäfer and other defendants made, they started to question the role of the Gestapo and, in the process, they looked at the role the German people played in the Third Reich.

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Johnson, *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans* (New York: Perseus Books, 2000), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from the official verdict of the criminal case against Dr. Schafer on July 9, 1954. Schafer received a six-year prison sentence for accessory to murder and two counts of manslaughter. Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 6, nn 489.



This thesis looks at the role of the Gestapo in persecution of Polish labor within Germany during the Second World War. The evidence demonstrates that, although the Gestapo was small in size, it was quite adept at using all available resources, including civilian denunciations, to accomplish its objectives. In a larger context, denunciations represented only one resource the police used. Other sources such as the local police forces, employers dissatisfied with their Polish laborers, Party organizations, and other institutions participated in the search and discovery of political enemies in the Nazi state.

This thesis looks specifically at Gestapo activities in the Rhine-Ruhr area in Germany and more especially the Düsseldorf District of Prussia. Düsseldorf and its surrounding towns and cities composed the heartland of Germany. During Germany's industrial revolution, thousands of Poles emigrated to Germany and the Ruhr in search of work. During the Second World War, Germany imported thousands more Polish laborers to augment the wartime industries. Despite Hitler's intention to purify Germany by the elimination of non-Aryan peoples in the Reich, he soon found that foreign labor was essential to the war effort. The Gestapo was responsible for the enforcement of the numerous laws enacted to subjugate Poles and other racially inferior people brought into Germany.

The first chapter examines the historiography of the Gestapo from the end of the Second World War up through the present. The study of the Gestapo has gone through several key stages. Contemporary political climates, especially in post war Germany, directly affected the approach to research on the Gestapo as well as Nazi Germany. Recently, historians have taken a new approach that has only begun to reveal the true nature of the Gestapo within the Third Reich.

The second chapter of this thesis looks at the institutional development of the Gestapo within the Berlin Police force in Prussia under Hermann Goering and as a part of the Munich Metropolitan Police under Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich. Himmler succeeded in gaining complete control of the police apparatus of the entire Reich and creating an effective interdependent system. Control went beyond the Gestapo and extended into other police forces such as the criminal police, the local police, and the Gendarme or rural police. This section will also describe the local organization of the Gestapo as well as the officers that performed the majority of the Gestapo's duties. It is essential to understand the complicated administrative structure and the backgrounds of Gestapo agents before we look at their actions. Current historiography's attempt to "normalize" the Gestapo has led to a tragic underestimation of their ruthlessness. Moreover, it is important to note that the Gestapo was not the only police force the Nazis controlled. By the start of the war Himmler commanded all police forces. National Socialism influenced the *Gendarmen*, the *Schutzpolizei*, the *Kriminalpolizei*, or the border police.

Chapter three addresses the social history of the Rhine-Ruhr area before and during the Third Reich. It will focus on key social developments such as growth of industrialism, the Catholic Church, and the rise of political movements and their impact on the Rhineland. More specifically, it will address the growth of Polish labor in Germany and the reaction of Germans during the industrial revolution in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Rhine-Ruhr was not unlike many other regions of Germany. Although National Socialism was not immediately popular among the people, once Hitler gained control, all dissent either vanished or was targeted for

elimination. This region is especially important because of its large population of foreign workers. It provides an excellent example of the Gestapo and how they dealt with Polish laborers in Germany.

The last chapter looks specifically at evidence within Gestapo case files that demonstrates the role of the Gestapo. Statistical analysis coupled with an examination of several key cases will demonstrate the role of the Gestapo as well as other agencies that formed an integral part of the police state. The Gestapo played a fundamental part in cases that involved Polish workers. They regularly received memos from other Gestapo outposts, local police offices, large industrial firms, and the public that alerted the Gestapo to infractions Poles committed while employed in Germany. The Gestapo either chose to take an active role in the investigation, or they advised the local officials as to the appropriate action. In any case the Gestapo determined, for the most part, the course of action. They made the decision on punishment, and Gestapo approval was mandatory for a death sentence. Therefore, their role was essential in the process.

The most important part of my thesis focuses on a study of Gestapo case files from the Düsseldorf regional Gestapo office. Under the Third Reich, the Gestapo kept detailed records on almost all known political prisoners as well as those under investigation. The majority of these files were destroyed at the end of the war to hide evidence of their crimes. Despite their efforts, small groups of files survived. The greatest repositories of Gestapo files that survived came from the Würzburg office in Bavaria and the Rhine-Ruhr district in Prussia. These files currently reside in several locations. The majority of the original files are located at the Berlin Document Center in Germany. The United States Government made copies of these files. Their copies of the

surviving files are located in the National Archives in Washington DC. Recent files have also been uncovered within the Polish and Soviet archives since the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe. Material used for my analysis was drawn principally from the archives at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). The USHMM made copies of a large selection of Gestapo case files from the Düsseldorf Gestapo office. These records were copies of files located within the Main Commission archives in Germany. These documents provide an invaluable insight into the activities of the Gestapo. They detail the origins for the start of cases. They also illustrate what measures the Gestapo took, how deeply they were involved in the investigations, and provide examples of punishments the police used. The majority of my research has focused on the case files from the Gestapo office in Düsseldorf. However, I have included the findings of other scholars such as Reinhard Mann, Robert Gellately, and Eric Johnson for comparative purposes.

Recent emphasis on civilian denunciations has overemphasized the role they played in Gestapo investigations. Although these efforts helped demystify the secret police they have also managed to minimize the role of the Gestapo altogether. In its place, scholars have focused on the role of the average German in Nazi crimes. They argue the police merely carried out the wishes of the public. This approach fails to account for the Gestapo's true role in the horrific crimes and falls short of truly understanding how Nazi Germany functioned. Although it is indeed true that the public played a role in the crimes of the Third Reich, the Gestapo's part was essential to the regime and its efforts.

The Gestapo's role in the enforcement of National Socialist racial policy towards foreign labor in Germany during the war is an excellent example of the central role the secret police played. Foreign labor in Germany had a long history before the rise of National Socialism. Germans had similar attitudes toward Polish immigrants as they did with Jews. In times of economic turmoil, Poles were the focus of resentment because they appeared to take jobs away from unemployed Germans. Furthermore, Poles were considered racially and intellectually inferior, and many believed they carried the "social disease" of Marxist agitation. As a result, when the Nazis assumed power in Germany they already had the support of a significant number of the population in Germany who disliked foreigners, especially Poles. The Nazis were able to capitalize on the experience of previous German administrations in their treatment of the Poles as well as the support of the population for almost any measure to control Poles working in Germany. The Nazis were able to manipulate racial tensions within Germany to subjugate foreign workers. At the same time, the Gestapo played a central and pivotal role in carrying out these plans. They used many methods, including information from the public, to control and monitor Polish workers.

Without question denunciation played a key role in the detection of crimes committed among the Polish labor force in Germany. For example, Gellately's research demonstrated the value of civilian denunciations to the Gestapo in order to discover forbidden contact between Poles and Germans. However, German racial policy went beyond forbidden contact. Because the Nazis considered Poles racially inferior, nearly every crime the Poles committed should be considered racial in nature. For example, a German, unlike a Polish laborer, would have never been arrested for the use of public

transportation. As a result, Gellately failed to look at the full range of crimes and the number of civilian denunciations. When one looks at all Polish racial crimes the number of denunciations drops. In their place, the Gestapo relied on a wide range of sources for their information. Although the role of the public was important, the Gestapo was the essential element of Nazi control. The Gestapo, although not entirely active in the pursuit of criminal as earlier believed, functioned as a center point where information was received, analyzed, and acted upon.

## CHAPTER 1

### HISTORIOGRAPHY

**Map 1.** Nazi Germany, 1938.



Source: George Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers: The Gestapo and SS Security Service in the Nazi Revolution* (New York: Oxford University press, 1996), 1.

Analysis of the Gestapo has progressed through several key stages that have shaped how we view the secret police in Nazi Germany and the study of the Third Reich in general. From the start, much of the Gestapo was a mystery. Historians took much of the propaganda the Nazi regime on the Third Reich as fact thus creating an image that bordered almost on the mythological. As time progressed and new sources of information became available, scholars reassessed this interpretation and came to a

wholly different and revolutionary conclusion. This chapter analyzes the historiography of the Gestapo, the key stages of historical scholarship, and key works that determined its course.

After the end of the Second World War, historians argued the Gestapo was a large and highly ideologically motivated force committed to the service of Hitler and the Nazi regime. This early period of scholarship was heavily influenced by the apparent need to explain the horrific crimes committed by the German government during the war. Historians, especially German scholars returning from exile, found it necessary to defend the German people in the face of the horrible crimes committed by the Third Reich.<sup>1</sup> To these writers, the Third Reich was a European, not just a German, phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> It was in no way connected with the rich and progressive history of Germany. They went further to explain that the German people were, for the most part, either duped or forced into submission by the Nazi leadership. It was Hitler and his henchmen such as Himmler, Goering, and Bormann that murdered millions of people. These were, above all, evil men who conspired to destroy civilization. To accomplish their aims, these mass murderers created a large police state, with the Gestapo as its cornerstone, to eliminate resistance and seek out opposition. In other words the German people were not to blame for the crimes of the Second World War, and were powerless to resist the regime's agenda.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars outside Germany had, for the most part, a far different picture of Germany. To authors William Shirer and Rohan O'Butler, Nazi Germany was a result of

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the German scholars in post war Germany were discredited because they either supported the Nazi regime or failed to act in opposition. Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Edward Arnold, 1993), 6.

<sup>2</sup> See Friedrich Meineke, *The German Catastrophe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Gerhard Ritter, *Das deutsche Problem Grundfragen deutschen Staatslebens gestern und heute* (Munich, 1962), 128.



centuries of historical development. Germany's authoritative nature and lack of freedom and democracy made the Third Reich possible. To them, German society was responsible for the atrocities and not just the Nazi leadership.<sup>4</sup> Hitler was not a mere phenomenon. He was the result of a bankrupt civilization that emphasized authoritarianism and racism over democracy and tolerance.

These different perspectives of both German and non-German scholars are clearly reflected in the early histories of the Gestapo. In an analysis of political police forces Ernest Bramstedt described how the Gestapo was able to intimidate a population into compliance. Bramstedt addressed the techniques the Gestapo used to implement fear and its impact on the people. He described methods the Gestapo used to gather information, detain suspects, intimidate, and if necessary eliminate opponents of the regime. He emphasized the fundamental role of propaganda in the process. To Bramstedt, misinformation, both intentional and accidental, fueled the fear of the police. Furthermore, the terror the police created was a form of propaganda in and of itself. He concluded that the use of terror coupled with its advertisement had a significant impact on the people. The power and ruthlessness of the Gestapo reached mythical proportions. Far from refuting it, the Gestapo authorities encouraged it. They perpetrated the idea of the mysterious secret police, and they deliberately left the people in the dark about their activities.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 97; To Shirer Hitler's ideas originated from centuries of German thought from Hegel, Nietzsche, and Hegel. To him, they "succeeded in establishing a breach with the West..." Shirer was a foreign correspondent in Berlin for the Chicago Tribune before the United States entry into the war in 1941. He has written several accounts of his time in Germany during the Third Reich such as *Berlin Diary; The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent, 1934-1941* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1941). See also Rohan O'Butler, *The Roots of National Socialism* (London: H. Fertig, 1942).

Bramstedt's work, in both content and structure, resembled the post war German interpretation of both the Third Reich and the Gestapo. To begin with, Bramstedt's analysis of the Gestapo was only two chapters of a book that analyzed several other modern political police forces such as the Soviet police under Lenin and Stalin, along with the police in fascist Italy. He demonstrated key similarities of political police forces under all authoritarian regimes, and how they stifled any dissent and destroyed opposition through fear and intimidation. His work treated the danger of political police forces, not as a problem unique to Nazi Germany, but as a European phenomenon.

The English writer Edward Crankshaw's take on the Gestapo, like many scholars outside of Germany after the war, differed markedly from Bramstedt's assessment. *Gestapo: Instrument of Tyranny* was important because it illustrated how many scholars outside Germany after the war explained the causes behind the atrocities committed by the Nazis.<sup>6</sup> Crankshaw focused the majority of his work on an analysis of the Gestapo leadership and the role the Gestapo played in the pivotal moments of the history of the Third Reich. To him, the Gestapo leadership was composed of social deviants, criminals, and sociopaths. In page after page, Crankshaw described how these criminals vied for power and murdered millions in the process. In the final chapter though he came to the

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<sup>5</sup>E.K. Bramstadt. *Dictatorship and Political Police the Technique of Control by Fear* (London. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, & Company, 1945), 177.

<sup>6</sup> French historian Jacques Delarue, in his work *The Gestapo A History of Horror* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1964), presented a similar historiographical approach as Crankshaw. Delarue focused much of his research on Gestapo activities in France.

crux of his argument. In one paragraph he offered the true reason for the atrocities:

The German system of education, with its exaltation of unquestioning obedience to authority and the consequent encouragement of bullying on the one hand and irresponsibility on the other, must contribute to the sort of behavior contemplated in these pages. It has taken the German themselves to develop this system. Have they abolished it?<sup>7</sup>

Crankshaw's analysis, similar to other historians who argued that a specific path of modernization in Germany led to the development of National Socialism, indicated that Germans and German culture helped contribute to the Nazi atrocities.<sup>8</sup>

To Crankshaw, Himmler, Heydrich, and Kaltenbrunner were products of a bankrupt and deeply flawed civilization. Although he chose to focus specifically on their crimes, he was careful to assert that thousands more Germans from all classes of society contributed to the atrocities.<sup>9</sup>

Both Bramstedt and Crankshaw suffered from a lack of primary sources from which to base their findings. The only material available at the time consisted of personal accounts, victim's testimonies, and transcripts from the Nuremberg trials. Thus, the limitations of the sources shaped their conclusions. Bramstedt's findings, driven largely by former Gestapo patriots such as Dr. Werner Best and Rudolf Diels, focused almost exclusively on the intentions of the Gestapo and not the actual methods the secret police

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<sup>7</sup> Edward Crankshaw, *Gestapo Instrument of Tyranny* (New York: Viking Press, 1957), 243. Crankshaw served on the British Military staff in Moscow during World War Two. After the war, he became both a journalist and writer of history specializing primarily in modern Russian history. Among his noted publication include *Russia and the Russians* (New York: Viking Press, 1948), *Russia Without Stalin* (New York: Viking Press, 1956), and *The Fall of the House of Habsburg* (New York: Viking Press, 1963).

<sup>8</sup> Also known as the German *Sonderweg*, key historians such as Hans-Ulrich Wehler and William Shirer argued that pre-modern characteristics continued to exist in Germany long after they disappeared in other European cultures. As a result, these forces mixed with and conflicted with the growing modern capitalist tendencies within Germany. To them, the conflict within German society between pre-modern and modern elements directly contributed to the growth of National Socialism.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

used.<sup>10</sup> Crankshaw's work relied heavily upon Nuremberg transcripts, which detailed the crimes committed along with directives by the Nazi hierarchy.<sup>11</sup> However, these papers dealt little with exactly how the directives were carried out and much less on the routine day-to-day operations of the Gestapo. As a result, both of their works created a picture open to mystery and suspicion as to exactly how the Gestapo operated.

To Bramstedt, Delarue, and others the Gestapo was larger than life. The police knew everything that occurred and all that would happen. From this perspective, the people were powerless to resist. This interpretation of the Nazi terror persisted for almost twenty years after the end of the war until a new generation of German scholars, freed from some of the post war controversy, began to critically analyze German society under the Third Reich. In the 1960s, such a group of historians started to direct the focus away from the Nazi leadership and towards German society. These German scholars borrowed methods from the French *Annales* school along with American political and social science methods to reexamine their approach to the study of history. Instead of the traditional emphasis on political history, new scholars such as Hans-Ulrich Wehler, David Schoenbaum, and Martin Broszat sought a wider context in which to explain historical events such as the Third Reich.<sup>12</sup> Later known as *Alltagsgeschichte*, German

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<sup>10</sup> Dr. Werner Best *Die deutsche Polizei* (Darmstadt, 1941); Rudolf Diels, *Lucifer ante portas* (Stuttgart, 1950).

<sup>11</sup> In the third appendix Crankshaw confined his research "with some rigidity to the testimony of Germans and of witnesses at the Nuremberg trials." The two major sources he used were *The Trials of the German war criminals before the International Military Tribunal. Vols. I-XXIII, Proceedings Vols. XXIV-XLII, Documents in Evidence (Nuremberg, 1947-1949)* and *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals. Vols. I-XV* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1951-52).

<sup>12</sup> Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Edward Arnold, 1993), 7. Kershaw, himself a noted historian on the Third Reich, was a member of this new group of historians. Among his many publications included important works such as *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich, Bavaria 1933-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), *The Hitler Myth Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987)

historians started to study every day life under Nazi Germany juxtaposed to analysis of the Nazi leadership. To them, there was something far more deep and troubling than a few psychopaths that made the crimes of the Third Reich possible.

A key figure among these new scholars, Broszat, along with others, looked closely at long term social trends such as rapid modernization, liberalism, and their interaction with an authoritarian culture and how Germany and its people dealt with such a rapidly changing society.<sup>13</sup> In addition, instead of analysis of leading political figures, they sought to explore the structures of society and government to gain a better appreciation of exactly how society under the Third Reich functioned. Known principally as structuralists, historians such as Hans Mommsen, Edward Peterson, and Tim Mason explored the history of the Third Reich from a perspective that de-emphasized the role of Hitler and looked more closely at other factors within German government and society that contributed to the Third Reich.<sup>14</sup>

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and the biography entitled *Hitler* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999). In addition to these books, Kershaw has written a number of articles and book reviews on Nazi Germany.

<sup>13</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler is not considered a Nazi historian although his work on Imperial Germany in works such as *The German Empire, 1871-1918* (Leamington Spa, 1984) illustrated the emphasis of continuity and long term socio-economic trends that shaped Germany. Schoenbaum's work, *Hitler's Social Revolution Class and Status in Nazi Germany, 1933-1945* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1966), offered one of the first comprehensive social histories of the Third Reich. Sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf in *Society and Democracy in Germany* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1967) described the weakness of democracy in Germany contributed to many of the problems experienced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps the most famous social historian of this period of was Martin Broszat. In his monumental work, *Bayern in der NS Zeit*. 6 volumes (Munich, 1977-1983), Broszat along with other well-known scholars such as Ian Kershaw delved into the long-term socio-economic elements of Bavaria under the Third Reich.

<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the most widely read of the structuralist historians from this period was Martin Broszat. In his book, *The Hitler State* (London: Longman, 1981), Broszat concluded that Hitler was a comparatively weak leader. Instead, an internal power structure with a continued path toward radicalization accounted for much of the violence and war of the Third Reich. See also Hans Mommsen *Beamtenum im Dritten Reich* (Stuttgart, 1966) and Edward Peterson in *The Limits of Hitler's Power* (Princeton, 1969); and Tim Mason, "Intention and Explanation: A current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism," in *Der Führerstaat. Mythos und Realität*, Gerhard Herschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker, eds. (Stuttgart, 1981). Broszat and other structuralists challenged the functionalists, led by such figures as Karl Dietrich Bracher,

The emphasis on structural analysis in history over individuals also affected scholarship on the Gestapo. In the place of monographs that focused on leading figures within the political police such as Himmler and Heydrich, a few works such as Shlomo Aronson's *The Beginnings of the Gestapo System: The Bavarian Model in 1933* focused on the organization and makeup of the early stages of the Gestapo. Hans Bucheim's work in *Anatomy of the SS State* gave an even more detailed and fine tuned description of the administrative structure of the Gestapo.<sup>15</sup> They differed widely from the earlier works by authors such as Crankshaw and Bramstedt because they started a shift away from a description of the Gestapo's crimes towards an analysis of how it functioned. Despite the efforts of Aronson and Bucheim, Nazi historians continued to view the Gestapo in much the same way as earlier historians such as Bramstedt and Crankshaw. They saw the Gestapo as a large, nefarious organization with ideologically motivated officers. Although much of the structure was laid out for the reader, neither Aronson Bucheim, nor anyone else made little if any attempt to analyze the day-to-day activities of the Gestapo. Furthermore, no one attempted to investigate the Gestapo agents themselves or who actually served within the secret police. Despite this oversight, Bucheim, Aronson, and others managed to move historiographical analysis away from traditional political analysis. In the process, they made it possible for future analysis to delve even more deeply into German society under the Third Reich.

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Klaus Hildebrand, and Andreas Hillgruber. These scholars argue that Hitler had a program, which he followed from his early actions in the 1920s up to his demise in 1945. He was the key figure in the regime and directed all plans carried out by the Nazi regime.

<sup>15</sup> Shlomo Aronson. *The Beginnings of the Gestapo System: The Bavarian Model in 1933* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1969); Hans Bucheim, "The SS Instrument of Domination," in *Anatomy Of the SS State*, Helmut Krausnick, Hans Bucheim, Martin Broszat, and Hans-Adolf Jacobson. eds. (New York: Walker and Co., 1968).

Such endeavors began to surface in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s as historians such as Broszat, Detlev Peukert, and others focused more and more on society in general and less on the Nazi government. In this phase, the leading Nazis took a back seat to social history. Research on Germans and how they reacted to National Socialism on a daily basis took the place of analysis of the Nazi leadership.<sup>16</sup> As a result, scholarship on resistance movements increased dramatically. What historians found was astonishing. Broszat and others found that many Germans expressed frustration over Nazi policies in a variety of ways other than traditional direct or active opposition. Meanwhile, as analysis of opposition to the Nazi regime increased, few historians devoted time to any new or groundbreaking monographs on the Gestapo.<sup>17</sup>

New data from archives in both the United States and Germany helped drive a new wave of historical scholarship. This new material, found largely in files previously believed destroyed at the end of the war by the Nazis or allied bombers, shed vital new light into the daily activities of the Gestapo previously unexplored by historians. This access to new primary source material helped to facilitate a new research into the

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<sup>16</sup> A great deal of research during this phase dealt with German resistance to Hitler. For example, Peter Hoffman's book *The German Resistance to Hitler, 1933-1945*, trans. Richard Barry (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977) examined the opposition's struggle against Hitler culminating in the assassination attempt on 20 July 1944. Other works branched out from the elite to look at more widespread forms of active resistance (*Widerstand*) or passive opposition later called *Resistenz*. As the 1960's historiography stripped away the monolithic picture of Nazi Germany, new historians started to examine the "resistance of the people" or *Resistenz*. Works such as Martin Broszat's "Resistenz und Widerstand: Eine Zwischenbilanz des Forschungsprojektes," in *Bayern in der NS Zeit*, vol. 4, Martin Broszat, ed. (Munich, 1977-83) explored the more subtle forms of opposition such as listening to foreign radio broadcasts or telling jokes about Hitler. See also Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria, 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

<sup>17</sup> Few publications during this time were devoted specifically to the Gestapo those that did originate were administrative histories that added little to the historiographical debate. Detlev Peukert's analysis of the KPD in Germany in *Die KPD In Widerstand Verfolgung und Untergrundarbeit in Rhein und Ruhr 1933-1945* (Wuppertal, 1980) dealt primarily with the KPD's failed attempts to oppose Hitler. Peukert's book like many others during this period chose to focus more on resistance groups rather than the methods the Gestapo used to stop them.

Gestapo. As a result, it would change the very basic assumptions historians held about the Gestapo and inevitably German society under the Third Reich in general.

The newly rediscovered records shed valuable new light on the daily activities of the secret police and the methods they used to enforce Nazi racial policy. These findings directly challenged the traditional interpretation of the omnipotent Gestapo. Based on these documents, historians such as Reinhard Mann and Robert Gellately to conclude the Nazis relied upon the public, primarily in the form of civilian denunciations, for the successful operation of local government under the Third Reich. The emphasis on denunciations renewed the debate over average German cooperation in the crimes of the Third Reich.

Reinhard Mann was among the first scholars to look closely at the day-to-day activities of the Gestapo.<sup>18</sup> His work rested on a detailed investigation into Gestapo case files from the city of Düsseldorf. The Düsseldorf Gestapo office kept a file system that contained information on each individual they investigated. Mann examined the files that dealt only with German citizens. He wanted to find out exactly how the Gestapo started their investigations. Through a statistical analysis of over 70,000 Gestapo case files from Düsseldorf, he found that the majority of cases started from information the public provided. Mann found that Germans, for a variety of reasons, informed on their neighbors. He discovered the Gestapo initiated very few if any cases themselves.<sup>19</sup> Based upon

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<sup>18</sup> Although he did necessarily look at the day-to-day activities of the Gestapo, historian Walter Otto Weyrauch did investigate the paid informers of the Gestapo. In his work entitled, *Gestapo V-Leute: Tatsachen und Theorie des Geheimdienstes* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 1989) Weyrauch studied the records of over 1,200 paid Gestapo agents (V-Men). Although he offered no new groundbreaking thesis, he was one of the first to explore documents on the Gestapo previously unavailable.

<sup>19</sup> Reinhard Mann, *Protest und Kontrolle im Dritten Reich: Nationalsozialistische Herrschaft im Alltag einer rheinischen Großstadt* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1987), 292. Mann died before he could complete his work. His work was published posthumously as a collection of his many findings.



these discoveries, Mann concluded the Gestapo relied heavily upon the public to conduct their activities.

Mann, however, did not cover all Gestapo activities in Düsseldorf. He left out several important categories of files. In the original organization of the records in Düsseldorf, the Gestapo divided the files into 52 separate and distinct categories based on the specific crime investigated. He excluded eleven of the 52 categories of files that included material that concerned Jews, racially foreign minorities, foreign workers, economic sabotage, and several other categories that did not concern Germans directly. As a result, he left out files that dealt with individuals that Gestapo activities affected the most.<sup>20</sup>

Mann's research challenged the mythical power of the Gestapo. He suggested the Gestapo was not very aggressive in its pursuit of political criminals in the Reich. He also implied Germans played a larger role in the Nazi terror than previously claimed.<sup>21</sup> His emphasis on the role of denunciations in Gestapo activities helped set the parameters for further analysis on the Gestapo. This research followed Mann's lead and looked toward the significance of civilian denunciations in other areas of investigations undertaken by the Gestapo. In addition, given their reliance upon outside information over their own investigative activity, scholars started to question the methods the Gestapo used. This directly impacted analysis of German society in the Third Reich.

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<sup>20</sup> Mann, *Protest und Kontrolle im Dritten Reich*, 252. Mann offered no real explanation for leaving out these categories other than the fact that these files did not address Germans but foreign workers and were therefore not germane to his study. See Gellately, "Situating the 'SS-State' in a Social-Historical Context: Recent Histories of the SS, the Police, and the Courts in the Third Reich," in *Journal of Modern History* 64 (June 1992), 352; see also *The Gestapo and German Society Enforcing Racial Policy 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 133.

<sup>21</sup> Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 136. Though Gellately criticized the methodology of Mann's work, In *The Gestapo and German Society* he based a great deal of his work on Mann's conclusions.

Shortly after Mann, Robert Gellately, in his 1990 book *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy*, addressed two issues that Mann raised; public cooperation in Gestapo investigations, and the day-to day activities of the Gestapo. Gellately initially wanted to look at material that described the responses of average Germans to Nazi policies. When he examined the remains of Gestapo case files, he realized he could only truly appreciate the files' value if he expanded his research to include the social, organizational, and personnel issues of the Gestapo. His research evolved from an analysis of people's responses to anti-Semitism into an investigation of Nazi racial policy and, most importantly, how it was enforced. He sought to understand how, despite its small numbers, the Gestapo would maintain its reputation of efficiency.<sup>22</sup>

Gellately's research, like Mann's, concluded that the Nazi leadership depended upon collaboration, or at least the co-operation of ordinary citizens, in order to successfully implement their policies. The small number of Gestapo agents could not possibly have enforced the government's directives without some form of assistance from the population. He further claimed the majority's passivity, conformity, or even enthusiastic support was necessary to accomplish the leadership's agenda.<sup>23</sup>

Gellately combined both administrative and social history to analyze the everyday interaction between the Gestapo, society, and the racial policies of Nazi Germany. He studied the local organization of the Gestapo, the men who served in it, and the methods they used to accomplish their tasks.<sup>24</sup> The bulk of Gellately's work rested on his use of Gestapo case-files from Bavaria and the city of Würzburg. He also drew material from

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<sup>22</sup> Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, vi.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

records of the SOPADE reports, the underground records of the illegal SPD (Sozialistische Partei Deutschland), and material from the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg.<sup>25</sup> Gellately went further than Mann's study. He focused on files that dealt exclusively with non-Germans. He argued that the files that dealt with the racial enemies of the Reich demonstrated the true nature of the police. In fact, he argued that had Mann included the files that dealt with racial minorities, the number of civilian denunciations Mann found would have increased.<sup>26</sup>

Gellately organized his work into three sections. The first part covered the developmental history of the Gestapo and its organization at the local level. He found that most Gestapo men were not fanatical Nazis but professional bureaucrats.<sup>27</sup> The second part surveyed German society in Würzburg and Lower Franconia. In this section, he addressed the level of anti-Semitism before and after 1933. The last portion concerned the enforcement of racial policy in the National Socialist state. This part, the bulk of the essay, dealt with methods the Gestapo used to obtain its information. Here, Gellately addressed the large numbers of civilian denunciations, initiated for a wide variety of reasons, by individuals that lead to Gestapo investigations. He claimed the frequency of denunciations was proof of the public's key involvement in Gestapo

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<sup>25</sup> Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Gellately, "Situating the 'SS-State' in a Social-Historical Context," 352.

<sup>27</sup> Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 43.

investigations.<sup>28</sup> Without the denunciations, the Gestapo would have found it extremely difficult to enforce the government's policies.

Gellately was careful to state that denunciations did not necessarily translate into approval of Nazi policy by the public. Through his study, he concluded a variety of reasons such as marital problems, greed, jealousy, and others led to many denunciations. Denunciations did not necessarily indicate high levels of support of Nazi anti-Semitic policies. Although they were key to the Gestapo's investigations, they were initiated mostly for reasons other than ideology.<sup>29</sup>

Gellately's work reinforced Mann's research and was fundamental in the study of the Gestapo and the social history of Nazi Germany. According to him, the Gestapo's could not have functioned properly without the help of the German people. The Gestapo was no longer the elite, highly trained, political police previously portrayed by scholars such as Bramstedt. Its size was small, and they needed the help of the citizenry to pursue the regime's agenda. Furthermore, Gestapo agents were not necessarily ideological followers of Hitler as characterized by historians such as Crankshaw and Delarue. In fact, most of them were normal police officers that remained at their post after the fall of Imperial Germany and the Weimar government.<sup>30</sup>

The emphasis upon civilian denunciations and public complicity in Nazis crimes coupled with the "normalization" of the Gestapo continued as an important theme in

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<sup>28</sup> According to Mann's research, from which Gellately drew heavily, 29% of Gestapo case files were initiated when citizens or businesses voluntarily informed the police. Furthermore, Mann stated 13% of the files gave no reason why an investigation was initiated. Gellately assumed many of these were also started by civilian denunciations. See Gellately, "Situating the 'SS-State' in a Social-Historical Context: Recent Histories of the SS, the Police, and the Courts in the Third Reich," 134.

<sup>29</sup> Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 158.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

future works. For example, George Browder conducted an in depth analysis of the Gestapo in his 1996 book *Hitler's Enforcers: The Gestapo and the SS Security Service in the Nazi Revolution*. Browder looked at the men who served in the Gestapo to gain an accurate picture of how the police interacted with society during the Nazi era.

Browder concluded that Gestapo officers, for the most part, were normal average men. There were no convicted criminals in the police, and most were career policemen who had previously served in the Weimar police force. Demographically, they exhibited the same social characteristics that the majority of young males in Germany possessed in the early 1930s. However, what separated them from the average German male was their profession. As police officers in Nazi Germany they served in an occupation that legitimized participation in mass murder.<sup>31</sup> They, according to Browder, convinced themselves that the torture and executions were justified in service of a higher cause that was not subject to any law or value system. These “normal” policemen maintained they were merely conducting routine police work and shifted all blame on to the shoulders of SS men who served along side them.

Browder's book, in addition to Gellately's, revolutionized the image of the Gestapo. The agents were no longer “mysterious men in the black leather trench coats.” In fact, Browder argued they were not far removed from the average person. According to scholars such as Gellately and Browder, these former Weimar police officers were more concerned with promotion in rank than ideological anti-Semitism. Furthermore,

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<sup>31</sup> George Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers: The Gestapo and the SS Security Service in the Nazi Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 168. Browder has devoted a considerable amount of his scholarship to the study of the German police. *Hitler's Enforcers* was actually the second part of a two-work study of the Police in the Third Reich. The first volume, *The Foundation of the Nazi Police State: The Formation of Sipo and the SD* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), was primarily a structural analysis of the early period of the Gestapo.

their part in the Holocaust was no greater than the German citizens who informed on their neighbors for any number of reasons.<sup>32</sup> In essence, the Gestapo agent was a normal man that succumbed to the endemic violence of the period.

Efforts from Browder and Gellately along with others to explore the Gestapo agents, as well as the complicity of the public in their crimes marked a trend that only increased in the 1990s. In 1996, this growing trend helped spark a new controversy that would eventually alter the historiographical debate on the Gestapo. The crux of the controversy centered on Daniel Goldhagen. Goldhagen, in his book *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, indicted the entire German people in the crimes committed under the Third Reich. To him, there was no distinction between Nazis and average Germans. They all hated Jews and eagerly sought their destruction.<sup>33</sup> His thesis illustrated a growing trend to indict Germans as a whole for the crimes committed during the Third Reich. The Gestapo's part in the Holocaust, according to Goldhagen and others, was merely a supportive role. The Gestapo, a small force of essentially ordinary men, relied upon the German citizenry to provide them with the majority of information for their cases. Furthermore, the average German played a much larger role in the Holocaust and other crimes of the Third Reich. Few citizens openly defied the will of the Nazis, and most went along or openly participated in the

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<sup>32</sup> Gellately asserted the majority of informants denounced their victims out of selfish concerns and not anti-Semitism or any other ideological concern. For example, a number of people denounced their spouse for fictitious crimes because they believed they were having an affair.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 14; Christopher Browning, in his 1992 book *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), based his thesis on similar sources although he came to a far different conclusion than Goldhagen. Browning did not agree that anti-Semitism was the single motivating factor in the Holocaust. Instead he maintained average Germans, for a variety of reasons, participated in many of the crimes committed during the Third Reich.

crimes of the Third Reich.<sup>34</sup>

Although Goldhagen's thesis and methodology were deeply flawed his work did raise a fundamental problem with interpretation.<sup>35</sup> Goldhagen's work represented the culmination of a historiographical trend that focused more and more on the role average Germans played in the Holocaust and, at the same time, de-emphasized the part the Gestapo served. He pursued the same strategy of Gellately's work though Goldhagen's conclusions were much more controversial. Both Goldhagen and Gellately argued the Gestapo were mere bureaucrats that simply carried out the will of the German people. They both argued Gestapo agents were no different from normal Germans.

In 2001 Gellately finished *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany*. In this work he agreed with an essential component of Goldhagen's argument. Although he strongly disagreed with Goldhagen's monocausal thesis, he claimed, like Goldhagen that average Germans played a crucial role in the Holocaust. In *Backing Hitler* Gellately expounded on his earlier work on Gestapo case files. In one section, Gellately looked at cases that involved forbidden contact between Polish workers and Germans in a variety of regions within Germany. He continued to argue that denunciations played a large role in the initiation of cases against Poles in this type of crime.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Both Robert Gellately and George Browder de-emphasize the role of the Gestapo and emphasize the role the German people played in the Holocaust.

<sup>35</sup> For an in-depth criticism of Goldhagen's thesis see Robert Shandley ed., *Unwilling Germans? The Goldhagen Debate* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) and Geoff Eley ed., *The Goldhagen Effect: History, Memory, Nazism, Facing the German Past* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 161.

Recently, some scholars have questioned Gellately's thesis. Historian Eric Johnson challenged the work of both Goldhagen and Gellately in his 2000 book *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans*. Although he largely agreed with the essential component the public in Germany played in the crimes of the Nazi regime, he asserted that it deflected emphasis away from the Nazis and underestimated the true power of the Gestapo. He argued:

This shift in focus has also begun to underestimate the ruthless effectiveness of the Gestapo; indeed, the newest perspective is nearly at the point of excusing Gestapo officers for their overwhelming culpability. Finally the newest perspective...undervalues the resistance activity that did take place...many people-among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, clergymen, and others-acted consciously and bravely at various times during the Third Reich to try to undermine the Nazi regime.<sup>37</sup>

Johnson claimed the terror the Gestapo carried out functioned effectively because of its highly selective nature. The Gestapo, he maintained, did not actively target Germans for criminal political activity. As a result, they relied upon the citizenry to inform them of dissidents among their fellow Germans. However, the Gestapo actively pursued Jews and other targeted political enemies. Therefore, they relied less upon denunciations and more upon other methods at their disposal in the pursuit of their cases.<sup>38</sup>

Like Gellately, Johnson examined records that remained mostly within Gestapo case files. He looked at files from a variety of cities with varying levels of population and from a variety of regions within the Reich. He also surveyed criminal court

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<sup>37</sup> Eric Johnson, *Nazi Terror The Gestapo, Jews and Ordinary Germans* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 20. Johnson has written several books on crime in urban areas. Among his works include *Urbanization and Crime Germany, 1871-1914* (New York, 1995) and *The Civilization of Crime. Violence in Town and Country Since the Middle Ages* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1996).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.



proceedings to cross-reference material within the Gestapo's records.<sup>39</sup> Although he agreed with Gellately's basic assumption on the Germans' role, he was careful to note the difference in their arguments in the realm of documentary evidence and interpretation.

First and foremost, Johnson claimed that Gellately overestimated the significance of civilian denunciations in Gestapo activities. He argued that denunciations accounted for only a minority of cases.<sup>40</sup> For example, he mentioned that Gellately examined only one specific category of Jewish cases. Johnson, however, looked at the entire range of cases that involved Jews and discovered the number of civilian denunciations dropped considerably.<sup>41</sup> He also found the Gestapo relied heavily upon information collected through their own surveillance in cases against Communists, Socialists, and members of religious groups. He was also clear to state that though Jews suffered frequently because of civilian denunciations, most Jews were never denounced by German citizens, and most of their cases did not come to the Gestapo's attention through denunciations.<sup>42</sup> Johnson was careful to note this because he felt undue emphasis on denunciations led to an "underestimation and of the heinous and willful actions of the Gestapo and an overestimation of the criminal culpability of the civilian population."<sup>43</sup>

As with Johnson's work, this thesis seeks to readdress this argument concerning the role of the Gestapo. Looking at Gestapo case files from Düsseldorf, I will show that the Gestapo did not always rely on the assistance from the public. Looking at the all

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<sup>39</sup> Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 24.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

cases that involved Polish workers and not just those that involved forbidden contact, I found that civilian denunciations, though important, were not as significant to Gestapo activities as previously maintained. In many cases, the Gestapo either discovered illegal activity on their own or relied on other agencies, such as local police and businesses, for information on criminal activity. This strikes at the heart of the debate on the role of the Gestapo in Nazi Germany. Indeed, the Gestapo was not, as Bramstedt and Crankshaw maintained, a large political force that always aggressively pursued all criminal activity. At the same time, it was not, according to Gellately and Browder, a complacent force that relied heavily upon the public for information. In fact, the Gestapo was a highly efficient force that maximized the limited tools at their disposal to seek out and destroy enemies they considered most dangerous to the Reich. It was their selective nature, not necessarily public compliance, that facilitated their success and contributed to the mythical efficiency and ruthlessness commonly attributed to them.

## CHAPTER 2

### GERMAN POLICE HISTORY AND THE GESTAPO

The history of the German police dates back to the imperial era under the Hohenzollern imperial dynasty. Although they never achieved the power and efficiency the Gestapo was able to attain, the imperial police forces in Prussia and other German states in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries possessed key characteristics that the Gestapo would later take full advantage of under the Third Reich. The Imperial police, according to scholars such as Raymond Fosdick, possessed a significant degree of power and authority over the population unheard of in many other western states.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the strong level of authoritarianism within the German police before 1933 played a direct role in the development of the Gestapo in Nazi Germany.

This chapter traces the development of the German police before 1933 and through the early stages of the Third Reich. The first section looks at the development and characteristics of the police before the Third Reich. Before the Gestapo, the police in Germany possessed a significant amount of power and authority over the people. During the Weimar period, a significant element within the German police rejected the democratization efforts of the German Republicans and longed for a return of their power and authority. Although they may not have officially joined the Nazi party, many within

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Fosdick, *European Police Systems* (Montclair: Patterson Smith, 1969)

the police undoubtedly sympathized with the Nazi message of a return to authoritarian measures especially for the police.

The next section traces the creation of the Gestapo under the leadership of the SS commander Heinrich Himmler. Hitler restored the powers of the police that the Weimar government abolished. In addition, he gave the police unprecedented authority over the public. In order to accomplish this, Himmler separated the police from the traditional civil administration. It was from then on, the police was a tool of the party designed to serve one function, the elimination of all opposition to the Führer. To maximize their efforts Himmler and his associates recruited mostly bureaucrats and former police officers with the skills and expertise necessary to conduct operations against the enemies of the Party.

The last part of this chapter examines the Gestapo in detail. Emphasis is placed on the organization and the characteristics of those who served within the secret police. Gestapo agents, for the most part, resembled the average German. However, Gestapo officers were not normal, and their participation in the crimes of the Third Reich is what distinguished them from the average German.

### **The German Police Under the Hohenzollern Dynasty**

Beginning in the later eighteenth century and continuing into the nineteenth century, Prussia grew from a minor German principality into the preeminent state within the German empire. Under the Imperial government, Bismarck continued to use many of the same institutions, customs and traditions of the Prussian state. Because of this fact, it is important to detail the developments within the Prussian police and its impact on future

developments in police functions under the Imperial and later the National Socialist regimes.

The development of the Prussian police developed along lines similar to the French. Both were, for the most part, authoritarian regimes. The police were charged with the maintenance of order and crime prevention. In order to prevent crime and more importantly to secure order the Hohenzollern dynasty, like the Bourbons in France, established the right in the eighteenth century to impose their idea of order on the citizenry. This concept, notably exclusive rule from above, permitted such measures as the use of the military force to guarantee order.<sup>2</sup>

In France, the police began under Louis XIV. Louis appointed a royal official the title of *lieutenant général de police de la ville* (Lieutenant of Police) in 1667. The Lieutenant of Police's broad authority stretched from supervising markets, commerce and manufactures to regulating the food supply and repressing crime, prostitution, and vagrancy. In addition, he also acted as a judge, often mediating disputes between citizens as well as violations of his own edicts that governed day-to-day activities in the city.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the Lieutenant of Police's authority was significant and extended well beyond modern conceptions of police functions.

Noticing the impact on law and order, Frederick the Great sent a royal official to work with the Lieutenant of Police. After observing the French officials methods for one year, Frederick created a similar agency in Berlin with orders to "introduce gradually the

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<sup>2</sup> Alf Lüdtke, *Police and State in Prussia, 1815-1850*, trans. Pete Burgess (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) Other nation such as Great Britain and the United States, based, for the most part, on popular sovereignty, were reluctant and openly suspicious of any use of force, especially the use of the military, to ensure the peace. As a result, police forces developed later in the nineteenth centuries in both England and the United States and with far more restrictions.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Chapman, *Police State* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 15; see also Clive Emsley, *Policing and its Context, 1750-1870* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 9.

superior features of the French police, so far as they are appropriate to conditions here.”<sup>4</sup> What resulted was a police force that answered to the king and not to municipal authority. After a short interlude during the Napoleonic era, the crown regained sole control over the police in Berlin as well as the rest of Prussia. Under Imperial control, the police would take on an increasingly large role Prussia.<sup>5</sup>

To carryout duties for the crown the Berlin Police President relied upon approximately one hundred *Executivepolizei*. In addition, he also relied upon 100 *Gendarmen*, a primarily military force established in 1812 by the Prussian monarchy on the French model designed to act as a rural police force. Outside of Berlin in the provincial towns and burgs, Prussia relied on a mixture of *Gendarmen* and police sergeants or servants. The *Gendarmen* were often spread thin in the rural areas. To augment these groups, the Army played a heavy role in policing. When the authorities in Berlin or other towns were unable to handle public disorder the army was routinely called in to crush dissent.<sup>6</sup> This system lasted up until the revolution of 1848.

After the revolution of 1848, government ministers created a plan for a new police force in Berlin modeled after the London Police. The *Schutzmannschaft* (Royal Police) started initially as a civilian police force designed to allay the publics’ fear of the military. However, Police president Carl Ludwig von Hinckeldy wrested the control of the *Schutzmannschaft* away from municipal reformers and returned the police to its military roots. Hinckeldy, an old Prussian bureaucrat, argued the police was the state’s

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<sup>4</sup> Emsley, *Policing and its Context*, 99.

<sup>5</sup> Lüdtkke, *Police and State in Prussia*, 181; see also Chapman, *Police State*, 34

<sup>6</sup> Emsley, *Policing and its Context*, 100; see also Lüdtkke, *Police and State in Prussia*, 76-77; 166-179. Lüdtkke gives an impressive example of the use of the military to crush a domestic disturbance in the town of Krefeld in 1828. Initially a local police matter, the military was quickly called in. Once there, the local authorities requested they stay to insure no further disturbances occurred.

first line of defense. He exchanged the civilian-style clothes for military uniforms. In addition, he established ties with other police agencies in Prussia and throughout the German states, often exchanging key intelligence on key democrats and social radicals.<sup>7</sup> Under Hinckeldy the crown regained and increased their control over police activities in Prussia.

Hinckeldy's *Schutzmann*, along with most of the other police forces of the various German states strongly resembled the military. They recruited almost all of the rank-and-file patrolmen from the army. Like those who served in the military, patrolmen could advance only as far as the rank of *Oberwachtmeister* (First Sergeant). The officers were men who had either previously served in the army as officers or in the universities where they studied law.<sup>8</sup> The dress of the German policeman strongly resembled soldiers on the battlefield. They wore military uniforms, carried a sword or club, and lived usually in barracks. Although they served the public, the Prussian Police conducted their daily duties with a large measure of arbitrariness. One contemporary account described the activities of the police in Berlin:

Although the official orders make frequent reference to the necessity for courtesy and kindness in dealing with the public, the German police, particularly in the larger cities are at times unsympathetic, even harsh...A German Policeman on patrol is armed as if for war. At night a Berlin *Schutzmann* carries an automatic pistol strapped outside his coat while the Dresden Patrolmen carry swords, pistols, and brass knuckles. I have myself seen a poor wretch bleeding from saber cuts brought into a Berlin Police station for a misdemeanor.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Clive Emsley, *Policing and its Context, 1750-1870*, 102.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 183

<sup>9</sup> Fosdick, *European Police Systems*, 231.

The Prussian Police had a significant amount of authority over the average German citizen, and a suspect had little recourse if the police abused their power.

In addition to their intimidating appearance, the *Schutzmann* had a great deal of authority. To begin with, they had a significant amount of legislative authority. Many laws within the general sections of the *Reichsstrafgesetzbuch* (Imperial Penal Code) were deliberately vague and required elaboration and executive definition. The police therefore had the power to frame rules and ordinances (*Verordnung* and *Verfügung*) that regulated the conduct of citizens within the functions under their jurisdiction.<sup>10</sup>

Although many concerned with general orderliness and proper sanitation as in similar laws in England and France, many went much further punishing persons guilty of insulting the honor or dignity of a police officer.<sup>11</sup> They also held significant judicial powers as well. They could impose penalties for misdemeanors and other minor infractions as long as the penalty did not exceed imprisonment for more than fourteen days or a fine above sixty marks.<sup>12</sup>

The amount of power the German police held also translated over to the treatment of prisoners. Under German law, a suspect could not be held for more than twenty-four hours without being produced before the court. However, they often detained a suspect for longer on the grounds that he violated one or more various ordinances. They often continued to hold the suspect under this system until they gathered enough evidence to bring before a magistrate. Treatment of suspects in Imperial Germany also left much to be desired. They frequently resorted to high pressure interrogations commonly referred

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<sup>10</sup> Fosdick, *European Police Systems*, 24-25.

<sup>11</sup> Chapman, *Police State*, 47; see also Emsley, *Policing and its Context*, 102.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.



to as the “third degree” in order to obtain information. The government had almost complete faith in the actions of the police. To them, a policeman’s word was taken over that of an average citizen.<sup>13</sup>

Since their inception in the middle of the eighteenth century, the German police devoted part of their duties towards political policing. All of the larger municipal police forces including the *Schutzmannschaft* created special departments to deal with political matters. They were to observe any suspicious activities of suspected anarchists, trade unionists, and other political groups considered subversive. After 1848, political policing intensified in the Reich. In Bavaria Ludwig I ordered the Munich Police to monitor public opinion for signs of discontent. By 1849 the crown directed local authorities to fill out detailed questionnaires on public behavior.<sup>14</sup>

Under the Imperial regime, Bismarck sought to monitor subversive elements as well as groups within Germany that could pose a threat to the power of the monarchy. One of his first opponents was the Catholic Church. During the *Kulturkampf*, Bismarck directed the police to monitor religious services of the Catholic Church for possible infractions. Bismarck feared the church, especially its political voice represented by the Catholic Center Party (formed in 1870). The Center Party received significant amount of support from German Catholics in addition to Polish immigrants. He directed the various police forces to monitor the political activities of the Center Party as well as other groups

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<sup>13</sup> Emsley, *Policing and its Context*, 17, 34.

<sup>14</sup> The Berlin Police enlisted an untold number of voluntary informers as well as paid spies to infiltrate political groups and discover their intentions. Fosdick estimated Berlin used approximately 100 spies and informers. See Chapman, *Police State*, 35-36; also Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 24.

he considered a threat to the crown.<sup>15</sup>

Following Bismarck, the crown continued to use the police to monitor subversive groups. As industrialization expanded in Germany, Wilhelm II became increasingly concerned with the growth of Socialist and Marxist elements within the labor force. Between 1878 and 1890 the crown passed numerous laws that outlawed socialist political parties such as the SPD. In addition, the imperial government also directed the various political police units to watch foreigners and any individuals suspected of leftist beliefs.<sup>16</sup> Although the monarchy delegated police functions to the individual states, the crown, on occasion, exercised Imperial authority to prosecute “political criminality” in the name of preventing revolution. Wilhelm II was especially concerned with the popularity of the Social Democrats.<sup>17</sup>

When Germany declared war on Russia in 1914 the police, like most of Germany society, was firmly behind the government. By 1917 however Germany was on the brink of military defeat in France and revolution at home. The military had exhausted itself in a last effort to break through the allied lines. At home, public support for the war had evaporated. By November 1918 the war had decimated the ranks of the once formidable

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<sup>15</sup> Ronald Ross, “Enforcing Kulturkampf in the Bismarckian State and the Limit of Coercion in Imperial Germany,” in *The Journal of Modern History* 56 (September 1984): 468. The *Kulturkampf* was a struggle within Germany starting in 1871 and lasting until 1878. It was an effort by Bismarck and the imperial administration to gain a greater control of the Catholic Church in Germany. Bismarck’s efforts were largely unsuccessful because of the lack of an effective implementation of action other than legislation. Bismarck directed the police to monitor and when necessary make arrests. At the same time, Bismarck was careful to make sure the local authorities, including the police acted within the letter of the law and not exceed their mandate.

<sup>16</sup> Elaine Glovka Spencer. *Police and the Social Order in German Cities The Düsseldorf District, 1848-1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), 131. The government, in addition to concern over Marxism, was also concerned with the growth of Polish nationalism especially in the Ruhr.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

*Schutzmannschaft* and left mostly inexperienced, poorly trained, elderly officers to secure the peace at home. They, like many Germans, had become disillusioned with the Empire's wartime policies. When the nation took to the streets in revolt the once loyal *Schutzmannschaft* stood aside and refused to oppose the people as they marched in the streets of Berlin on 9 November 1918. The police, like so many other parts of the Government collapsed in the face of revolution.

### **The German Police in the Weimar Era**

One of the most effective arguments the Nazis used to gain support from the police centered on what they believed was the emasculation of police authority. They repeatedly decried the efforts made by the Weimar government to democratize the police and make them a servant of the people rather than a tool of the state. Many within the police, especially among the officer corps, found solace in Hitler's words. After years of what seemed like open warfare in the streets with Communists and right wing extremists, many in the police began to feel that the restrictions the government placed on their activities critically weakened their efforts. They sought a return of the powers they held under the imperial government that the republicans had taken away. The Nazis, keen to the complaints of the police were eager to state that, once they achieved power, they would do so. Given the importance many within the police held for the traditional powers they held under the monarchy it is important to explore how the police operated as well as their role in society under the imperial dynasty.

After the collapse of the imperial government the fate of the *Schutzmannschaft* and the rest of the German police were in limbo when the Worker's and Soldier's

Councils seized power. Made up principally of socialist and Marxist revolutionaries, the Councils assumed power and placed Emil Eichhorn, an emissary from the Independent Socialists (USPD), in command of the Berlin Police. Eichhorn quickly moved to eliminate the militarism of the *Schutzmannschaft*. He abolished military salutes, invited civilians to observe the police as “precinct assistants,” and created a new security guard, the *Sicherheitswehr*, to patrol the streets alongside the *Schutzmannschaft*.<sup>18</sup>

When the provisional government collapsed in a dispute between the moderate Majority Socialists and the radical USPD, Eichhorn was forced to resign. Shortly thereafter the USPD, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, and the Spartacists took to the streets. During the struggle between the Weimar coalition and the radicals the *Schutzmannschaft* refrained from committing to either side of the struggle. In an effort to defeat the radicals elements within the Weimar coalition, led by men such as Defense Minister Gustav Noske, called on groups of volunteers, mostly former frontline soldiers, called the *Freikorps*.<sup>19</sup> Primarily composed of nationalists and anti communist radicals, these groups ruthlessly suppressed the Spartacist threat and restore order in the streets of Berlin.<sup>20</sup>

Following the conclusion of hostilities the *Schutzmannschaft* was in a difficult position. During the critical moments of the civil war with the USPD and other radicals

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<sup>18</sup> His-Huey Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic* (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1970), 37.

<sup>19</sup> The *Freikorps* (Free Corps) were paramilitary groups formed after the end of the First World War in 1918 to combat the Communist uprising in German cities. These units were composed primarily of demobilized soldiers, nationalist fanatics, and unemployed youths. Overwhelmingly rightist in beliefs, their actions were supported, for the most part, by the Army command.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert Jacob, *German Administration Since Bismarck Central Authority Versus Local Autonomy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 87; See also Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic*, 41. During their activities the Freikorps achieved a great deal of notoriety from atrocities such as the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht on 15 January.

they failed to come to the aid of the provisional government. Furthermore, the success of the *Freikorps* and other paramilitary as well as some regular military formations threatened the future position of the police in the new state. To regain the favor of the government they quickly voiced their support for the new government. However, the damage had already been done. Elements within the new government, especially within the Ministry of Interior and the *Reichswehr*, argued the administration needed a stronger police force, military in nature, to combat armed insurrections in the future. They further argued the support of the *Schutzmannschaft* was suspect based on their inaction during the Spartacist uprising<sup>21</sup>

Recovered from near disaster, Weimar authorities, now controlled by the SPD, moved to resolve the police problem and create a new force loyal and capable of meeting future threats to the government. In the place of the *Schutzmannschaft* the Ministry of Interior and the *Reichswehr* proposed a new force, later called the *Sicherheitspolizei* to replace the *Schutzmannschaft*. Former military units, encompassed mostly of *Freikorps* volunteers, would form the bulk of the new police army.<sup>22</sup> The *Sicherheitspolizei* were heavily armed with submachine guns, armored cars, and some heavy weaponry capable of suppressing large-scale insurrections such as the Spartacist movement.<sup>23</sup>

Events soon tested the allegiance of the *Sicherheitspolizei* during the ill-fated Kapp Putsch of 1920. In March of that year Wolfgang Kapp, a leader of the strongly

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<sup>21</sup> Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic*, 42.

<sup>22</sup> Other major German cities such as Hamburg and Munich created similar forces that resembled armed military forces rather than police units. See Jacob, *German Administration Since Bismarck*, 88; also Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic*, 43.

<sup>23</sup> The Berlin *Sicherheitspolizei* encompassed nine divisions of 1,000 men each. It included heavily armed units with machine guns, mortar teams, and flamethrowers. Plans also called for an aerial detachment of ten planes. Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic*, 43.

nationalist Fatherland Party sought, with assistance from elements of the military and the *Sicherheitspolizei*, to replace the government with a national dictatorship. When the *Sicherheitspolizei* failed to come to the government's aid, the legal government withdrew from Berlin and called for a general strike.<sup>24</sup> Although the Kapp forces included elements within the police and some military units from the *Reichswehr*, they were unable to withstand the strike, which paralyzed public utilities and transportation. Several days later Kapp resigned and fled to Sweden.<sup>25</sup>

Its failure to support the legitimate government during the Putsch, along with the Allied Powers' insistence on its disbandment, doomed the *Sicherheitspolizei*. In its place the new Republic formed what they thought would become a police force determined to defend the Democratic principles of the new regime. In early 1920 the Weimar government created the *Schutzpolizei* to replace the militaristic *Sicherheitspolizei*. Although not as heavily armed as the *Sicherheitspolizei*, the Weimar government allowed the police to carry carbines, submachine guns, hand grenades, and a limited amount of heavy weapons for riot brigades.<sup>26</sup> They formed the new police force out of remnants of the old *Schutzmannschaft* and *Sicherheitspolizei*.<sup>27</sup> They also recruited a number of *Freikorps* soldiers, men who largely distrusted the new Republican government.<sup>28</sup> These

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<sup>24</sup> Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic*, 47.

<sup>25</sup> Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic. The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 69

<sup>26</sup> According to Allied rules, a German policeman could carry a bayonet, a pistol, and one hand grenade. Every Third patrolman could carry a rifle or carbine, every twentieth man a machine gun, and every thousand was allowed an armored car with two heavy machine guns. Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic*, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Jacob, *German Administration Since Bismarck*, 88; see also Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic*, 52.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

men, though of dubious character possessed valuable experience quelling public disorder and street violence that the new police force needed.

The reformers, led by Albert Grzesinski and Carl Severing, sought to transform the police, from what they argued was an oppressive tool of government, into a “servant of the people.”<sup>29</sup> In order to accomplish this, they created civilian oversight committees to investigate police abuse of power. They also allowed the police to unionize. Last of all, keenly aware of the suspicion the political police created in the community, they disbanded the Prussian Political Police detachment.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the efforts of Grzesinski and Severing, the Weimar Government was unable to rid the police of many of its characteristics and traditions that made it dangerous to the new Republic. Grzesinski, speaking on the weakness of the Weimar government stated that it needed the support of elements or people normally opposed to socialist democracy, to ensure the formation of an adequate police force. To him, “it had no other alternative than to avail itself of the services of the enemy.”<sup>31</sup> Grzesinski and other reformers committed to Democracy were frustrated when events forced them to maintain a strong police force used primarily against former partners in the cause of socialism, i.e. the Communists.

Efforts made to initiate real reform met with strong resistance from elements of the police, mostly within the officer corps. This opposition doomed attempts to make any significant changes to the German police. Many of the officers resisted fiercely any

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<sup>29</sup> Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic*, 10. Grzesinski served as the Berlin Police President. Carl Severing was the Minister of Interior in the Weimar government and Grzesinski's superior. Both were Democrats committed to police reform and republicanism in Germany.

<sup>30</sup> Browder, *Hutler's Enforcers*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic*, 49, 58.

attempt to democratize the police or any effort to take away their powers they held under the monarchy. For example, they opposed any attempt to allow civilian oversight over their actions. To them, the public had no right to question the methods they used to enforce and maintain law and order. They also disliked the creation of a police union. They argued a union gave the rank-and-file patrolmen the opportunity to challenge officers' authority and was bad for morale. The *Verein der Polizeibeamten Preussens*, the police union that represented the majority of the police officer corps, waged a constant battle to oppose the reforms the Social Democrats initiated. They held on strongly to their military tradition and refused any attempt at change. By 1931 the antagonism between the police leadership and the government had reached such a deplorable state that officers started to deliberately stage incidents to embarrass their civilian superiors.<sup>32</sup>

As the relationship between the government and the police deteriorated, elements outside of the government that opposed the Republican regime took to the streets and demanded the overthrow of the Weimar experiment. Radical groups from both the extreme right and left such as the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschland* (KPD) and the *National Sozialistische Partei Deutschland* (NSDAP) staged violent protests in the streets, attacked their opponents, and created almost total chaos. In an effort to combat these groups the Federal government reluctantly authorized the recreation of the political police in Prussia (*Abteilung IA*). The other federal states also created political detachments to monitor certain groups the government considered dangerous. As the situation continued to deteriorate, the surveillance of political matters expanded

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<sup>32</sup> Eric Kohler, "The Crisis in the Prussian Schutzpolizei, 1930-32," in *Police Forces in History* George Mosse, ed. (London: Sage Publications, 1975), 139; On 24 November 1931 Following a republican youth rally were several leading Social Democrats spoke, the police accused the people leaving of riotous behavior. They police commanders ruthlessly unleashed the police riot brigade on the crowd arguing they violated a little known 1929 ordinance that forbid open air demonstrations.



significantly. In addition, the duties of the police in general increased in order to deal with riots, strikes, attempted coups, and possible foreign incursions.<sup>33</sup>

The increased violence coupled with the government's efforts for reform placed a significant amount of strain on the police. The officer corps continued to wage a battle with the government to stop reform and retain their traditional powers. The government exacerbated the dispute when they, because of a reduction of subsidies from the Reich government, cut the police budget.<sup>34</sup> The police faced an administration that not only hindered their efforts to enforce law and order at a time where almost total chaos reigned on the streets of every major city but also cut their salaries. The severe strain placed on the police undermined the loyalty of the police, especially among the officer corps, to the government and many within the police started to ally themselves with radical political groups determined to bring an end to democracy in Germany.

As many within the police rejected the government leadership they became eager supporters among radical rightwing movements. Many policemen had some level of sympathy for the nationalistic groups that opposed the Republican government. Like them, the police considered the Communists the real threat to Germany. To many within the police, Communism was inherently subversive and antithetical to all their traditional values. It was atheistic, internationalist, and openly opposed police authority.<sup>35</sup> The KPD claimed the police were tools of an oppressive and corrupt regime. The Nazis and other rightist groups, however, sympathized with the police and stated they would restore

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<sup>33</sup> Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic*, 6; Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Kohler, "The Crisis in the Prussian Schutzpolizei," 135.

<sup>35</sup> Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers*, 25.

the powers of the police once they gained power.<sup>36</sup> The Nazis argued the liberal restrictions the government imposed “chained the police” and paralyzed state authority.<sup>37</sup> As the conflict in the streets progressed, the police started to target Communists specifically and overlooked similar actions the Nazi Stormtroopers perpetrated.<sup>38</sup>

The battle between the police and the government ended in Prussia after Franz von Papen, with the blessing of the German Army and President Hindenburg, seized control of the Prussian government on 20 July 1932. Papen was determined to end the violence in the streets as well as the failed democratic experiment in Prussia.<sup>39</sup> He declared martial law and restored the powers to the police the Social Democrats took away. He also removed members within the police force with ties to the previous regime and placed the social democrats on the list of subversive organizations.<sup>40</sup> In his coup, the Prussian Police, for the most, part sided with Papen and refused to come to the aid of the Republican government.<sup>41</sup> Following Papen's takeover, the police started aggressively pursue Communists.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In March 1933 Himmler, in an address to Academy of German Law, emphasized the predicament of the Weimar police stating, “It was called ‘a power structure’ but in reality it was not; it was a helpless organization, tied hand and foot. Whenever police officers arrested a criminal they had to watch out that they did not get into trouble themselves while the criminal got away scot-free.” See Document 17 in Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, *Documents on Nazism, 1919-1945* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), 283.

<sup>37</sup> Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Kohler, “The Crisis in the Prussian Schutzpolizei,” 135; On October 14, 1930 Nazi Stormtroopers rioted after the NSDAP victory at the polls in the election. The Schutzpolizei officers on duty along with the rank-and-file patrolmen stood by and did not intervene as the Nazis destroyed property and attacked civilians in Berlin’s central shopping district (Potsdamer Platz and Leipziger Strasse).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 143; See also Jacob, *Police State*, 85. Papen led a group of conservatives and army officers who wanted an end to the Liberal Brown regime. Once they gained control of Prussia they hoped to secure support from the Nazis for an authoritarian non-parliamentary government in the next elections.

<sup>40</sup> Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers*, 27.

<sup>41</sup> Kohler, “The Crisis in the Prussian Schutzpolizei,” 148.

Upon the eve of the Nazi seizure of power the German police strongly sympathized with right wing authoritarian political groups. Although it is difficult to determine the level of support for National Socialism with the Weimar Police, evidence does exist to suggest that a significant number of men within the police supported political parties with conservative agendas including the NSDAP. A great number of police officers previously served in the Freikorps, the paramilitary force that played a central role in the defeat of the Communist uprising in 1918. Many also served in the short-lived militaristic *Sicherheitspolizei* formed initially after the war. Both groups contained large numbers of men who opposed republicanism and wanted a stronger and more authoritative government.<sup>43</sup>

Although it was illegal to join the Nazi party, significant numbers within *Abteilung IA* either indirectly supported the NSDAP or secretly became party members. Many political police officers were also less than enthusiastic when they pursued investigations against suspected Nazis within the German police. They took denials as the truth, and they often threatened informers who accused police officers with ties to the Nazi party with a suit of slander if they did not recant their statement.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the police often allowed the Nazis to demonstrate while, at the same time, they attacked the Communists for the same offense. It was clear on the eve of the Nazi seizure of power that a significant number within the police held many of the same beliefs that the National Socialists espoused.

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<sup>42</sup> Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic*, 79.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid , 41

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 94.

### The German Police 1933-1939

Complete control of the German police was essential to the Nazi *Gleichschaltung* (Coordination).<sup>45</sup> Consolidation and control over the police would enable the Nazi movement to eliminate threats from both outside and within the Nazi party. Once Hitler assumed power in 1933 the Nazis, principally under the direction of Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler, slowly but deliberately started to assume control of the police. Hitler and the Nazi leadership knew they needed the control of the police to secure their hold on power. The police enabled them to eliminate the opponents of the party. Beginning with the Reichstag Fire decree in 1933 to the creation of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA) in 1939, the Nazis slowly detached the police from the German government in order to serve the sole interest of the Führer.

The Reichstag fire started the process.<sup>46</sup> Driven by a fear of a Communist conspiracy, Hindenburg approved the suspension of democratic government. The decree ended many of the personal liberties initiated under the Republic, abolished the federal state structure, and expanded the authority of the police to detain suspects without due

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<sup>45</sup> *Gleichschaltung* was a word created by the National Socialist regime to illustrate the process where all of the social and political organizations in Germany would become Nazified or, if they are unable to fit within Nazi doctrine, eliminated. A perfect example of the Nazi *Gleichschaltung* was the consolidation of the many German trade unions into one Nazi organization called the *deutsche Arbeitsfront* (German Labor Front). Another classic example is the Hitler Youth movement which, under the direction of Baldur von Schirach either took over all existing youth organizations or outlawed their existence.

<sup>46</sup> The burning of the Reichstag, the building that housed the German Parliament, occurred on the night of 27 February 1933. Various uncorroborated theories claim the Nazis deliberately started the fire to stir up hysteria against the Communists in advance of the upcoming parliamentary elections. The police, however, arrested a Dutchman Marinus van der Lubbe with suspected ties to the Dutch Communist party. After the fire, Goering, with Hitler's approval, arrested all of the Communist deputies in the Reichstag and proceeded to arrest suspected Communists. Hitler saw the fire as a "sign from Heaven" and moved quickly to take advantage of the crisis.

process. In the end, the Reichstag-fire decree, passed on 28 February 1933, enabled the creation of the Nazi police state.<sup>47</sup>

Once Hindenburg issued the Reichstag-fire decree, the Nazi leadership immediately set out to consolidate the police apparatus, especially the political arm. The process began in Prussia under the direction of Hermann Goering and in Bavaria under the control of Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich. Eventually, Himmler controlled the entire police apparatus of the Reich including Prussia.

Hitler appointed Goering to head the Prussian Ministry of Interior in January 1933. As the Minister President of Prussia, Goering was the also head of the Prussian Police. He appointed Rudolf Diels in charge of *Abteilung* (Department) IA of the Prussian Police. Diels was a close confidant of Goering and valued for his experience fighting Communists in the Weimar Republic.<sup>48</sup>

Diels, with ministerial approval, moved *Abteilung IA* out of the Berlin Police Headquarters and into its new home at No. 8 Prinz-Albrecht Strasse. This was one of many steps designed to separate the political police from the state government.<sup>49</sup>

The Gestapo law of 26 April 1933 formally legalized Diel's plans for the political police. The law created the *Geheime Staatspolizeiamt* (Secret State Police Office) or *Gestapa* office in Berlin. It also formally separated the political office from the Prussian

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<sup>47</sup> Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 24, 27.

<sup>48</sup> Crankshaw, *Gestapo Instrument of Tyranny*, 44. Heydrich hated Diels and sought to have him arrested or, at the least, removed from his post. Only later in 1935 after many attempts Diels was finally gotten rid of on the pretext that he was plotting against his protector Herman Goring. Diel's removal left the way for Himmler and Heydrich to gain control of the Prussian Gestapo.

<sup>49</sup> Christoph Graf. "Kontinuitäten und Brüche: Von der Politischen Polizei der Weimarer Republik zur Geheimen Staatspolizei," in *Die Gestapo: Mythos und Realität*, Gerhard Paul and Klaus-Michael Mallmann editors (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 76; Hans Bucheim. "The SS: Instrument of Domination," in *Anatomy of the SS State*, Helmut Krausnick, Hans Bucheim, et al. editors. (New York: Walker and Company, 1965), 145.

Police, placed the political police directly under the control of the Minister of Interior, and ranked the *Gestapa* as a *Land* authority along with the other police forces such as the Gendarmerie and the Schutzpolizei. In addition, the law created *Staatspolizeistellen* (Regional Political Police Offices) within each *Regierungsbezirk* (government district). An additional law passed on 30 November 1933 made the Gestapo an independent branch of the Prussian government under the direct supervision of the Prussian Minister President.<sup>50</sup>

The Bavarian government under Prime Minister Heinrich Held resisted efforts to seize control of the state government. Bavaria was traditionally suspicious of Berlin and the central government. Held and others within the Bavarian state government fought to keep Nazis out of the Bavarian administration. Despite his efforts, Held could not delay Nazi pressure for long. On 9 March 1933, SA commander Ernst Röhm, Gauleiter Adolf Wagner, along with SS commander Heinrich Himmler demanded Held appoint General Ritter von Epp Bavarian Federal Commissar. They alerted Held to the fact that thousands of SA stormtroopers waited outside and threatened to riot in the street if he did not relinquish power. Faced with open violence in the streets, Held capitulated and handed over control to Epp.<sup>51</sup> Once in power, Epp named Himmler as Commissar of the Munich Police Presidium. Himmler appointed Heydrich to the head of the political desk

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<sup>50</sup> Graf. "Kontinuitäten und Brüche," 77; Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 29; Buchheim. "The SS: Instrument of Domination," 146;

<sup>51</sup> Held was in a no win situation. If he refused the Nazis' demands and the SA rioted, the Federal government, under Hitler's direction, would send in troops and take over the Bavarian administration on the pretext that the state government was unable to maintain law and order in the streets. In either way the Nazis would gain control.

(*Abteilung VI*) of the Munich Criminal Police.<sup>52</sup> These actions removed one of the principle obstacles to the Nazi seizure of power in the state governments and placed one of the most important police units, after Berlin, under control of the Nazis.

Once in control of the Munich police, Himmler took control of all of the police in Bavaria. An order from the provisional Minister of the Interior for Bavaria on 1 April 1933, gave Himmler the new post of Political Police Commander. The act also created the Bavarian Political Police, which answered only to the Bavarian Ministry of Interior and the Political Police Commander of Bavaria. As in Prussia, Himmler consolidated the various political sections of the state police offices along with political officers within the local government and borough offices into regional and local Political Police offices. In addition to his control of the political police, Himmler now also commanded the uniformed police (*Blau Polizei*) the rural gendarme and the Emergency Police for “executive duties.” In addition to these units, Himmler also had thousands of SA stormtroopers that he could call upon to act as auxiliary units.<sup>53</sup> These various forces gave Himmler a significant amount of power in Bavaria.

Additionally, Himmler set out to increase the size of political police. He emphasized the urgency of his mission, specifically the immediate threat of a Communist conspiracy, and stressed to everyone who would listen the inadequate number of men given to him to accomplish his task. Following March 1933, the majority of cases the

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<sup>52</sup> Bucheim. “The SS: Instrument of Domination,” 147, 148; Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 31, 37; Shlomo Aronson. *The Beginnings of the Gestapo System The Bavarian Model in 1933* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1969)

<sup>53</sup> Aronson *The Beginnings of the Gestapo System*, 10-11.

police investigated concerned Communists.<sup>54</sup> He emphasized the threat of the Communists, especially among foreigners, and urgently requested more men to monitor them.<sup>55</sup> He constantly complained that his employees were overworked, often working fourteen to sixteen hour days, had to work Sundays, and had no time for vacations.

Himmler gave Heydrich the job of creating an efficient police force to carry out the offensive against the Communists. To Heydrich, the “perfect functioning of the shop” was more important than party membership. As a result, he sought men such as Heinrich Müller and Franz Josef Huber, men of dubious political rectitude but extremely valuable for their experience and technical expertise in political policing. Heydrich especially valued Müller because of his knowledge of the Bavarian Communist Party. Both Müller and Huber, despite any ties to the Nazi party, advanced in the ranks of the Gestapo; Müller became Director of the Gestapo and Huber the head of the Gestapo in Vienna.<sup>56</sup> Heydrich recruited men primarily from units within the former political department of the Munich Metropolitan Police who possessed practical skills rather than appointing party members who had little experience in law enforcement and detective work.

After Himmler conquered Bavaria, he expanded his control over the various political police forces in the other German *Länder*. He was named Commander of the Political Police in Saxony on 5 July 1933, in Anhalt and Hesse on 20 December 1933, in

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<sup>54</sup> Hitler outlawed the Communist party in March 1933. Three months later on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, Hitler also outlawed the SPD on the grounds that its leaders outside Germany were involved in treasonous activities.

<sup>55</sup> Aronson. *The Beginnings of the Gestapo System*, 16; Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 27,38.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28; see also Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 56; Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers*, 41.



Thuringia on 21 December 1933, in Bremen on 23 December 1933, and in Brunswick at the end of January 1934. On 20 April 1934 Göring appointed Himmler Deputy Chief and Inspector of the Prussian Secret State Police. Although in theory Himmler was Göring's deputy, in reality Himmler had taken sole control of the Prussian Police. As a result, by 1935 Himmler controlled the entire political police apparatus in Germany.<sup>57</sup>

After he had control, Himmler proceeded to consolidate the individual political police units within the different German states into one cohesive unit. Part of his plan involved the total control of the police without any interference from any state or regional authorities. Officially, the Political Police Commander of the various *Länder* along with the commanders of the regional *Stapoleitstelle* and local *Außenstellen* answered to the local government officials. For example, the Gestapo office in the province of East Prussia was supposed to report and answer to the *Oberpräsident* (provincial prefect). However, he, and other regional authorities constantly complained to the Prussian Minister of Interior that the Gestapo office for their respective province carried out operations without their knowledge or consent. Difficulties such as these compromised Himmler's total control of the police. Himmler realized the dilemma and successfully pleaded his case to Hitler to prevent the civil administration from interfering with his control of the political police.<sup>58</sup>

Civil administration was not the only adversary Himmler had to contend with in order to assume complete domination of the German Police. The SA under Ernst Röhm was extremely popular. Its membership increased dramatically after Hitler assumed the Chancellorship. During the initial stages of Nazi control, Hitler often called on the SA to

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<sup>57</sup> Bucheim. "The SS: Instrument of Domination," 151.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 148, 153.

serve as auxiliary police units. Through brutal and uncontrolled violence and intimidation they made thousands of arrests of Communists, Socialists, Jews, and any other enemies of the state.<sup>59</sup> Their arbitrary use of power had begun to concern many within the Nazi leadership. On 30 June 1934 Hitler, convinced of the threat of Röhm's power, enlisted the help of Himmler and the SS to arrest and execute the leadership of the SA. Known as the "Night of the Long Knives," the actions against the SA eliminated Himmler's principle competitor, and in addition, allowed the Nazi leadership to shed its violent image for that of a "cooler" more organized police state designed to appeal to the Germans' sense for law and order.<sup>60</sup>

On 17 June 1936 Hitler named Himmler Chief of the German Police. From that point on, all police forces, both political and criminal, fell under Himmler's command. In his first act as Chief of the German Police, Himmler created a unified security police force (*Sicherheitspolizei* or Sipo) under the command of Heydrich, and composed of both the Criminal Police (Kripo) and the Gestapo (See chart 1). In addition, Himmler appointed Kurt Dalwege as Chief of the *Ordnungspolizei* (Ordinary Police). The *Ordnungspolizei* included the *Schutzpolizei* (Protection Police and the Urban Constabulary), the Gendarmerie (Rural Constabulary), and the *Gemeindepolizei* (Municipal Police). The Gestapo law of 20 September 1936 brought all of the various political police agencies of the various *Länder* under the control of Gestapo headquarters in Berlin. Himmler also created inspectors for both the *Ordnungspolizei* (Orpo) and

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<sup>59</sup> Many of those the SA arrested were sent to Dachau, one of the first concentration camps set up in 1933. There, prisoners were beaten, tortured, and killed at the hand of their SA and SS tormentors. For a list of punitive regulations at Dachau see Document #19, Disciplinary and Punitive regulations for the internment camp in Noakes and Pridham, *Documents on Nazism*, 284-289.

<sup>60</sup> Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 41; Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers*, 39.

**Chart 1.** Organization of German Police, 1936.

Source: George C. Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers: The Gestapo and SS Security Service in the Nazi Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

*Sicherheitspolizei* (Sipo) for each *Wehrkreis* (Military District) in order to coordinate activities with the local Gauleiters and *Wehrkreis* commanders and oversee all police activity under their jurisdiction.<sup>61</sup>

On 27 September 1939 Himmler combined the *Sicherheitspolizei* and the Nazi Party intelligence apparatus, the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD), to form the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA). The RSHA merged state police authority with the Party and completed Himmler's plan to separate the police from the state making it answerable only to Hitler and the Nazi party. Himmler divided the RSHA into six divisions, personnel and administration, home intelligence, foreign intelligence, the Gestapo, and the Kripo. The Gestapo comprised Section IV of the RSHA and was commanded by Heinrich Müller.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Graf. "Kontinuitäten und Brüche," 78, 163; Crankshaw. *Gestapo: Instrument of Tyranny*, 90; Buchheim. "The SS: Instrument of Domination," 157, 163.

This last measure by Himmler completed the detachment of the police from the traditional governmental bureaucracy and formally made the Gestapo an extra-governmental agency totally concerned with carrying out the will of the Fuhrer. Himmler not only had control of the political police, he also assumed control of the local police forces and all other law enforcement units in the *Reich*. This force was immune to almost all judicial oversight and answered to only two men, Himmler and Hitler.

### **Gestapo Organization**

The Nazis organized the Gestapo to maximize the work of a limited number of personnel. The Berlin *Gestapo* office commanded all of the *Stapoleitstellen* (Regional Gestapo Offices). Himmler set up *Stapoleitstellen* in each of the major cities of the Reich such as in Düsseldorf and Dresden. These offices directed all Gestapo activity in their respective region. Beneath the *Stapoleitstellen*, local Gestapo offices or *Außendienststellen* were set up and reported to the regional *Stapoleitstellen*. In the smaller towns and boroughs the local police office performed the majority of Gestapo duties.<sup>63</sup> In only rare occasions did the local authorities request the assistance of Gestapo officers from the larger cities. In addition, the Gestapo also had police posts stationed along the borders.<sup>64</sup> In all, the Gestapo possessed thirty-four regional offices and fifty-six outposts.

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<sup>62</sup> Bucheim, "The SS: Instrument of Domination," 172.

<sup>63</sup> Trial of the Major War Criminals, *Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal sitting at Nuremberg Germany*, Volume 20 (Nuremberg, 1946), 163. In his testimony, Deputy to Gestapo commander and later Reich Defense Adviser to the Inspector of the Security Police for the Düsseldorf region. Hoffman noted that, "In towns and districts in which there were no branch offices of the State Police, its lower levels were represented by the *Kreis* and the local police officials, and the Gendarmerie. Approximately 80 per cent of all matters came from these police offices."

<sup>64</sup> Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 37.

The organization of the Gestapo in the Rhine-Ruhr district in Prussia proceeded along the same pattern as the rest of Germany. In April 1934, Prussian Minister President Herman Goering removed the political police desk from the jurisdiction of the Prussian State Police office in Düsseldorf and created the Düsseldorf Gestapo office. The *Staatspolizestelle* in Düsseldorf was responsible for the entire *Land* (Province) and answered only to the *Gestapa* office in Berlin and the *Regierungspräsidenten*.<sup>65</sup> He also established *Außendienststellen* in the towns of Krefeld, Wuppertal, Monchen-Gladbach/Rheydt, Emmerich, Kaldenkirchen, and Cleve. Essen's Gestapo office as well as its *Außenstellen* in Duisborg-Hamborn and Oberhausen-Mulheim also fell under the jurisdiction of the Düsseldorf office.<sup>66</sup>

Düsseldorf was the capitol of the Rhineland province in Prussia. Its office was responsible for one of the largest districts in the Prussian state and the Reich. The Rhineland was the industrial heart of Germany. Düsseldorf, the largest city and capitol of the Rhine district, was only one of a number of large industrial cities in the area. Its office was responsible for Gestapo activity and monitored the border to the west including the security of the Rhine River, the most important commercial waterway in Germany. The Düsseldorf office received reports from the *Außenstellen* who submitted reports on arrests and sought advice on directions to take in various investigations. The

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<sup>65</sup> For a complete account of the administrative evolution of the Gestapo see Bucheim, "SS: Instrument of Tyranny."

<sup>66</sup> Reinhard Mann, *Protest und Kontrolle im Dritten Reich Nationalsozialistische Herrschaft im Alltag einer rheinischen Großstadt* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1987), 147. Due to the influence of the local Gauleiter, Essen and its *Außenstellen* were able to maintain some limited autonomy from the Düsseldorf office.

local office often suggested a course of action and asked the regional office for permission to proceed.<sup>67</sup>

### **Gestapo Personnel**

The size of the Gestapo remained small for the entire duration of the Third Reich. In 1933 the *Gestapo* Headquarters in Berlin employed 250 detectives and detective assistants. In addition to the detectives, the office used forty-one administrators and civil servants as well as office employees. By 1934 the number of personnel increased to 645. The number of detectives and their assistants rose to 463. The thirty-four regional posts employed only 793 detectives along with seventy-three detective employees to assist them. In total, by the end of 1934 the Gestapo consisted of only 1,329 executive personnel for the entire Reich.<sup>68</sup> By April of 1935 the number of agents for the Reich increased to almost 2,500. Of these, 589 were stationed in Berlin and the remaining 1,778 were posted in the various regional offices.<sup>69</sup>

Despite the initial limited numbers of officers and administrative personnel, the Gestapo did not expand dramatically in size. For example, the Düsseldorf Gestapo office was one of the largest posts in Germany. Its office employed 291 people in March 1937. Forty-nine of these employees served as administrative personnel. The remaining 242 conducted actual police work. Given a population of over four million inhabitants, its office had its hands full. By comparison, the Koblenz office had approximately 100

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<sup>67</sup> In many of the postwar trials of the commanders of the local Gestapo offices, many argued they were only operating on orders from above (i.e. regional offices such as in Düsseldorf). However, historians such as Eric Johnson have demonstrated that local Gestapo commander had significant powers to determine the fate of prisoners. See Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 36-46.

<sup>68</sup> Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers*, 35-36

<sup>69</sup> Graf, *Kontinuitäten und Brüche*, 78.

officers.<sup>70</sup> Other cities such as Essen, with a population of 650,000, had only forty-three agents. Wuppertal and Duisberg, both with populations near 400,000 had forty-three and twenty-eight employees respectively.<sup>71</sup> In other smaller towns the Gestapo had no office at all. The local gendarmerie or *Schutzpolizei* (regular police) often assumed the responsibilities of the Gestapo.<sup>72</sup> Roughly speaking; there was approximately one Gestapo officer for every 10,000 to 15,000 citizens in Germany.<sup>73</sup>

The majority of Gestapo personnel were holdovers from the Weimar Police. Many of the Republicans or those who seriously opposed the Nazis had been purged from the Prussian Police during Papen's coup in 1932. Most of those who remained in Prussia were either conservative nationalists or sympathetic to the Nazi Party.<sup>74</sup> Göring did not find it necessary to remove many police officers from their duties. He removed only 294 or 12.8 percent of the officers of the *Schutzpolizei* and only 1,370 of the 50,000 or 2.7 percent of the patrolmen.<sup>75</sup> In Bavaria the number of officers purged from the police resembled Prussia. Himmler wanted competent men above loyal party members in the police. Their loyalty to him was assured because they depended upon Himmler for employment. Secondly, they possessed vital police experience necessary to pursue threats to the state as well as Himmler's own enemies within the government.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Mann, *Protest und Kontrolle*, 155. This number represents the size of the Koblenz office in 1939.

<sup>71</sup> Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 45.

<sup>72</sup> Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 47.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 46

<sup>74</sup> Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers*, 34.

<sup>75</sup> Mosse, *Police Forces in History*, 149.

<sup>76</sup> Crankshaw, *Gestapo: Instrument of Tyranny*, 47.

Gestapo personnel can be divided into two distinct categories, commanding officers of the regional and local Gestapo posts and the rank and file officers. Both groups possessed certain characteristics and duties that help illustrate the nature of their position in the Gestapo. The Commanding officers within the Gestapo possessed a great deal of authority and responsibility. They were in charge of the local Gestapo outposts and were responsible for the routine administrative functions, and they determined which cases were to be pursued. They often mediated between the rank and file men under their command and the *Gestapo* office in Berlin. Gestapo commanders also had the power to hold a suspect in custody indefinitely. They could also place a suspect in protective custody for as long as three weeks without the permission of his superiors. Post commanders also possessed the power to keep a prisoner in a concentration camp beyond the time prescribed regardless of the opinions of the camp commander.<sup>77</sup>

Gestapo officers were often highly educated young men from the middle class. Many of them held a degree in law and often a doctoral degree as well. The majority of these officers had joined the Nazi movement at an early stage.<sup>78</sup> For example, Dr. Schafer, the former head of the Cologne Gestapo, resembled many of his colleagues. He graduated from the University of Breslau in the fall of 1920 with a law degree and received his doctorate in 1925. During his career as a police officer he joined the SS sometime between 1930 and 1931. He joined the SA in April of 1933 and finally applied for membership in the Nazi Party on 1 May 1933. In addition to his membership he also served in a number of Party organizations such as the SD and the Reich Association of

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<sup>77</sup> Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 51.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.



State Officials. In February 1933 he was given the command of the political police in Breslau and was named head of the Gestapo in Oppeln until the start of the war in 1939.<sup>79</sup>

Rank-and-file Gestapo men possessed some of the same characteristics as their superiors. Most of them joined the Nazi Party only after the Nazis assumed power. However, many had previously served in other radical rightwing groups such as the *Freikorps* earlier in their lives. However, they lacked the formal education that many of the commanding officers received. As a result, their limited education restricted them from advancing to higher levels within the Gestapo. Like many of the officers, most of them had previously served in the Imperial police and later under the Weimar government. Herbert Braun and Kurt Joost, two Gestapo officers in Krefeld for example, served in the *Schutzpolizei* in the early 1930s.<sup>80</sup>

There were no Gestapo offices in most of the small towns in the rural areas. In the small towns and boroughs the responsibility of law enforcement as well as the duties normally performed by the Gestapo fell to the various police forces under the *Ordnungspolizei*. The Orpo units, the *Schutzpolizei*, the Gendarme, and the *Gemeindepolizei*, fell under the command of SS General Kurt Daluge.<sup>81</sup> They, like the Gestapo, theoretically answered to local government officials (the *Bürgermeister*) though

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<sup>79</sup> Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 55.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>81</sup> Kurt Daluge was appointed head of the *Ordnungspolizei* on 26 June 1936. Daluge was an early convert to National Socialism and joined the SS in 1928. During the Third Reich he served in a number of posts ranging from a seat in the Reichstag, ministerial director and Prussian state councilor and was later named the Deputy Protector of Bohemia and Moravia under Reinhard Heydrich.

they took most of their commands from Daluge and Himmler.<sup>82</sup> Under the Third Reich the units of the Orpo expanded significantly. In 1938 there were 62,000 policemen in the *Ordnungspolizei*. By the end of 1940 this number had increased to over 240,000.<sup>83</sup>

The units of the *Ortspolizei* were responsible for the normal day-to-day law enforcement duties within the Reich. Under the Nazi regime, these units took on a greater degree of responsibility for the enforcement of National Socialist doctrine. The primary responsibility the Third Reich gave to the Orpo concerned asocial elements within the Reich. They spent most of their time in the pursuit of Gypsies, homosexuals, and repeat criminal offenders.<sup>84</sup> As with the Gestapo, they carried out the majority of their arrests and detention without the approval of the courts.<sup>85</sup> As time progressed, they were also called upon to reinforce the Gestapo in various activities. One of their most notorious duties involved service in the *Einsatzkommandos* (killing units) in the occupied territories in the East.<sup>86</sup> In Germany the Schupo, Gendarne and other units of Orpo routinely assisted the Gestapo in the apprehension of runaway POWs and foreign workers.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Although they answered to the local authorities, the local police forces really took their orders from the *Höhere SS und Polizeiführer* (HSSPF). The office of the HSSPF was created by Himmler on 13 November 1937 to promote SS/police integration and oversee political activity in the district as the personal representative of the *Reichsführer SS and Chef der deutschen Polizei* (Himmler). The HSSPF theoretically answered to the local civil administration. However, in practice answered only to Himmler. See Buchheim, "The SS- Instrument of Domination," 213-217.

<sup>83</sup> Klaus-Michael Mallman and Gerhard Paul, *Herrschaft und Alltag: Ein Industrieviertel im Dritten Reich*, vol 2, *Widerstand und Verweigerung im Saarland, 1933-1945* (Bonn: Verlag J.H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1991), 5-6.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 281

<sup>86</sup> For a detailed account of the *Ordnungspolizei* and their role in the *Einsatzgruppen* in the East see Browning, *Ordinary Men*.

<sup>87</sup> Mallman and Paul, *Widerstand und Verweigerung im Saarland*, 291.

The rural policeman possessed many of the same characteristics as the rank-and-file Gestapo men. They were, for the most part, career police officers with limited education and little formal police training. They often did not serve in areas where they grew up. Those who joined the party became members after 1933 and only a very few joined the SS. For the most part, few had any official ties to National Socialism. However, Himmler made a concerted effort, especially for those in the Orpo who served in the *Einsatzgruppen*, to indoctrinate the police officers in National Socialist doctrine. In addition to their normal police training they were given a one-month course in ideological education. Although the material was significant, much of their indoctrination consisted of the same propaganda disseminated among the general population.<sup>88</sup> Despite their belief in Nazi propaganda, they, like many others within the police in the Third Reich, remained loyal to the Nazis until the end.<sup>89</sup>

More important than ideology, Himmler and Heydrich wanted men with experience and expertise.<sup>90</sup> They retained officers with key knowledge in law enforcement and surveillance often sacrificing loyalty to National Socialism in the process. As a result, Himmler created a small but highly experienced force. Although few in number, they used a number of intelligence gathering sources such as paid informants, Gestapo agents, local and state police agencies, and information provided from the public. In some cases they relied more heavily upon one source of information over another. This ability to deftly draw upon multiple sources of intelligence only

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<sup>88</sup> Topics during their “ideological training” included sessions titled “Race as the Basis of Our World View,” followed by “Maintaining the Purity of Blood,” and “The Jewish Question in Germany.” See Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 177.

<sup>89</sup> Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 66.

<sup>90</sup> Crankshaw, *Gestapo Instrument of Tyranny*, 47,94.

increased their efficiency. No one knew where or when the Gestapo might strike.<sup>91</sup>

Their efficient use of sources, such as informants, surveillance, and civilian denunciations coupled with their well-known use of violence helped added to the fear of the public and helped create a reputation that has risen to almost mythical proportions.

### **Conclusion**

The police under the Third Reich, both the Gestapo and the regular forces, retained characteristics similar to law enforcement units in the imperial era. Like the Gestapo, imperial forces acted with a great deal of authority and force when necessary. When the Weimar government attempted to place restrictions on police activity the police reacted negatively and sought to undermine the new Republic's actions. Although they may not have been eager supporters of the National Socialists, many within the police did maintain similar political beliefs. As a result, very little friction occurred when the Nazis assumed power. In fact, they co-opted the various law enforcement units, modified them, and gave them increased powers to enforce the will of the state.

Although the Gestapo received the most attention by the regime, the local police forces were essential to the enforcement of Nazi policy including many of the racial laws and edicts passed by the Nazi leadership. When Himmler deftly assumed control of the entire police apparatus he created a force that was small yet efficient. The Gestapo, a small force of bureaucrats and trained policemen, could rely on a number of other police agencies to assist and carry out their assigned task. In addition, this entire apparatus was constructed on top of a deliberately created atmosphere of fear. This fear created a myth

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<sup>91</sup> Crankshaw, *Gestapo Instrument of Tyranny*, 103.

that was all too real in the mind of the public. As a result, it only magnified the Gestapo's effectiveness.

Recent historians have focused so much effort on the explanation or reasons behind why Germans committed horrible atrocities they have come exceedingly close to making the same claim that many convicted German war criminals used in their defense at Nuremberg.<sup>92</sup> These men, mostly within the Gestapo and the SS, argued they were not vicious murderers. They were average citizens, mere bureaucrats, or unwilling accomplices. Others made the decisions, and they "were only following orders."<sup>93</sup>

Historian Eric Johnson has rightly questioned this recent historiographical movement.

He noted:

...we can typologize a schizoid personality or an asocial personality. But that does not make a person who falls into one of these personality types "normal." The fact that psychological theory can help us understand why a person committed murder does not make that person normal. Such reasoning would be music to the ears of the Cologne and Krefeld Gestapo officers who argued almost to a man after the war that they had only been ordinary policemen...<sup>94</sup>

Other noted scholars such as Saul Friedländer also warn of an overemphasis on the ordinariness in many aspects of the Third Reich. Friedlander, cautioned that current historiography runs a continuous risk of overemphasizing the "normalcy" in studies that

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<sup>92</sup> Several historians, both good and bad have given increasing attention to psychoanalysis of Holocaust perpetrators. For example, George Browder, Christopher Browning, Robert Gellately, and many others have given increasing time exploring why Germans, as well as others, participated in the Holocaust.

<sup>93</sup> Crankshaw, *Gestapo. Instrument of Tyranny*, 11.

<sup>94</sup> Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 79.

focus on the Nazi era.<sup>95</sup> These historians correctly argue that just because we can explain why they committed murder does not necessarily make them “ordinary” men. Gellately’s analysis on civilian denunciation only further complicated this debate. His efforts to explain the heavy reliance upon the public for information may demonstrate the weakness of the Gestapo. However, it does not make the case for their “ordinariness.” The Gestapo agents had the choice of life and death over millions of victims. In many cases they chose death. Beyond this they took it upon themselves to circumvent the German justice system when it gave out punishments to Polish workers they deemed were not strong enough. Therefore, the mere fact that they exhibited traits similar to the German population at large is inconsequential. Gestapo agents initiated acts of torture and murder. This alone dismisses all notions of normalcy.

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<sup>95</sup> Saul Friedlander, “Some Reflections on the Historicization of National Socialism,” in *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 16 (1987), 310-324. Although historian Ian Kershaw disagreed with several of Friedländer’s questions on recent historiography, he does treat the dispute with fairness. For an in-depth analysis see Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 183-196.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE RHINE RUHR AND POLISH LABORERS

Polish workers have had a significant presence in the Rhine-Ruhr since the middle of the nineteenth century. Their presence in the region has also had a significant impact on the socio-economic structure. Many Germans mistrusted and feared the growing Polish minority in the country. They argued Poles negatively impacted the economy, created turmoil within the working class, and threatened to rob Germany of its national distinctiveness as a German state. Many considered the Pole in Germany, uneducated, rebellious, and unwelcome. During the Third Reich, Hitler institutionalized and radicalized the anti Polish attitude. Under the Nazi regime, Poles were isolated, subjugated, and ultimately targeted for elimination. Hitler charged the Gestapo with the responsibility of administering Nazi racial policy towards the Poles.

The first part of this chapter examines the geographical and economic importance of the Rhine-Ruhr. For most of its history subsistence farming and limited mining dominated the region. During this period Poles, in small numbers, came to Germany only during the harvest season to assist German farmers. In the later nineteenth century the Rhine-Ruhr and the rest of Germany underwent a rapid process of industrialization. During this period the Rhine-Ruhr moved away from an agriculture dominated economy toward heavy industry dominated by coal mining and steel manufacture. The Rhine-Ruhr, above all other regions, exemplified this economic shift. Hundreds of thousands of

Poles came to cities such as Essen, Krefeld, and Düsseldorf in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in search of employment.

The second part of the chapter explores the presence of Polish laborers in Germany and the Rhine-Ruhr and their relations with Germans and the government. Early on in its industrial development, Poles played a key role in the German economy. However, many Germans feared foreigners, especially Poles. This racism towards a significant racial minority in the community began at an early stage and continued into the Nazi period. Hitler capitalized on this fear and mistrust to gain power and later subjugated the Poles in order to accomplish his war aims.

Clearly the Rhine-Ruhr area of Germany was complex under the Third Reich. Although the few records that survive demonstrated an enthusiastic approval of National Socialism, many people of this region possessed key political and racial views that the Nazis were able to capitalize on making their job much easier. When the cooperation of the public was not readily available, the Gestapo was able to rely on other tools within the community to facilitate their tasks.

### **Geography of the Rhine-Ruhr**

The Rhine-Ruhr district encompasses several geographic zones each with distinct features ranging from wooded hills, to coal rich valleys, and isolated river basins with soil perfect for agriculture. Despite its diversity, the Rhine-Ruhr's economy, especially since the middle of the nineteenth century, has been driven by its rich mineral deposits located in the Ruhr Valley. The Ruhr Valley (*Ruhrgebiet*) extends roughly from the Emscher River and the town of Recklinghausen in the North to the Ruhr River itself and



**Map 2. The Rhine-Ruhr: Natural Regions.**



Source: J.A. Hellen, *North Rhine-Westphalia*, Problem Regions of Europe, ed. D.I. Scargill, no. 13 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 6.

the towns of Witten and Hagen. It extends from the Rhine in the west and the town of Duisberg eastward to the city of Dortmund. Within the horseshoe boundaries of the Rhine, Emscher, and Ruhr rivers lies one of the greatest industrial centers of Europe. Industrial towns such as Oberhausen-Mülheim, Gelsenkirchen, and Bochum extend out in a network of towns and cities with virtually no open country between them. Located in

the center of this region lies Essen, one of the largest and perhaps most important cities of the Ruhr.<sup>1</sup>

Lying to the south of the Ruhr resides the Rhine Highlands or the Sauerland. The Sauerland is part of the Süderbergland; a complex set of geographical features made up primarily of rolling hills and densely forested areas. The Sauerland, with its high rainfall and extensive drainage network provides the much needed water for the Ruhr valley. In addition the Sauerland provides two other significant natural resources, timber and coal. Both used for fuel, the Sauerland's large sources of Brown coal or lignite grew to become one of the principle sources of cheap energy for much of western Germany. Poor soil quality has limited any significant agriculture. In its stead, two cities, Wuppertal and Remscheid have flourished in the production of specialized industries of textiles such as silk and the production of fine tool.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the Sauerland, two other sub regions, the Rhine Lowlands and the Lower Rhine Plain form key parts of the Rhine-Ruhr area. To the west of the Sauerland is the Rhine lowlands also known as Köln-Bonn Bay (Cologne Bay). It extends up the Rhine River from Düsseldorf to Bonn. These lowlands possess both areas of soil perfect for agriculture as well as areas that contain large deposits of lignite. In addition to Düsseldorf, the area includes the key textile cities of Krefeld and München-Gladbach. To the north of the Sauerland is the lower Rhine plain. Formed principally of the easternmost portions of the Ardennes forest, the area is valued most for its two small but

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<sup>1</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the Ruhr's geography and its historical context see Norman J.G. Pounds, *The Ruhr. A Study in Historical and Economic Geography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> G. H. Shanahan, *Western and Central Europe: A Regional Geography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), 244; See also J.A. Hellen, *North Rhine-Westphalia*, Problem regions of Europe, ed. D.I. Scargill, no. 13 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 7.

key coalfields near the city of Aachen. These fields provide the minerals necessary to Aachen's metallurgical industry and for fuel to power its textile works.<sup>3</sup>

These three areas, the Lower Rhine Plain, the Cologne Bay, and the Sauerland, in addition to the *Ruhrgebiet*, combine to make up the significant parts of the Rhine-Ruhr district. The area as a whole is not ideally suited for agriculture. Instead the area contains an extremely large amount of mineral resources, such as coal and iron, necessary for heavy industry. Until major innovations in mining and steel manufacturing in the middle of the nineteenth century, the region lay largely undeveloped and was one of the least populated areas of Germany. However, by 1890, the Ruhr and its surrounding regions exploded in population as millions of Germans and foreigners arrived in search of work in the rapidly expanding mining and iron works industries.

### **Poles in Germany prior to 1933**

Before 1850, The Rhine-Ruhr valley was primarily an area of small cottage industries and coalmines. However, once the industry took a hold of the area, factories and mining exploded in the region. In 1852, only three factories with an average of 145 workers existed in the Ruhr. By 1873, this number expanded to include eleven firms with an average of over 409 employees.<sup>4</sup> In 1868, the Rhine-Ruhr area was the third

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<sup>3</sup> Shanahan, *Western and Central Europe*, 244; Hellen, *North Rhine-Westphalia*, 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> J.D. Hunley, "The Working Classes, Religion, and Social Democracy in the Düsseldorf Area," in *Societas* (Spring, 1986) 135. The population of Germany increased dramatically during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century as well. In 1875, 42.5 million people lived in Germany. By 1905 the population had increased to 60.5 million. In 1915 Germany's population had increased to 67.9 million inhabitants. For more population statistics see Gustav Stopler, Karl Häuser, and Knut Borchardt, *The German Economy: 1870 to the Present*, translated by Tom Stopler (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1967), 21.

**Table 1.** Coal Production in the Ruhr, 1800-1913

Year	No. of mines	Output (tons)	Value (Marks)	No. of miners
1800	158	230	1,039	1,546
1850	198	1,666	10,385	12,741
1870	220	11,813	67,626	51,391
1890	177	35,469	282,442	127,794
1913	167	110,812	1,282,013	394,569

Source: M.J. Koch, *Die Bergarbeiterbewegung im Ruhrgebiet zur Zeit Wilhelm* (Düsseldorf, 1954), 139; cited in S.H.F. Hickey, *Workers In Imperial Germany: The Miners of the Ruhr* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 13.

largest coal producing area in Prussia (see table 1). By 1873, the same area was also the largest Prussian producer of pig iron.<sup>5</sup>

Prior to the 1870s, most Poles who entered Germany came for only a short period. They worked as seasonal workers primarily on the farms in East Prussia. As industry expanded in the Ruhr, Polish laborers, eager for steady employment, started to settle in the Rhine-Ruhr.<sup>6</sup> In 1861 only sixteen Poles lived and worked in the Rhineland provinces of Prussia. By 1890, the number increased to over 30,000. In 1910 the number of Poles who lived and worked in the Rhine-Ruhr area climbed to between 300,000 to 420,000. Most of them lived and worked in the Düsseldorf province.<sup>7</sup> These numbers continued to increase as the region further relied on heavy industry and mining. The

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<sup>5</sup> Stopler, Häuser, and Borchardt, *The German Economy*, 132.

<sup>6</sup> By the 1880, Poles, primarily from Russia, had replaced East Prussians as the most important source of seasonal labor in agriculture as well. Frank B. Tipton, *Regional Variations in the Economic Development of Germany During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1976), 94; See also C.W. Guillebaud, *The Economic Recovery of Germany From 1933 to the Incorporation of Austria in March, 1938* (New York: AMS Press, 1972), 64.

<sup>7</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Krisenherde des Kaiserreiches, 1871-1918* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck and Ruprecht, 1979), 221; See also Tipton, *Regional Variations*, 110. By 1907, over sixty percent of the population of Bochum was made up of foreign workers. In Essen 53 percent were immigrants and Duisberg fifty one percent were not German. See S.H.F. Hickey, *Workers in Imperial Germany: The Miners of the Ruhr* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 24.

**Table 2.** Population born in the Eastern Marches living in the Rhineland.<sup>8</sup>

Year	East Prussia	West Prussia	Posen	Silesia
1871	3,699	(1) <sup>9</sup>	1,535	6,561
1880	10,251	4,450	3,244	10,268
1890	28,551	9,717	7,562	16,460
1900	64,489	22,248	28,269	29,505
1907	73,428	35,736	46,915	42,931

Source: Benjamin P. Murdzek, *Emigration in Polish Social-Political Thought, 1870-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 369.

number expanded significantly until, on the eve of the First World War, Polish workers made up more than a third of the Ruhr's mining industry.<sup>10</sup>

As the numbers of Poles increased, so did tensions with Germans. The rapid growth of the Polish minority as well as the growth of a number of Polish community organizations led many Germans to speak of a 'Polish Problem'.<sup>11</sup> Germans from all sections of society called for measures to protect Germany from the growing Polish element in Germany.

Germans mistrusted the incoming Poles for a variety of reasons. To begin with, the Poles refused to integrate into mainstream German society. For some, their stay was short. They remained for a brief time to make some money and quickly returned home. For others who stayed longer, they tended to congregate only with other Poles and avoided German social groups, churches, and organizations. They formed their own social clubs similar to their German counterparts. They continued to speak Polish and

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<sup>8</sup> Although many Germans came to the Rhineland to work as well, Murdzek asserts the majority of those from the East who came to the Rhineland were ethnic Poles.

<sup>9</sup> Numbers are included in East Prussia

<sup>10</sup> Elaine Glovka Spencer, *Police and the Social Order in German Cities. The Düsseldorf District 1848-1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), 130.

<sup>11</sup> Tipton, *Regional Variations*, 130.

avoided the use of German. They attended churches directed by Polish priests and ministers. They also formed their own trade unions and political organizations. These actions frustrated many Germans and led to a growing suspicion of Polish workers.

A great deal of this suspicion focused on the concern of Polish nationalism. Since the partitions of Poland in the eighteenth century, the Polish state had vanished. A large number of Poles eagerly sought the creation of a new state. Many Germans, a number of them nationalists themselves, feared the rise of Polish nationalism. To begin with, it presented a formidable challenge, especially in East Prussia, to Germany's own growing nationalist cause.<sup>12</sup> They also argued it created a source of political and social instability. As fear increased, calls came to crack down on Polish political organization and enforce efforts to "Germanicize" the Polish population in Germany.

Bismarck was aware of Germans' concern over the growing Polish presence in Germany but acted for another reason. In an effort to strengthen the new imperial government, Bismarck set to eliminate all elements within German culture that could possibly challenge the authority of the imperial government. This included Polish nationalists. During this battle known as the *Kulturkampf*, Bismarck targeted cultural institutions in Germany, especially the Catholic Church, that he argued threatened imperial authority.<sup>13</sup> High on Bismarck's list were Poles who lived and worked in Germany. The crown issued decrees that forbid the use of the Polish language in German schools. Bismarck also expelled thousands of Polish workers in the east. In the German

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<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Murdzek. *Emigration in Polish Social-Political Thought, 1870-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 21.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 5. Bismarck was initially concerned only with potential challenges to the authority of the state. To him, the Polish gentry and clergy represented remnants of Polish national ambitions. As a result, he made no effort to force lingual or cultural assimilation.

occupied Polish territories he also replaced Polish civil servants with Germans. In what became known as *Polenpolitik*, the Government along with many German cultural institutions attempted to force Poles to abandon their cultural distinctiveness and adopt German customs.<sup>14</sup> Westphalia President Heinrich Konrad von Studt (1889- 1899) made clear the German plan to eradicate the Polish culture in Germany by almost any means necessary.

Sharp surveillance of the agitation and activity of associations, exclusion of nationalistic Polish clergy from the area, restriction on the use of the Polish language in public assemblies, exclusively German education, these will be the means with which the Polish presence in the Monarchy's west will be pulled away from the influence and agitation inimical to Germans and be brought under the influence of Germanization.<sup>15</sup>

Anti Polish sentiment in Germany increased after the turn of the century. In 1908 the Reich passed the imperial law of association (*Reichsvereingesetz*). Under the new law, Polish as well as all other non-German languages were forbidden at political meetings and in education.<sup>16</sup> Other restrictions on Germans mandated that only Poles that could understand some German could work in Germany. In addition, companies

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<sup>14</sup> Although Bismarck was not considered to be a nationalist some historians claim he eventually fell into that camp near his death. For example, on his deathbed noted, "On the basis of many years of observation and consideration the prince [Bismarck] regards all Poles, especially the gentry, the clergy, and last but not least, the Polish peasant as elements to whom conspiracy and political intrigue not only have become a necessity of life but for which they show a high level of perfection and competence; [these aptitudes] dedicated to the service of the idea of nationalism, never permit them to rest but serve is impulses to ever newer machinations." Murdzek. *Emigration in Polish Social-Political Thought*, 5; quoted from Johannes Penzler, *Fürst Bismarck nach seiner Entlassung. Leben und Politik des Fürsten sei seinem Scheiden aus dem Amte auf Grund aller authentischen Kundgebungen*. Vol. 6 (Leipzig: W. Fiedler, 1897), 476.

<sup>15</sup> Peter O'Brien, "Continuity and Change in Germany's treatment of Non-Germans, in *International Migration Review* 22 (Autumn, 1988), 114; see also Christoph Kleßmann, *Polnische Bergarbeiter im Ruhrgebiet 1870-1945: Soziale Integration und National Subkultur einer Minderheit in der Deutschen Industriegesellschaft* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck and Ruprecht, 1978), 84.

<sup>16</sup> Tipton, *Regional Variations*, 115. Gustav Von Gossler, Minister of Religion under Wilhelm I, forbade Polish as a language of instruction in German schools; see also Spencer, *Police and the Social Order in German Cities*, 131.

mandated Polish foremen or supervisors must be able to read and write German in order to retain their positions.<sup>17</sup> Despite these measures, mistrust continued to be directed towards Poles who worked and lived in Germany.

A great deal of this mistrust stemmed from the social tensions that resulted from a society that was rapidly changing. The transition, especially in the Rhine-Ruhr, from an agriculture based economy to one heavy reliant upon heavy industry increased tensions that increasingly tool on a racial factor. Germans started to blame Poles and other foreigners for the principle problems in German society such as the rise in land prices, turmoil within the labor unions, and the rise of radical socialist and Marxist groups.

One of the principle problems Germans faced, especially in the Rhine-Ruhr, was the inability to mount a successful campaign on behalf of labor against the growing power of the industrialists. Despite the large working class in the Rhine-Ruhr, the area's working class leadership had an extremely tough time organizing the labor force. This leadership blamed Poles for many of the their problems. On the one hand, The Social Democrats and the German trade Unions became frustrated when Polish workers refused to join their organizations. At the same time, these same labor unions and parties became further incensed when Poles, for no apparent reason, would strike without warning or consultation. The German organizations disapproved because these spontaneous walkouts undermined their bargaining position with the manufacturing companies and raised the anger of the imperial government.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Wehler, *Krisenherde des Kaiserreiches*, 235.

<sup>18</sup> Hickey, *Workers in Imperial Germany*, 183.



Another problem Germans blamed on foreigners such as the Poles centered on the encroachment of Polish settlements in East Prussia. During the later half of the nineteenth century thousands of German farmers left Germany to live in the United States. Many of these farmers came from East Prussia. As agricultural prices dropped many Germans were no longer able to afford to maintain their farms. They sold their land, mostly to Polish settlers and moved. Many blamed the high level of German emigration to the United States on the seasonal Polish laborers. They argued the cheap labor provided by Polish immigrants helped drive up land prices in East Prussia and reduced the profitability of agriculture.<sup>19</sup> Many liberals within the German government hoped to solve this dilemma by a deliberate governmental program to colonize the east to offset the number of Poles in the area.<sup>20</sup>

As Germany quickly moved to heavy industry, the imperial government became increasingly concerned with radical elements within the working class. They were particularly aware of interactions between Polish workers in the Rhine-Ruhr and various Marxist-socialist groups. They feared Marxist agitators had penetrated many Polish social and political organizations. They further feared this would spread to the rest of the Germany and potentially destabilize Germany's working class population. In response, the crown ordered the police, particularly in the Rhine-Ruhr, to monitor Polish groups

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<sup>19</sup> Murdzek. *Emigration in Polish Social-Political Thought, 1870-1914*, 8, 20-21. A number of prominent Germans such as Max Weber, Karl Lamprecht, Heinrich von Treitschke, all of them leading German nationalists, signed on in a campaign to "awaken interest in the Polish threat" and led efforts to recolonize the Eastern marches of the empire. They and many other prominent and lesser known Germans joined organizations such as the Pan-German League, the Colonial League, and the German Language Association. Their goal primary goal was to colonize Germans on eastern farmlands and eliminating the Polish presence.

<sup>20</sup> Tipton, *Regional Variations*, 116. Government attempts to supplement the depressed agriculture system with a program to industrialize the region was blocked by German nationalists who felt industrialization would not help *Germanization* unless it was accompanied by laws that discriminated against Poles.

and their interaction with Ruhr Socialists.<sup>21</sup> They attended Polish political meetings, attempted to penetrate Polish social clubs and organizations, and monitored their newspaper and pamphlet publications. Popular pamphlets such as the *Wiarus Polski* were closely watched to discover any activity that might be considered harmful to the government. In 1906 imperial authorities ordered the Regional Police Commissar in West Prussia to monitor Poles in the Netherlands and other areas of Western Europe.<sup>22</sup>

Despite their concern, German political police agencies had great difficulty penetrating Polish labor groups. They found it considerably difficult to monitor these groups because few of their agents were able to speak Polish, and could not effectively follow debates at Polish gatherings.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, as more and more Poles arrived in the Rhine-Ruhr area and the police found it difficult to come up with enough agents to monitor them, elements within the government began to voice concern over the level of Polish immigration into the Reich. A detailed report in 1896 laid out detailed concerns over the level of Polish immigration and feared it constituted a danger to the future of the Reich.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time the imperial government intensified surveillance, elements within German society started to take a distinctly anti-Polish attitude. Many Germans felt

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<sup>21</sup> Spencer, *Police and the Social Order in German Cities*, 130. In a report made by the District Polizei Komissar in Essen in 1904, Polish workers had become demanding and restless in their new environment. He went further to argue that they were encouraged by elements within their own community such as Poles within the professional and business community but also through their contacts with German workers.

<sup>22</sup> Kleßmann, *Polnische Bergarbeiter im Ruhrgebiet*, 115.

<sup>23</sup> Spencer, *Police and the Social Order in German Cities*, 130. Police in the Düsseldorf district were especially hampered by the scarcity of Polish speaking officers. For example, in Essen only eight out of 291 officers could speak Polish. In addition, those who spoke the language were considered unreliable because they were often of Polish decent.

<sup>24</sup> Kleßmann, *Polnische Bergarbeiter im Ruhrgebiet*, 84.

Poles were “dirty” and “unclean”. Jokes were repeatedly made about Poles and their inferiority to Germans.<sup>25</sup> The editor and chief of the “Rheinsich-Westfälischen Zeitung” (RhWZ) and cofounder of the ultra nationalist *Alldeutschen Verbandes*, Theodor Reismann-Grone repeatedly preached about the threat of Polish immigration into the Reich. He and others launched continuous attacks against the center parties, the SPD, and other “enemies of the Reich”. He even included attacks against what he considered a lax and liberal administration. Reismann, and many others like him, felt the government was far too soft on foreigners, especially Poles, and a tougher policy was needed.<sup>26</sup> On the eve of the First World War it was clear that many Germans considered Poles an alien and unwanted presence in German society. Not only did Germans consider Poles inferior, but they also argued they posed a serious threat to the future of German culture.

When war began in 1914 many of the social concerns over the Polish presence in Germany took on an added significance. Germans distrusted the Poles and their presence in Germany. At the same time, they needed Poles to fill in the gaps of the labor force. As the war escalated the army took away hundreds of thousands of Germans from farms and factories and left serious gaps in the work force. When these men marched off to war the Imperial government replaced these workers with foreign laborers. Further, the government forced seasonal Polish laborers, permitted to enter Germany temporarily to work during the harvest season, to remain in Germany to fill the labor gap. Overall, from

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<sup>25</sup> Kleßmann, *Polnische Bergarbeiter im Ruhrgebiet*, 93.

<sup>26</sup> Roderick Stackelberg, *Hitler's Germany: Origins, Interpretations, Legacies* (London: Routledge, 1999), 52; see also Kleßmann, *Polnische Bergarbeiter im Ruhrgebiet*, 88.

1914 to 1918, Germany added approximately 400,000 foreigners, most of them Polish, to the German workforce.<sup>27</sup>

After the end of World War One, the numbers of Polish workers dramatically declined. In the post war period, the number of Laborers from Poland, in both industry and agriculture, never reached the numbers of 1900 to 1914. During the economic collapse of 1929 to 1932, the number of foreign workers continued to decline. As jobs became scarce unemployed Germans competed with Poles in an ever-shrinking job market. In an effort to provide Germans with jobs, the Weimar government limited the number of Poles permitted to enter the Reich. By 1934 fewer than 200,000 foreigners worked in Germany.<sup>28</sup>

### **Polish Laborers in Nazi Germany**

Hitler initially continued the policies of Weimar and restricted the numbers of foreign workers in Germany.<sup>29</sup> Early on, he had little need for workers from the east because of the large number of German in need of employment. However, as Hitler began to make preparations for war, labor shortages, especially in agriculture, quickly started to surface. Massive building projects such as the Autobahn consumed most of the available labor. Construction of defensive fortifications on the West Wall and the building of other wartime necessities such as armaments factories and coal hydration

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<sup>27</sup> O'Brien, "Continuity and Change in Germany's treatment of Non-Germans," 111.

<sup>28</sup> Jürgen Kuczynski, *Germany: Economic and Labor Conditions Under Fascism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 180.

<sup>29</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs, 1939-1946: Hitler's Europe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), ; see also Avraham Barkai, *Nazi Economics. Ideology, Theory, and Policy*, translated by Ruth Hadass-Vashitz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 23.

plants further strained the available labor supply.<sup>30</sup> The call up for military service only exacerbated the problem.<sup>31</sup>

Hitler's plan for a rapid military buildup created a problem that directly challenged Nazi racial doctrine. Hitler promised that once he obtained power, he would purify Germany of the inferior peoples. Hitler included foreign workers, especially Poles, along with other targeted groups such as Jews and Gypsies.<sup>32</sup> However, Hitler's wish for a racially pure state was confronted with an awkward reality. As Hitler rearmed Germany, the Reich began to experience an acute labor shortage. The Nazi policy towards women further complicated the labor supply. According to many within the Nazi leadership, the woman's role in German society was in the home.<sup>33</sup> These policies eliminated a large number of potential workers necessary to drive German industry and agriculture and created a gap in the work force that continued to plague the Reich.

In an effort to solve the labor problem, Hitler reluctantly agreed in 1937 to reopen

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<sup>30</sup> International Labor Office. *The Exploitation of Foreign Labor by Germany* (Montreal: International Labor Office, 1954), 3; When Hitler came to Power in 1933, 3.7 million Germans were unemployed. By 1938 only about 200,000 Germans were without work. Much of this was achieved because of projects such as the Autobahn, begun in 1933, and the *Arbeitsdienst*, initially a voluntary program that assembled young men and women in work camps to work on roads, footpaths, work in agriculture, and other land improvements. See Stopler, *The German Economy*, 133; Barkai, *Nazi Economics*, 171.

<sup>31</sup> Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs*, 228. Stopler, Häuser, and Borchardt, *The German Economy*, 153. In March 1935 Hitler announced a general military conscription to increase the size of the army.

<sup>32</sup> Intrinsic in the National Socialists "*Volksgemeinschaft*" principal was a belief in racial purity. Jews and the *Slav Untermenschen*, Poles and Russians, were the two principle enemies of the German racial state. See David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London: Routledge, 1993), 65-66.

<sup>33</sup> Hitler believed women complicated relations in the work place, and most importantly, was biologically harmful to the race. See Alan S. Milward, *The German Economy at War* (London: University of London Athlone Press, 1965), 46; see also Barkai, *Nazi Economics*, 229.

the frontiers to foreign workers.<sup>34</sup> However, by 1938, the shortage of workers was still acute. Dr. Friedrich Syrup, State Secretary in the Reich Ministry of Labor, estimated the need for additional manpower at about one million. Out of this, twenty-five percent were needed in agriculture and the remaining in industry.<sup>35</sup> By the end of the year the shortage in manpower had increased to an estimated two million workers.<sup>36</sup> It was clear that Germany could not continue without further assistance from workers outside the Reich.

In an effort to stave off the inevitable, the Nazi government enacted further measures to expand the available pool of labor. In June 1938, Reich Minister Herman Goering, Commissioner of the Four Year Plan, introduced compulsory labor mobilization. This required every German citizen, regardless of profession or social status, to accept any work or to undergo any training assigned by the proper authorities.<sup>37</sup> Despite this and other measures, including the importation of foreign labor and the almost complete mobilization of the German workforce, the shortage of workers remained a persistent problem.<sup>38</sup>

Once the war started in September 1939 Germany quickly began to exploit Poland to solve its labor shortage. Agents from the Ministry of Labor followed closely behind

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<sup>34</sup> Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs*, 224; see also Milward, *The German Economy at War*, 41.

<sup>35</sup> International Labor Office, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs*, 224.

<sup>37</sup> International Labor Office, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Approximately seven million foreigners and POWs were brought into the German labor force during the war. In addition, a further one million Germans were brought into the labor pool. This number was offset by the call-up of eleven and a half million Germans for military service. As a result, the German economy operated with a deficit of over 3 ½ million workers between 1939 and 1944. See Edward R. Zilbert, *Albert Speer and the Nazi Ministry of Arms: Economic Institutions and Industrial Production in the German War Economy* (London: Associated University Presses, 1981), 38; See also Barkai, *Nazi Economics*, 238-239.

German military units as they rapidly advanced into Poland. Their assignment was to round up recruits for work in Germany and deport them back to the Reich.<sup>39</sup> A month later Hitler issued a decree that made all Poles in the occupied territories between the ages of fourteen and sixty eligible for work in the Reich.<sup>40</sup> However, the numbers who “volunteered” were not able to satisfy the needs of the Reich. By the spring of 1940, Hitler abandoned all attempts to recruit willing Poles ordered leaders in the Generalgovernment in Poland to begin the forced recruitment of Polish labor.<sup>41</sup> Hans Frank, the Governor-General of occupied Poland, continued to insist that voluntary measures, and better treatment of the Polish workers would contribute better results.<sup>42</sup> However, as the war continued and the army drafted more and more Germans into military service, pressure from Berlin on Frank to find more workers in Poland ended all discussion of a voluntary system.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Hans Pfahman, *Fremdarbeiter und Kriegsgefangene in der Deutschen Kriegswirtschaft, 1939-1945* (Darmstadt: Wehr and Wissen Verlagsgesellschaft MBH, 1968), 23.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Broszat, *Nationalsozialistische Polenpolitik, 1939-1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags, 1961), 102; Pfahman, *Fremdarbeiter und Kriegsgefangene*, 26. By the end of 1939, 711,550 foreigners, 469,000 of them were from Poland, worked in German agriculture plus another 180,000 freed prisoners of war who supposedly “volunteered for work in agriculture. See Kuczynski, *Economic and Labor Conditions Under Fascism*, 191.

<sup>41</sup> Broszat, *Nationalsozialistische Polenpolitik*, 105. Although initially a voluntary system, the German would encourage recruits by denying ration cards, and closing down factories in occupied Poland. See Kuczynski, *Economic and Labor Conditions Under Fascism*, 211.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 103,105. Frank did not oppose the use of slave labor on any ideological basis. Frank’s objections stemmed from his belief that the forced labor process created more problems than it was worth. He felt arrangements made to round up, watch, and transport the workers, all under secrecy to avoid other Poles from finding out, would be extremely difficult. Whitney Harris, *Tyranny on Trial: The Trial of the Major German War Criminals at the End of WWII at Nuremberg, Germany, 1945-46* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1954), 407. See also Burton Klein, *Germany’s Economic Preparations for War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 125; also, Milward, *The German Economy at War*, 97.

<sup>43</sup> In May of 1940 5,808,000 men were drafted into the armed services. A year later this increased to 7,805,000. The number of foreign workers in Germany, mostly Poles, increased from 301,000 in 1939 to over 3 million in 1941 and over 4 million in the summer of 1942. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs*, 225-226.

After setbacks on the Eastern front in 1942 and 1943 Hitler ordered the complete mobilization of labor in Poland. All measures, no matter how harsh, were used to secure workers from the Reich.<sup>44</sup> However, by this point Poles were well aware of the harsh treatment workers received while in Germany. Many Poles who were capable of work either fled before the German authorities captured them or joined resistance groups to fight the occupation.<sup>45</sup> As a result, Germany was only able to find a further 400,000 Poles for service in the Reich. The passive resistance of Polish citizens along with the expansion of partisan groups in the occupied territories made it increasingly difficult to find workers.<sup>46</sup>

### **Treatment of Polish Laborers in the Reich**

From the moment Nazi Germany allowed them to enter Germany to work in 1936 the Reich discriminated against Poles. Numerous rules and regulations restricted their movement and activity. Once the war started Germany completely exploited the Poles and subjected them to extremely harsh working conditions. By the end of the war the Nazis were treating their Polish slave laborers no better than cattle. They were worked until they were near death. After, they were either sent back or where executed.

Workers who voluntarily came to Germany fared little better than those who were forced. To begin with, they were required to pay a special tax, a “social equalization

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<sup>44</sup> Document 025-PS, Office of the United States Chief Council for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, vol. 3 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946).

<sup>45</sup> *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, vol. 1, 886.

<sup>46</sup> Broszat, *Nationalsozialistische Polenpolitik*, 108; Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs*, 227. Speer and believed Fritz Sauckel, the chief of slave labor recruitment in the occupied territories, and his methods of labor “recruitment” were self-defeating. Under Sauckel, recruitments in foreign labor steadily dropped from 2.1 million workers between 1942 and 1943 to only 900,000 between 1943 and 1944. See also Milward, *The German Economy at War*, 113, 80.



levy,” that corresponded to the amount the Nazis assumed the alleged “lower” Polish racial level could be determined in terms of wage percentages.<sup>47</sup> Polish unskilled workers, the lowest wage category, earned exactly half the earnings of their German counterparts.<sup>48</sup>

The working conditions that Poles were exposed to overshadowed any argument of unfair payment. If a Pole worked on a farm, his or her treatment depended on the German family he or she worked for. In some cases Germans treated them reasonably well. Those Germans who did treat their Poles well however risked punishment by Nazi authorities.<sup>49</sup> Nazi officials encouraged farm owners to beat their foreign workers when they misbehaved, and they authorities assured them that they could always rely on the Police if their workers did not obey. In the coal mines, factories, and large farms of the Ruhr conditions for Polish workers were deliberately much worse. The brutal reality of work in Germany began immediately upon arrival. In *The Arms of Krupp*, William Manchester described life for Poles and other foreigners brought in from the east to feed the German war machine.

According to Adam Schmidt, a railroad worker, “in the middle of 1941 the first workers arrived from Poland, Galicia, and the Polish Ukraine. They came crammed in freight cars. The Krupp foremen rushed the workers out of the train, and beat them and kicked them....I watched with my own eyes while people who could barely walk were dragged to work”.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Kuczynski, *Economic and Labor Conditions Under Fascism*, 201.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Gellately’s work detailed numerous accounts of German farmers reprimanded or even sent to prison for showing any sign of leniency or charity towards Polish workers. See Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*.

<sup>50</sup> William Manchester, *The Arms of Krupp*, 1857-1968 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964), 482.

Upon their arrival, Poles came face to face with their future treatment. Manchester went further to describe the attitude of Germans toward the forced laborers.

signs posted outside the Krupp shops proclaimed *Slawen sind Sklaven* (Slavs are slaves). The ugly word was out in the open, and with it came a new jargon. Increasingly, intrafirm memoranda alluded to *Sklavenarbeiter* (slave labor), *Sklavengeschäfte* (the slave trade), *Sklaverei* (salvory)...In German the verb to eat is *essen*. The feeding of farm creatures is *Fressen*, and that was the word used for slaves; often as they jumped from the boxcars in the terminal the first words they heard were “*Keine Arbeit, Kein Fressen*” (No work, no feeding).<sup>51</sup>

To Poles and other slave laborers, the twelve-hour workday was normal, and they often had to work longer. On a daily basis the Ruhr companies subjected their Poles and other foreign workers to extreme brutality and degradation that defied imagination.

Most of the forced laborers suffered malnutrition and had almost no medical care. The rations Poles received were significantly lower than German workers. On May 17, 1944 the Polish Main Committee submitted a report to the General Government that described the conditions of Poles forced to work in Germany.

The call for help that reaches us brings to light privation and hunger, severe stomach and intestinal trouble, especially in the case of children, resulting from insufficiency of food...Proper medical treatment or care for the sick is not available in the mass camps<sup>52</sup>

Doctors were only to be called in cases of extreme need, and they were not to see Polish patients if Germans needed attention at the time.<sup>53</sup> In all, Nazi Germany deliberately set

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<sup>51</sup> Manchester, *The Arms of Krupp*, 482.

<sup>52</sup> *Trial of the Major War Criminals*. Volume III. (Nuremberg: International Military Tribunal, 1947-49), 447-48, quoted in Harris, *Tyranny on Trial*, 418.

<sup>53</sup> Kuczynski, *Economic and Labor Conditions Under Fascism*, 219, 221

the standard of living for Poles so low as to deliberately cause death.<sup>54</sup>

In an effort to maintain the war effort and uphold their racial doctrine, the Third Reich introduced a number of draconian legislative measures to prevent any interaction between Germans and other racially inferior peoples. However, this was not enough. In addition to restricting contact they enacted a series of rules and regulations designed to isolate, persecute, and ultimately eliminate a race they considered inferior. Once brought into the Reich, Polish laborers were placed under severe scrutiny. The Nazi government placed harsh restrictions on their interactions with the German public. Poles were forbidden to associate with German citizens. Industrial workers were housed in barracks and closely watched while on farms employers provided the housing for their laborers.<sup>55</sup> Any contact between the two could, and usually did, result in a prison sentence, a trip to a concentration camp, or execution (also known as 'special treatment').<sup>56</sup> Poles were forbidden to use bicycles, go to church, visit restaurants, or use public transportation. In addition, Poles were ordered to wear special badges to designate their inferior status. Failure to display the badge often resulted in a prison sentence or execution.<sup>57</sup> It was the responsibility of the Gestapo to enforce the numerous race laws that related to the use of foreign labor in Germany.

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<sup>54</sup> Kuczynski, *Economic and Labor Conditions Under Fascism*, 201. According to Nazi racial theory, Poles were the next targeted group for extermination after the Jews. Therefore, all regulations concerning foreign workers which might keep Poles working productively, much less alive, were not applied. See Christopher Browning, *The Path to Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 146.

<sup>55</sup> Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs*, 249; for a complete list of regulations, issued on March 6, 1941 see Harris, *Tyranny on Trial*, 420-421.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 59.

<sup>57</sup> Memorandum of December 3, 1941 pertaining to the use of foreign workers in the German Reich in Reinhard Rürup, *Topography of Terror: Gestapo, SS and Reichssicherheitshauptamt on the Prinz-Albrecht-terrain A Documentation* translated by Werner T. Angress (Berlin: Verlag Willmuth Arenhövel, 1989), 158.

### **Conclusion**

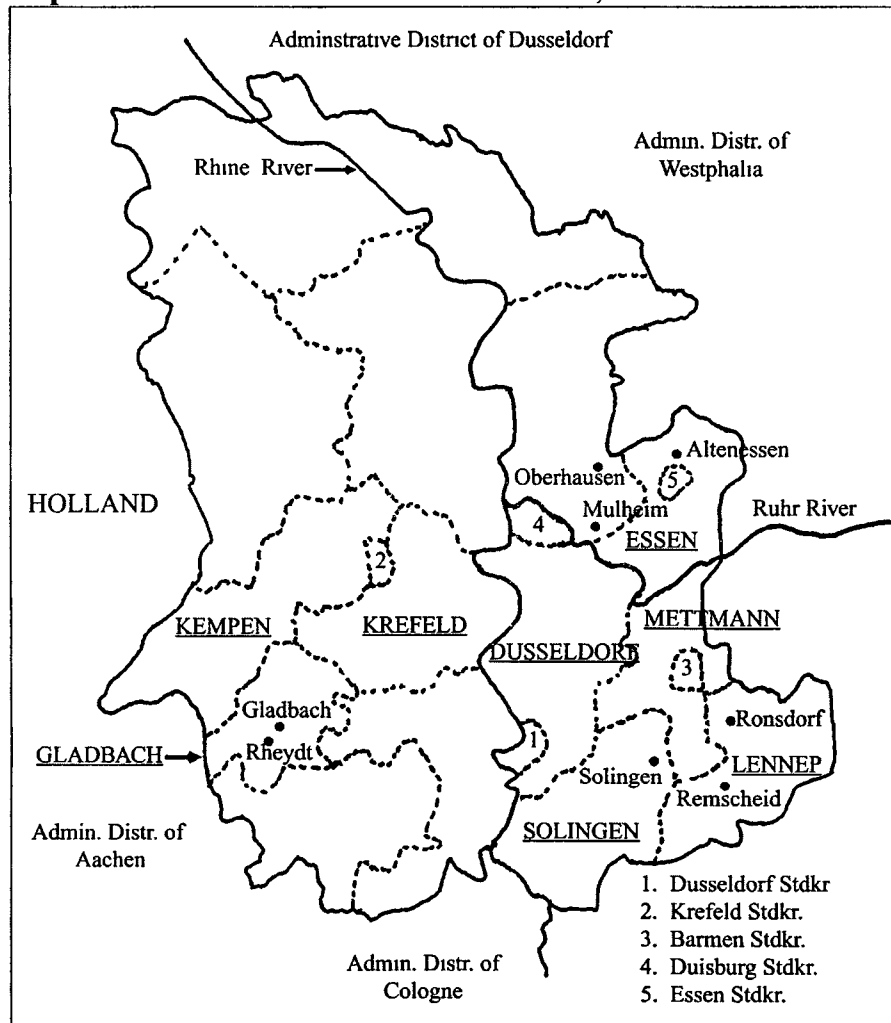
Since the start of Germany's industrial expansion, Polish laborers have maintained a significant presence in Germany and especially within the Rhine-Ruhr. Since 1850 and increasing thereafter, Poles came to Germany in ever-increasing numbers in search of work. Many within the German community disliked the increase of immigrants flowing into Germany. They believed Poles contributed to a number of the country's social problems, destabilized relations between trade unions and employers, and contributed towards political violence in the Ruhr. In response to the fear of both the Public and government, the imperial government directed the various police agencies to monitor Polish activities.

When Hitler assumed power, he resolved to rid Germany of all foreigners especially those considered racially inferior such as Poles. However, Hitler's commitment to rearmament and war forced Germany to admit Poles and other workers from Eastern Europe to enter Germany to work. Once the war started, Hitler began force Poles to come to Germany to work in forced labor camps. While in Germany, Poles were subject to a series of racial laws designed to isolate and persecute them and other foreign workers. It was the Gestapo's responsibility to enforce the new laws.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE DUSSELDORF GESTAPO FILES: DENUNCIATIONS, LOCAL POLICE AND THE ROLE OF THE GESTAPO

**Map 3.** Administrative District of Düsseldorf, c. 1878.



*Source:* J. D. Hunley, "The Working Classes, Religion, and Social Democracy in the Düsseldorf Area," in *Societas* (Spring, 1986), 135.

The Gestapo was a small force with limited number of personnel. Nonetheless, these men, especially the commanding officers, possessed a great deal of police experience. They used their resources efficiently and selectively in order to eliminate opposition to the regime and enforce the will of the state. One source of information came from civilian denunciations. In certain crimes the Gestapo relied on the public. Though denunciations were important to detect certain types of criminal activity, in the larger context they were only one of many tools the Gestapo used to detect and eliminate political criminals. It was their ability to maximize all sources at their disposal that helped them achieve such a great degree of success despite their limited numbers.

To highlight the Gestapo's efficiency, this chapter looks within the Gestapo's own case files to examine the major tools the Gestapo used to discover racial crimes. Through an examination of these files, it is clear that the Gestapo relied on a number of sources for information besides assistance from the public. A statistical analysis demonstrates clearly that overall denunciations were only one of many sources of information. This chapter looks at situations when the Gestapo in fact relied heavily upon denunciations. At the same time, it also looks at other tools the Gestapo had at its disposal that, in the larger picture, played a much more important part in the Gestapo's investigations.

After close analysis of the Gestapo's own case files of Polish workers, the Gestapo was highly selective in the manner in which they participated in the enforcement of Nazi racial policy. In some cases they played an active role in investigations of suspects. In other instances, they relied on other various law enforcement agencies, information from social institutions, or party organizations to conduct the actual enforcement of Nazi policy and only played an indirect or advisory role in the process.

### **Gestapo Investigations and the Case File System**

The Gestapo kept records for almost every person they investigated. These files contained a wealth of material on how they started cases, conducted investigations, and how they dealt with the individuals they pursued. Although they are far from complete, these dossiers shed a great deal of light on the Gestapo, their activities, and German society under National Socialism.

The size of the files varied. Some were brief with little information while others were large and contained a multitude of documents, testimonies, and other evidence. Others contained only basic personal data with no indication of indictments, convictions, or the fate of the subject. At the same time, many files were far more complete and included many documents and significant material.<sup>1</sup>

The most common document found in almost all of the files were forms listing the basic information on the Gestapo prisoner. These documents listed a multitude of questions that covered basic biographical detail. In the case of Polish workers for example, it included the person's full name, birthplace, place of residence, and occupation. Most of the biographical sheets within the files from Düsseldorf that concerned Polish workers were never completed. The Gestapo apparently filled in only the essential parts of the form and almost never completely filled out the document. Although only basic information, this form gives important information on the types of people the Gestapo pursued, where they came from, what profession they practiced, and a

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<sup>1</sup> Mann, *Protest und Kontrolle*, 67.

number of other important details on Polish laborers in Nazi Germany.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to standard forms, the case files also included detailed correspondence that dealt with each case that was conducted between the local Gestapo post and other government or party offices. Very often, an office in Krefeld, Essen, or other locality would write to the regional headquarters in Düsseldorf or other post for further assistance.

For example, one common request centered on ethnicity. The Nazis were extremely occupied with the race or ethnicity of a prisoner. Often a local post would solicit the assistance of another post that employed a race expert. These officers determined whether a suspect had German blood and was capable of assimilation within the German race or not.<sup>3</sup> In other cases, they included reports from Nazi doctors, the Staatssicherheitsdienst (SD), party offices such as the Labor Office, or government sources such as the Ministry of Interior. Interrogation records were the most common documents outside of those that detailed the basic information on a suspect. In addition, depositions of witnesses were also often included.

The files also sometimes contained detail on the surveillance of the person's mail, as well as copies of evidence such as pamphlets, notebooks, or books.<sup>4</sup> For example, the files are replete with letters of Polish workers to their families at home detailing the horrible working conditions the Germans forced them to endure. In many cases, the

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<sup>2</sup> Although the form that contained the basic information varied from state to state within Germany and also changed over time the same basic information was included concerning personal information was included in all files. See Appendix B for an example. Also see Mann, *Protest und Kontrolle*, 69-72.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Gellately, "Police Justice, Popular Justice, and Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany," in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany* Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 263 ; See also Mann, *Protest und Kontrolle*, 68.

<sup>4</sup> Mann, *Protest und Kontrolle*, 67.



Gestapo used captured correspondence to capture accomplices of the criminal offenders. It enabled them to strengthen their investigation without a substantial increase in manpower. These correspondences are extremely valuable to the historian because they demonstrate how the Gestapo conducted their investigations.

Although the files have a great deal of value, they also suffer from a number of weaknesses. To begin with, almost no two files are alike. They either contain different forms and documents, or the documents themselves differ. Most of the standard forms the Gestapo used changed in style and format during the twelve-year history of the Third Reich. In addition, some forms differed depending on where the file originated. For example, a form within a file in the Munich office might not be the same as a document that served the same purpose in a file from Düsseldorf.

The Gestapo files are important because they give the historian a window into the investigative process of the Gestapo. They often included copies of the official indictment of the accused. In addition they might contain papers relating to the various courts that operated during the Third Reich.<sup>5</sup> If an accused was sent to a concentration camp, the Gestapo officer involved often wrote to the camp administration and conferred with the camp commander on the inmate's status. In these cases, the officer might recommend that the prisoner serve a longer sentence than recommended by the court.<sup>6</sup> They also illustrate the types of investigations often pursued by the Gestapo, and they tell

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to local and regional criminal and civil courts, defendants in Nazi Germany often found themselves facing the infamous *Volksgericht* (People's Court) in Berlin. Under the direction of Roland Freisler, defendants had to prove their innocence to the court and there was no appeal from a death sentence.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Gellately, "The Gestapo and German Society: Political denunciations in the Gestapo Case Files," in *The Journal of Modern History* 60 (December, 1988), 668.

the reader how the case was started, who conducted the inquiry, when the crime occurred, and the punishment meted out to the offender.

### Methods of Detection: Denunciations and Gestapo Activity

**Table 3.** Sources of Information for the start of cases concerning Poles in Lower Franconia, 1933-1945.

Sources of Information	Number of Cases	%
1. Reports from the population	35	48
2. Information from other control organizations	15	21
3. Observations by Gestapo and agents	0	0
4. Information via communal or state authorities	4	6
5. Statements at interrogations	0	0
6. Information from businesses	1	0
7. Information via Nazi Party, Nazi organizations, or Party Members	4	6
8. Source not known	14	19
Total	73	0

Source: Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 156.

The Gestapo relied on many methods to detect enemy activity inside the Reich. Recently, the Gestapo's use of civilian denunciations has received a great deal of attention. Previous research has focused on the importance of denunciations. This analysis looked primarily at crimes that involved forbidden contact, such as sexual encounters between Germans and Poles, and found that the majority of these cases were pursued based on information provided by average German citizens.<sup>7</sup>

Research across Germany has found that in other cases of forbidden contact between Poles and Germans, denunciations were the starting point for investigations. Table three above illustrates that in Franconia forty-eight percent of cases the Gestapo

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<sup>7</sup> Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 8; Gellately has written several other times on the issue of civilian denunciations. This was his first book to aggressively look into the matter.

opened concerning “personal/intimate friendly relations” between Germans and Poles were started initiated with information provided by the local population.

Once the Gestapo became aware of incidents of forbidden contact they immediately investigated the matter. Research from the Gestapo’s files demonstrates a great deal about how they conducted the investigation and how they punished the offenders, both Polish and German. The Gestapo preferred to punish the Polish offenders with a trip to the concentration camp or execution. The Germans convicted of the crime were often humiliated in public to set an example to the rest of the community to avoid contact with foreign workers, especially those considered racially inferior.<sup>8</sup>

One such case involved the Polish laborer from Wülfrath, Stephan Grubowski. The Gestapo sentenced Grubowski to death after a local hospital denounced a German woman, Irmgard Schmidt, to the police. Hinzin alerted the suspicion of authorities after Schmidt arrived at the local hospital with an apparent miscarriage. The hospital authorities alerted the local Gestapo post which began an investigation. After they interrogated Schmidt, they discovered she worked at a cantina that fed workers, most of them foreigners, from a local mining company. After she told them the name of a worker she had a relationship with the Gestapo directed the local police to arrest Grubowski and transfer him to the nearest Gestapo post for processing.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Gellately, “Police Justice, Popular Justice, and Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany,” 258.

<sup>9</sup> This case is from Wülfrath, Manuscript RG-14.001M, *Case Files From the Gestapo in Düsseldorf, 1937-1944*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington DC): Case #254, Grubowski. The USHMM contains a sampling of the original Gestapo case files from Düsseldorf office. The original records are held in the Main Commission archives in Berlin. Copies are also located at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. Afterwards cited as follows; Location, RG-14.001M, Case file number, Name.

While in their custody, the Gestapo questioned Hinzin and Grubowski's coworkers, the hospital staff, and Schmidt's family. The Gestapo agents were able to conclude there was a relationship and that Hinzin and Grubowski had sexual intercourse on several occasions. The agents were not able to prove the child belonged to Grubowski. After concluding the investigation, both Grubowski and Schmidt were turned over to the local courts. The court determined that because the child did not belong to Grubowski, he should be sent to prison for punishment. The Gestapo however, intervened after sentencing and designated Grubowski for "special treatment."<sup>10</sup>

In this case, the Gestapo received corroborative information of a crime from a reliable source. The hospital was not required by German law to inform the police of a suspected incident of racial mixing. Nonetheless, they felt it their duty to alert the appropriate authorities. Although nothing in the file explains who exactly within the hospital notified the police, the Gestapo received enough information to warrant starting an investigation.

In other cases, the Gestapo received information from more dubious sources. The Gestapo received thousands of denunciations that dealt with racial mixing from average citizens, party figures, and other groups. In some cases the denunciation was accurate. In many however, people either deliberately misinformed the police, or they alerted the authorities without all of the facts. From early on the Gestapo recognized the questionable nature of civilian denunciations. They set stiff penalties for false accusations, and took steps to make sure the criminal activity did in fact occur.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wulfrath, RG-14.001M: 254, Grubowski

<sup>11</sup> Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 36.40.

The Gestapo's investigation of Bronislaw Banasiak demonstrated their reluctance to take civilian denunciations for granted. Banasiak was arrested in Oberhausen in the summer of 1941 for forbidden contact with a German woman after a local citizen informed the police that she saw Banasiak and a woman, Johanna Vantini together.<sup>12</sup> The Gestapo questioned both suspects in addition to the witness who claimed to have seen them commit the crime. After their investigation they found that the witness never actually saw them have sexual intercourse. Their only proof, a confession from Vantini, was highly questionable. She changed her story several times under interrogation. Furthermore, they found she was diagnosed as mentally incompetent and had been sterilized by the government in 1938 for mental retardation. Doubting that a sexual encounter ever took place, the Gestapo released Banasiak after a stay in the Gestapo prison with a stern warning to avoid associating with Germans in the future.<sup>13</sup>

From this case it was clear the Gestapo did not always accept a denunciation as fact that a crime occurred. The Gestapo questioned everyone involved in the incident. They also questioned Banasiak's employer, who testified to Banasiak's faithful service and others in the community who stated to the Gestapo that Vantini was "feeble minded" and openly flirted with the foreign workers in town. In this case it was clear the Gestapo took their duty seriously and conducted the investigation as if any other crime had been committed.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Oberhausen, RG-14.001M: 39, Banasiak. Nazi Germany forbid any contact between Poles and any German citizens. They also did not permit them to interact with the other foreigners present in Germany. Numerous cases detail punishment for Polish workers for interacting with French POWs, Russian POWs, Italian nationals, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

**Table 4.** Forbidden contact cases concerning Poles in the district of Düsseldorf, 1939-1944.

Sources of Information	Number of Cases	%
Reports from the population	18	43%
Information from other control organizations	2	5%
Observations by Gestapo and agents	2	5%
Information via communal or state authorities	2	5%
Statements at interrogations	0	0%
Information from businesses	6	14%
Information via Nazi Party, Nazi organizations, or Party Members	2	5%
Source not known	10	24%
Total	42	100%

Source: Manuscript RG-14.001M, *Case Files From the Gestapo in Düsseldorf, 1937-1944*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington DC).

Punishment for racial mixing depended upon the person convicted. Polish men who had sexual relations with German women were almost always executed. Polish women, like the men, were usually sent to a concentration camp but were not immune from the death penalty as well. A German female caught having sexual intercourse with a Polish male was often paraded in public before the community and humiliated. They were both forced to wear a sign that stated the crime they committed, had their heads shaven, and were forced to endure public humiliation as punishment for their crime. German men who committed the infraction did not receive the same punishment. In many cases they were given a only warning and released.<sup>15</sup>

The number of cases that started from civilian denunciations in other areas of Germany was similar. In the Palatinate over fifty-five percent of the Gestapo cases of forbidden contact came from the people.<sup>16</sup> Last of all, in the Rhine-Ruhr, forty-six

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<sup>15</sup> Gellately, "Police Justice, Popular Justice, and Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany," 259.

<sup>16</sup> Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, 167.

percent of forbidden contact cases came from reports from the population. Table four shows that, in a similar study of case files from the Düsseldorf office, civilian denunciations initiated forty-three percent of cases that involved forbidden contact. These findings are compelling. They demonstrate clearly that the Gestapo needed the help of the population to discover crimes of forbidden contact.

Although the evidence that points towards the necessity of denunciations was significant, it is only part of the overall equation. Contact between Germans and Poles was certainly a key component within Nazi racial policy. Hitler wanted to limit the interaction with Poles and other “inferior” ethnic groups as much as possible.<sup>17</sup> He assigned responsibility for the enforcement of Nazi racial policy to the Gestapo. This was an immense task for such a small police force. It was only natural that they would use every means within their disposal to secure information on suspects. Forbidden contact was an especially difficult crime to detect. For the most part, contact between Germans and Poles, especially sexual contact, went beyond the capacity of the Gestapo to detect on its own. Sexual encounters were, for the most part, conducted in privacy. The Gestapo, as with any other police force in history, did not possess the manpower necessary to see into every window of every town and city in Germany. It was only natural that the Gestapo relied upon tips from the citizenry to detect these crimes. Without public cooperation, the Gestapo’s task would have been much more difficult.

The early focus by Gellately and other scholars on only one category of racial crime in order to illustrate the importance of denunciations and the weakness of the Gestapo fails to take into account other racial crimes whose detection did not rest on

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<sup>17</sup> Ulrich Hebert, “Labor as Spoils of Conquest, 1933-1945,” in *Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945* ed. David Crew (London: Routledge, 1994), 225.

information from the public. Although in cases of forbidden contact denunciations were important, in many other instances they were not. In many situations, the Gestapo relied upon the assistance of other tools such as the various other law enforcement agencies, businesses that employed Polish workers, and various other state and local institutions. Although in some cases the Gestapo may not have actively looked for criminals, this does not necessarily mean they were ineffective. The focus on one narrow class of racial crimes rather than the broader scope of Germany's racial policy has led to an overestimation of the role of denunciations. These conclusions have not taken into account other crimes Poles committed that did not necessarily involve forbidden contact but were nonetheless racial in nature. Furthermore, it inflated the public's role in Nazi crimes, and overlooked the efforts of the Gestapo to capture and punish offender. It also mitigates the role other forces within German government and society played.

Nazi racial policy towards Polish workers went far beyond restrictions on contact between Poles and Germans. The Poles, according to National Socialist doctrine, were inferior to Germans. They, like the Jews, were marked for eventual extermination.<sup>18</sup> As racial inferiors, the Nazis subjected Poles to an extensive list of laws designed to isolate and subjugate Polish workers in Germany. Edicts that prohibited Polish contact with other races were only a small part of a wider program that would eventually call for the elimination of what the Nazis considered an inferior race. For example, like the Jews, German law commanded that Poles must wear a patch with the letter "P" on their coat or clothing to signify their status within Germany. Failure to wear this item meant arrest,

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<sup>18</sup> Browning, *The Path to Genocide*, 146.



**Table 5.** Criminal cases in the Düsseldorf Gestapo files.

Crimes	Number	%
Reluctance to work	9	14%
Forbidden contact with Germans	13	21%
Forbidden Contact with foreigners	11	17%
Sedition/treasonous activity	10	16%
Espionage	1	2%
Sabotage	3	5%
Leaving work w/o permission	24	38%
Illegal correspondence	10	16%
Use of public transportation	1	2%
Anti Nazi comments	7	11%
Listening to radio/ playing music	3	5%
Theft	2	3%
Other	12	19%
Unknown	1	2%
Total	63	100%

*Source:* Manuscript RG-14.001M, *Case Files From the Gestapo in Düsseldorf, 1937-1944*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington DC).

possible imprisonment, or execution.<sup>19</sup> Poles were not allowed to move freely within Germany. They were forbidden to use public transportation such as the bus or train, nor could they use cars or bicycles. They were denied the opportunity to frequent theatres, bars, or public festivals. In fact, most Poles who worked in Germany were confined to barracks and worked under slave-like conditions. When Poles were unable to work they were immediately suspected of conspiring to avoid their duty.<sup>20</sup> These other restrictions, such as the Reluctance to work and restrictions upon travel, went beyond edicts that prohibited contact between Germans and Poles.

<sup>19</sup> See text 65, Police Ordinance of 8 March, 1940 pertaining to the wearing of a distinguishing patch by all civilian male and female workers of Polish ethnicity who are deployed in the Reich in Rürup, *Topography of Terror*, 158.

<sup>20</sup> Harris, *Tyranny on Trial*, 420. On 6 March, 1941 the German government issued regulations to govern Polish farm workers. Within these regulations were thirteen rules prohibiting movement, social interaction, and private behavior. Furthermore, the employer was given the power to use corporal; punishment without government approval and without accountability.

**Table 6.** Enforcing Polish racial policy in the Gestapo case files in Düsseldorf, 1939-1944.

Sources of Information	Number of Cases	%
Reports from the population	22	21%
Information from other control organizations	21	20%
Observations by Gestapo and agents	18	17%
Information via communal or state authorities	4	4%
Statements at interrogations	0	0%
Information from businesses	21	20%
Information via Nazi Party, Nazi organizations, or Party Members	2	2%
Source not known	17	16%
Total	105	100%

Source: Manuscript RG-14.001M, *Case Files From the Gestapo in Düsseldorf, 1937-1944*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington DC).

Evidence exists to show that the Gestapo showed an interest in many other cases besides those that involved forbidden contact. Table five shows a breakdown of crimes Poles committed in the Düsseldorf district. According to these findings, only thirty-eight percent of the crimes involved forbidden contact.<sup>21</sup> Although the number of cases that involved forbidden contact is significant, the survey also shows that a number of other crimes also received attention from the Gestapo. For example, the Gestapo regularly dealt, in some fashion, with cases that involved reluctance to work, flight from the workplace, illegal correspondence, and many other crimes. Although these cases do not involve racial mixing, a primary concern of the Gestapo, they were closely monitored because Poles, a racial minority, committed the crimes. If we include these crimes along with cases of forbidden contact we see that denunciations, though important, were far less significant to the start of cases than initially perceived (see table 6). Instead, we see that

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<sup>21</sup> Manuscript RG-14.001M, *Case Files From the Gestapo in Düsseldorf, 1937-1944*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington DC). This number is based upon a random sampling of all the case files from Düsseldorf that involved Polish Workers in the Rhine-Ruhr district.

other sources of information, such as local police agencies, businesses, and other agencies routinely provided information to the Gestapo. Only when we look at all racial crimes Poles committed along with cases that involved forbidden can we understand the true nature of the Gestapo's racial policy towards Poles.

One area of crime the Gestapo dealt with concerned Polish worker's reluctance to work. Given the harsh conditions, many Poles used illness or injury to secure time away from the workplace. If they were successful enough in their ruse, the German authorities might even return the Polish laborer back to their home in occupied Poland. The problem of workers neglecting their duties often became so acute that employers often called the Gestapo to determine the legitimacy of the worker's case and, when necessary, to determine an appropriate punishment. In almost all of these cases the employer, such as I.G. Farben or Krupp Ironworks, reported the incident and not the average citizen.<sup>22</sup> If they felt the worker had not completed his or her tasks satisfactorily, they reported the incident to either the local police or the Gestapo.<sup>23</sup>

Such was the case of the Polish worker Roman Fraszczak. Fraszczak worked for J. P. Bemberg, a textile firm in the Wuppertal. Fraszczak's employer notified the Gestapo in Düsseldorf that he reported sick to work on numerous occasions. They also contended that Fraszczak often came to work drunk and unfit for duty. They complained

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<sup>22</sup> Of the cases in Düsseldorf that involved worker's reluctance to work, almost all of them were reported by the employer of the accused. Krupp's Gusstahlfabrik in Essen employed 7,000 Poles by the summer of 1942 and had requested more. Workers in the Krupp factories were subjected to almost unimaginable physical abuse and torture even before they were sent before the Gestapo. In one case, prisoners were placed in, what one Krupp employee called "the cage." In this device, workers were placed in a windowless steel box only five feet high and 22 inches wide and left from period of hours up to several days. For a further description of conditions in Krupp factories see Manchester, *The Arms of Krupp*, 482, 583.

<sup>23</sup> Manchester, *The Arms of Krupp*, 582.

to the Gestapo that Fraszczak was a threat to the order and discipline of the work camp and requested that they place him in protective custody.<sup>24</sup>

Düsseldorf responded to the request and instructed the Wuppertal office to look into the matter. Wuppertal took custody of Fraszczak and questioned him and his coworkers. In addition to questioning, they also had one of their own physicians, Dr. Teuscher examine the prisoner to see if he was in fact sick. After his investigation, the Gestapo doctor concluded that Fraszczak was ill and not capable of physical labor. After they concluded their investigation, the Wuppertal office notified Düsseldorf of their findings and suggested that they send Fraszczak to prison but not to a concentration camp. The Düsseldorf office agreed and notified J. P. Bemberg of their decision.<sup>25</sup>

In this case, it was clear that the employer played a significant role in the detection of the crime. It would have been extremely difficult for the Gestapo to place agents in all businesses to see if Polish workers were following orders. Once the Gestapo became involved, they carried out the investigation, interrogated the suspect and witnesses, and determined the appropriate punishment. In cases such as these, a strong cooperation between employers and the Gestapo existed in the Third Reich.

The Gestapo conducted a similar investigation of Bronislaw Afeltowski, a Polish laborer in a Ruhr mining facility. The Gestapo intervened when his employer complained that Afeltowski was avoiding work. According to his file, he arrived in Germany voluntarily before the war to work for Vorwerk and Sohn, a local mining company in Wuppertal. In July of 1940 he began to complain that he was ill and could

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<sup>24</sup> Wuppertal, RG-14.001M: 219, Fraszczak.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

not work.<sup>26</sup> His supervisor sent Afeltowski to the company doctor for an exam. The company physician believed Afeltowski was still capable of working. After Afeltowski continued to insist that he was ill Verwerk and Sohn reported him to the local Gestapo. The Wuppertal office interrogated Afeltowski, his supervisor, and some of the employees he worked with. They also had one of their own doctors examine him. Although, the case file does not state what the examination entailed, it did state that Afeltowski was capable of not only working but was also fit enough to go to prison or a concentration camp if necessary.<sup>27</sup>

After they completed their investigation, the Wuppertal Gestapo office sent a report to the district office in Düsseldorf that detailed their findings and suggested they place Afeltowski in prison for twenty-one days as punishment. The Düsseldorf office concurred with the Wuppertal post's suggestion and instructed them to keep them apprised of the situation. Afeltowski was imprisoned for twenty days.<sup>28</sup> Upon his release, he signed a confession admitting his "crime" with the understanding that he would not receive the same "clemency" the next time.

Afeltowski's case represented several of the characteristics of many Gestapo investigations. To begin with, even though "refusal to work" was not an official crime under German law until 1942, the Gestapo had taken matters into their own hands to punish offenders.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, had a crime been committed, it was the responsibility

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<sup>26</sup> Wuppertal, RG-14.001M: 8, Afeltowski

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> International Labor Office, *The Exploitation of Foreign Labor by Germany*, 190.

of the German courts to determine guilt or innocence.<sup>30</sup> Most cases that involved reluctance to work were usually solved by either a threat of a concentration camp or short imprisonment in a Gestapo jail. Furthermore, it was clear in Afeltowski's case, as with the majority of investigations conducted, that the local Gestapo posts, though they frequently suggested punishments, did not possess the authority to carry out a punishment on their own. The local offices in almost every case studied, had to receive the approval of the regional office, in this case Düsseldorf, in order to carry out punishment.<sup>31</sup>

The Gestapo was also called upon to assist employers when Polish laborers ran away from the workplace. When Poles could not rely on illness or injury to gain relief from the horrible working conditions they often attempted to leave their employer and attempt to return home. In most cases they were captured and either returned to their former place of work or sent to a Gestapo concentration camp for a more severe and lethal punishment.<sup>32</sup>

Such was the fate of Zenon Bakalarski. Bakalarski worked for the sheet metal manufacturing firm Hille and Müller. In a letter to the Düsseldorf Gestapo, Bakalarski's employer listed several workers that violated rules the Nazi government proscribed against Polish workers. Among the list, they included Bakalarski. He apparently left the firm's barracks overnight and was not to be found. They requested the Gestapo look into the matter. After several weeks, and further inquiries by his employer, the Gestapo found

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<sup>30</sup> There was constant friction between the Gestapo and the courts over the Gestapo's usurpation of justice. It was finally decided in 1942 that Poles would no longer be subject to the normal court system. See Discussion with Reichsführer SS Himmler on 9/18/42 in Noakes and Pridham, *Documents on Nazism*, 293.

<sup>31</sup> Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> According to the case files, the Gestapo placed Poles who fled work in jail for two weeks. Repeat offenders were sent to concentration camps for an indefinite period.

and arrested Bakalarski in Warsaw in an attempt to return home. After an interrogation, Bakalarski was later sent to a labor camp for punishment.<sup>33</sup>

As Bakalarski and other cases like it illustrate, the Gestapo spent a great deal of time investigating the disappearance of foreign workers. When a case was reported, almost always by the employer, the Gestapo sent notices to all of their offices alerting them to the suspect and information that might lead to their arrest. In many cases, border personnel or authorities within the general government detained them. As punishment, they were usually sent to a labor camp. If they survived their stay at the camp they were usually sent to another employer.

A number of other cases the Gestapo investigated relied on information outside of civilian denunciations. Countless number of Polish workers attempted to smuggle letters back to their families in Poland that detailed their plight in Germany. Either they had Germans send the letters through the mail for them, sent the letters themselves, or bribed their guards to send them. The German government monitored the mail and notified the Gestapo of any incidents where sensitive information was contained.

One such incident involved Franz Bara. The Gestapo in Oberhausen arrested Bara after the Postal service in Cologne intercepted his letter. In the letter, Bara detailed the terrible working conditions she suffered in the labor camps and urged her family to avoid work in Germany if possible. Oberhausen alerted Düsseldorf of his letter and notified them they had given him a short jail term (ten days in a Gestapo prison) and sent him off with a warning.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Düsseldorf, RG-14.001M: 33, Bakalarski.

<sup>34</sup> Oberhausen, RG-14.001M: 44, Bara.

As these and other cases illustrate, the Gestapo dealt with a variety of infractions committed by Polish workers outside of those that involved forbidden contact. Only a few of these types of incidents involved denunciations. Indeed, in most of these situations, the various employers, rather than the public, alerted the Gestapo of Polish crimes. The public did play a large role in the start of some cases, however they were not essential to Gestapo activity in all areas of their assigned duties.

The emphasis upon civilian denunciations presents another critical weakness of Gellately's analysis of the Gestapo's activities. The focus upon information provided by the public leaves out the rest of the investigative processes undertaken by the Gestapo. Denunciations tell us little about how the Gestapo researched the cases brought before them. Although it was true that in certain cases the Gestapo relied heavily upon the public for information on crimes committed, they certainly did not have the public conduct the investigations and decide upon the appropriate form of punishment. Upon investigation, the Gestapo relied on their own investigative skills to determine the validity of denunciations or the presence of a crime committed. In addition, they also relied upon a number of other institutions to conduct the investigative duties or the fieldwork for the Gestapo.

One of the clearly significant sources of information for the Gestapo came from the various state and local police forces. Especially in the small towns and countryside, the Gestapo did not have offices. In their place the local police or the *Gendarmen* performed the majority of the duties the Gestapo performed elsewhere.<sup>35</sup> In addition to the investigation of crimes that involved contact between Poles and Germans, the

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<sup>35</sup> Deposition of Karl Heinz Hoffman, Trial of the Major War Criminals, *Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal sitting at Nuremberg Germany*, Volume 20 (Nuremberg, 1946), 163. See Mallmann and Paul, *Widerstand und Verweigerung*, 281.



*Schutzpolizei* and the *Gendarmen* routinely investigated other racial crimes such as Polish laborers' reluctance to work or leaving the workplace without permission. The German government considered these serious infractions and aggressively pursued cases against Poles who committed these acts.

Josef Bernat's employer, for example, accused him of deliberately avoiding work. Bernat worked in a small factory in Burscheid. His employer reported to the local *Schutzpolizei* that he refused to work. The local police office conducted an investigation and notified the Gestapo in Wuppertal. The Wuppertal office took no action other than to compile a report based upon the Burscheid authorities' findings and include a suggestion for punishment. Wuppertal forwarded the case to Düsseldorf where the regional Gestapo authorities signed off on the report and the punishment. Bernat was therefore sent to a labor camp for eight weeks.<sup>36</sup>

Bernat's case was indicative of many of the cases in the Gestapo's files. The Gestapo did not have the capacity to conduct every investigation. They needed the local police to carry out much of the footwork in their investigations. In many cases the Gestapo closely monitored investigations conducted by other police agencies such as the *Gendarme*, *Schutzpolizei*, *Kriminalpolizei* and others. In these cases it was clear that the Gestapo had jurisdiction and the local authorities took their orders from the Gestapo agent. After they completed their investigation, the Gestapo either assumed responsibility for the suspect or advised local officials of the appropriate punishment. The Gestapo continued to hold the power of life and death over the suspect, a decision the local authorities never possessed, but they infrequently actively participated in many cases.

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<sup>36</sup> Burscheid, RG-14.001M: 63, Bernat.

Local authorities were also needed to deal with the ever-increasing numbers of Polish workers who ran away from their workplace or who never returned from worker furloughs. As the war progressed, more and more workers found the conditions in Germany intolerable and sought to return home. By 1942, Germany ended all work furloughs, denied the workers who voluntarily came to Germany to work the right to return home, and continued to forcibly bring workers into the country.<sup>37</sup> The Düsseldorf files were replete with cases that involved correspondence concerning runaway Polish laborers.<sup>38</sup>

Such was the case of Helena Milan. According to her dossier, Milan had been guilty several times of leaving her job without permission. In this case, the Gestapo office in Linz, Austria sent a notice to all of the regional posts in Germany that Milan Left her job without permission. They requested that, if spotted, the local authorities were to detain her and report back for further instructions. When Düsseldorf received the memo it alerted Gestapo posts under its command of the case. Several days later, the Krefeld office, located in the city where the suspect's family lived, notified Düsseldorf that they had apprehended Milan. After a short correspondence with Düsseldorf and Linz, Milan was sent Linz to await punishment.<sup>39</sup>

As this case demonstrates, The Düsseldorf office did not become physically involved in many cases. They did not personally interrogate witnesses or conduct surveillance. They merely processed information and forwarded memorandums to their

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<sup>37</sup> First Supplementary Order concerning the labor law for Polish workers in the Warthegau. Quoted in International Labor Office, *The Exploitation of Foreign Labor by Germany*, 150.

<sup>38</sup> For examples see Manuscript RG-14.001M, *Case Files From the Gestapo in Düsseldorf, 1937-1944*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington DC).

<sup>39</sup> Linz, RG-14.001M: 385, Milan

local offices. Although the case file is not specific on the matter, we are not even sure the Krefeld Gestapo captured Milan. The gendarme or other local police force may have detained her and notified Krefeld. Nevertheless, the file did not indicate any direct action taken by the Gestapo.

As in the case of Helena Milan, Edward Jasklowski's employer also notified the Düsseldorf Gestapo directly of his disappearance. They apparently granted Jasklowski a vacation. When he did not return to work on the appropriate date, they notified the Gestapo. The Gestapo later captured Jasklowski, and he was later sent to a concentration camp and never heard from again.<sup>40</sup>

Cases such as Jasklowski's and others demonstrate a close relationship between the Gestapo and German employers of slave labor. Employers regularly notified the Gestapo when they felt Polish workers did not perform to their expectations. They also routinely informed the Gestapo when their foreign workers left the work place without permission. The Gestapo, however, rarely became actively involved in these cases. They provided information to other police agencies such as the *Kriminalpolizei*, the *Schutzpolizei*, or the *Gendarmen*. These units conducted the majority of the actual fieldwork. After they apprehended the suspect, they notified the local Gestapo post and requested further instructions. In some cases the Gestapo would take charge of the prisoner. In many cases however, they would leave the case to the local officials and the German courts to decide. Only in cases where they felt the courts were not strict enough

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<sup>40</sup> Düsseldorf, RG-14.001M: 295, Jasklowski. In early February 1944 Himmler issued a memo directing that all recaptured escaped eastern laborers without exception were to be sent to concentration camps. See Document 3360-PS, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, vol. 6, 95.

did they directly interfere.<sup>41</sup> This course of action differs markedly with cases that dealt with forbidden contact. In those cases they almost always took charge of the suspect from the beginning and conducted the investigation themselves. If the suspect was brought before the courts, the Gestapo would often interfere or ignore the decision of the judges.<sup>42</sup>

### **Gestapo Cases and “Special Treatment”**

The role of the Gestapo is further revealed in the process undertaken to punish racial crimes. The most infamous punishment the Gestapo used was known as “special treatment”. Under this sentence, the Gestapo authorities had several options from which to choose. Most often they sent the prisoner to a concentration camp, executed the person in front of a public audience to set an example, or simply shot the person outside of the office and later disposed of the body.<sup>43</sup>

Initially the German courts sentenced foreign workers for any criminal activity committed. Foreign workers and prisoners of war accounted for a large number of those executed by the Nazi courts.<sup>44</sup> For example, in the first half of 1942 alone 530 out of the 1,146 death sentences the courts imposed were against Polish workers.<sup>45</sup> Despite the frequent use of the death penalty by the courts, the Gestapo argued that the courts were

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<sup>41</sup> Gellately, “Police Justice, Popular Justice, and Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany,” 259.

<sup>42</sup> Early on the Gestapo watched the courts deliberations against “enemies of the state” and was greatly distressed at what they saw was the courts’ inability to give out stiff penalties. By 1942, all cases that involved Poles, Gypsies, Russians and Ukrainians were “no longer to be judged by the ordinary courts, so far as punishable offences are concerned, but are to be dealt with by the Reichsführer SS.” See Noakes and Pridham, *Documents on Nazism*, 293.

<sup>43</sup> Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, 173.

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 358.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 316.

not giving out stiff enough penalties. The Gestapo often intervened after the courts' decision and took custody of the prisoner. They then carried out their own punishment. What came to be known as "special treatment", according to Düsseldorf Gestapo officer Erich Preckel, usually meant "execution by hanging without a legal process of any sort. I believe that I can say with a good measure of assurance that a decree existed already in 1940 or 1941 demanding the special treatment be used in all cases of sexual relations between German women and Polish prisoners of war."<sup>46</sup>

Heydrich himself stated that execution was the preferable form of punishment. In a speech he noted:

Doubtlessly the justice system now passes very harsh sentences for such persons, but that is not sufficient. It also makes no sense to conserve such persons for years on end in German jails and prisons.<sup>47</sup>

In many cases the prisoner was delivered to a concentration camp to serve a specific amount of time at hard labor. In these cases, a sentence to a labor camp often meant certain death anyway. By 1942, despite objections from the courts, all cases that dealt with Polish laborers were removed from the jurisdiction of the courts and placed under the control of the RSHA.<sup>48</sup>

Although the Gestapo often used "special treatment", it was necessary to secure approval before sentencing a prisoner to death. The local office needed to gain the approval from the regional office to commit a person to death. In the cases that

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 59. Reinhard Heydrich determined that the courts were not enough to deal with foreigners. He stated, "doubtlessly the justice system now passes very harsh sentences against such persons, but that is not sufficient. It also makes no sense to conserve such persons for years on end in German jails and prisons." See Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 316.

<sup>47</sup> Heinz Wagner, "Die Polizei in Faschimus," in Udo Reifner and B.R. Sonnen, eds., *Strafjustiz und Polizei im Dritten Reich* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), 161-72; Quoted in Eric Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 316.

<sup>48</sup> Gellately, "Police Justice, Popular Justice, and Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany, 266.

originated from the various Rhine-Ruhr offices under Düsseldorf, permission from the regional post was necessary to execute the prisoner or send him or her to a concentration camp. Karl Heinz Hoffman, the deputy to the Chief of the Düsseldorf Gestapo noted in a cross examination at the Nuremberg trials in 1946:

- Q. You said to us just now that people were sent to concentration camps at the request of the local Gestapo services. Is that true?
- A. If an individual was to be sent to a concentration camp, the State Police office [Gestapo office] in Berlin had to make a request to the Gestapo office. It was only if the Gestapo office or, later on, the Chief of the Security Police, decided for protective custody that the individual could be sent to the concentration camp, because internments were obtained through the usual channels of police administration.
- Q. So it is a fact, witness, that internments in concentration camps were made on the initiative of the local offices of the Gestapo?
- A. On the demand of the local office of the State Police.
- Q. And the local Gestapo services, when making such a request, at the same time arrested the individual?
- A. Yes.<sup>49</sup>

On examination, Hoffman noted that the local offices asked for protective custody. They needed the approval of the regional office, in this case Düsseldorf, who later sent the request to Berlin. The regional offices almost always approved the request, and in some cases they suggested special treatment when it was not requested.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, both the regional and local offices had a significant amount of power over the life and death of a person under their custody, and each had a significant part in the treatment of prisoners once they were apprehended regardless of the situation in which the case was brought to their attention.

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<sup>49</sup> Trial of the Major War Criminals, *Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal sitting at Nuremberg Germany*, Volume 20 (Nuremberg, 1946), 172.

<sup>50</sup> Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 43.

### **Conclusions**

Denunciations were very important to the detection of certain types of activity. However they were not vital in all cases. Only in cases that involved forbidden contact did civilian denunciations play a significant role. Because the Nazi regime and the Gestapo considered forbidden contact between Germans and Poles an especially dangerous activity the Gestapo actively participated in the investigative process. They conducted the investigation, interrogated the witnesses and verified the denunciations. When cases of forbidden contact were brought to their attention they focused the limits of their manpower to the pursuit of Nazi racial policy.

Many types of racial crimes Poles committed did not involve forbidden contact. Such instances often did not rely on denunciations. In these cases the Gestapo selectively chose when to become actively involved in the investigation. Sometimes they participated in the case. At other times they were content to sit back and let other agencies conduct the investigation with only minimal assistance on their part. The local police, for example, would conduct the interrogations and report back to the Gestapo. The Gestapo would either let the local authorities handle the punishment phase, or they would suggest a firmer punishment of their own. In any event, in many cases the Gestapo's role in the enforcement of racial policy was more bureaucratic than active participation. The Gestapo, aside from the myth propagated by the Nazi leadership, was effective, not just because they received support from the public. Although information from the public was important, the Gestapo's selective nature and their ability to focus their attention on specific targets with ruthless force made them one of the most feared tools of the Third Reich.

## CONCLUSION

It is certainly clear that the Gestapo was not a large force with agents at every street corner enforcing the regime's will. Although numbered in the thousands, demographically one agent would have been responsible for thousands of Germans. This severely limited their ability to investigate and capture enemies of the state. However, this did not deter the Gestapo. In fact, the Gestapo was quite adept at discovering and punishing activity they deemed unacceptable. How was this possible?

To begin with, it was not their limited numbers. Although they possessed a limited number of personnel, Gestapo, especially among its leadership, had a number of experienced policemen with the expertise necessary to pursue and capture political criminals. Heydrich and Himmler specifically targeted former political police officers from the former Weimar police agencies to serve in the Gestapo. They also sought out men familiar with police bureaucracy and management. They valued these men so highly that they overlooked eager Nazis. Both Heydrich and Himmler treasured experience over ideology.

The Gestapo could also rely on the assistance of a number of other police agencies within the Reich. After Himmler gained control of all German police in 1936 he was able to call on a number of law enforcement agencies to assist the political police. The *Gendarmen*, *Schutzpolizei*, the *Kriminalpolizei*, all fell under Himmler's command. Although it was clear that political policing was not their primary function, numerous



times the Gestapo called upon them to assist in investigations. At the same time, these forces provided the Gestapo with thousands of cases against suspects. It was their duty to report all criminal behavior they discovered.

In addition to other police agencies, the Gestapo received a great deal of information from the public. German citizens, for a variety of reasons, readily informed on neighbors, friends, business partners, and many others when they discovered illegal activity. In some cases, the Gestapo readily accepted the information and arrested suspects. In other instances, they found the denunciations unsubstantiated or they ignored the informant altogether. Furthermore, in some types of crimes the Gestapo relied heavily upon denunciation. In others, however they did not. Therefore, though denunciations were important, they were not the sole reason the Gestapo was able to effectively pursue its enemies.

A more adequate explanation for the Gestapo's success resides in the agencies selective and efficient use of their available sources. As seen, the Gestapo had a number of resources from which to collect information. On a daily basis they received data from the multiple Gestapo posts, local and regional police forces, the general public, corporations, healthcare facilities, party organizations and many other areas. As they received this data, the Gestapo leadership, officers at the various outposts, determined which cases to pursue and those to ignore. Furthermore, they determined how best to pursue the case. In some instances they dispatched rank-and-file agents to conduct the investigation. In many other instances however, they corresponded with local officials and directed the investigation from afar. It was their highly selective nature, their ability

to allocate resources to areas they considered especially significant, that accounted for their success.

This selective nature is clearly reflected in the Gestapo's treatment of Polish laborers in Germany. As Poles arrived in Germany to work, the Reich gave the Gestapo the responsibility to enforce all of the racial policies designed to persecute Poles in Germany. This was a daunting task. Hundreds of thousands of Poles arrived yearly into Germany. These Poles worked in a variety of industries and a number of places. Their workplaces ranged from large factories, to huge mining facilities, to small domestic farms. As they worked the Reich subjected them to a number of draconian measures designed to separate and persecute the Poles while they worked in Germany.

One of the most severe criminal acts the Gestapo targeted the Poles for was forbidden contact with Germans. Forbidden contact ranged from a mere conversation with a German to sexual contact. This was a serious crime that frequently earned a death sentence or a trip to a concentration camp for a Polish worker. At the same time it was an especially difficult crime to detect for the Gestapo. They could not possibly assign a Gestapo agent inside each factory, mine, and on every farm. In these cases the Gestapo relied heavily upon information from the public. Studies have clearly shown that the civilian denunciation played a large role in the detection of cases that involved forbidden contact between Poles and Germans.

Though denunciations were pivotal in cases that involved forbidden contact were important, they were less essential in other areas of crimes that Poles committed. For example, in case that involved a Polish worker's reluctance to work, faking of an illness, unauthorized travel, or a number of other infractions denunciations played a very minor

role. In these cases, the Gestapo relied on local police officials as well as community and Party organizations. In some cases the Gestapo themselves discovered the forbidden activity.

Once discovered, the Gestapo determined the appropriate punishment. They decided whether the Pole deserved a warning or something far worse. In most cases, Poles who committed infractions outside of forbidden contact were given a warning and a short prison sentence of approximately two weeks. In other instances, the Gestapo could be far harsher. Executions, usually in the form of a gunshot to the back of the head, or a trip to a concentrations camp were frequent punishments for Polish workers especially towards the end of the war. In any event, regardless of who discovered or reported the crime, especially when a Pole committed the act, the Gestapo exacted the punishment.

Given this the effectiveness of the Gestapo resided in its selectivity. They were not a weak, laid back police force that waited for information to come to them. In reality the Gestapo was an efficient and highly selective agency that maximized the tools at its disposal. In some cases they did indeed rely on the public for information. This however is only a small part of their activity. Once they became aware of criminal activity they determined the course of action, determined which assets to use, and decided the appropriate punishment. In a sense they were more of a bureaucratic agency than a direct police force.

Despite the methods the Gestapo used to detect racial crimes, their role was clearly illustrated in their primary duty. Once authorities, either the Gestapo or other police force, detained suspects the Gestapo determined the appropriate punishment. They determined whether a Polish worker received a warning, a prison sentence, or execution.

This strikes at the heart of the matter. What separated the average civilian and the Gestapo was the fact that though the citizen may have reported the crime, the Gestapo decided whether the suspect lived or died. As a result, they were responsible for thousands of executions and murders.

## APPENDIX 1: GESTAPO ORGANIZATION (1943)<sup>1</sup>

### Section A: Opponents, Sabotage, and Protective Service.

- A1 Communism, Marxism and associated organizations, war crimes, illegal and enemy propaganda.
- A2 Defense against sabotage, combating of sabotage, political falsification
- A3 Reaction, opposition, and legitimism, liberalism, matters of malicious opposition.
- A4 Protective service, reports of attempted assassinations, guarding, special jobs, pursuit troops.

### Section B: Political churches, sects and Jews.

- B1 Political Catholicism.
- B2 Political Protestantism sects.
- B3 Other churches, Freemasonry.
- B4 Jewish affairs, matters of evacuation, means of suppressing enemies of the people and State, dispossession of rights of German citizenship. (Eichmann was head of this office).

### Section C: Card files, protective custody, matters of press and Party.

- C1 Main card index, administration of individual files, information office, supervision of foreigners.
- C2 Protective custody.
- C3 Press and literature.
- C4 Party matters and its formations, special cases.

### Section D: Regions under greater German influence.

- D Foreign Workers.
- D1 Matters of the Protectorate, Czechs in the Reich, Slovakia, Serbia, Croatia, and the remaining regions of the former Yugoslavia, Greece.
- D2 The General Government, Poles in the Reich.
- D3 Confidential office, foreigners hostile to the State, emigrants.
- D4 Occupied territories, France, Belgium, Holland, Norway, Denmark.
- D5 Occupied Eastern territories.

### Section E: Security affairs.

- E1 General security matters, supply of legal opinions in matters of high and State treason, and other security matters.
- E2 General economic matters, defense against economic espionage, protection of

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the United States Chief Council for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, vol. 2 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), 253-254.

works and those engaged in guarding.

E3 Security West.

E4 Security North.

E5 Security East.

E6 Security South.

#### Section F: Passports and border surveillance.

F1 Frontier Police.

F2 Passports.

F3 Identification and identity matters.

F4 Alien police and basic questions concerning frontiers.

F5 Central Visa Office.



Doc. 3. Biographical Information Document.

## Personalthesen

Personen des geistlich — (königsgewaltig) — in Erscheinung getreten:

1. a) Familienname: [Fot. setzen nach Geburtsname] \_\_\_\_\_  
 b) Vornamen: [Namen unterstreichen] \_\_\_\_\_  
 2. Wohnung: [Adresse eingetragener Wohnort] \_\_\_\_\_  
 3. a) Geburtsort: \_\_\_\_\_  
 b) Geburtsdatum: \_\_\_\_\_  
 4. Beruf: \_\_\_\_\_  
 5. Schulung, Jahr: [Geburtsjahr] Schulzeit: [Geburtsjahr bis Schulabschluss] \_\_\_\_\_  
 6. Minderjährigkeitszeit und -beurteilung: \_\_\_\_\_  
 7. Staatsangehörigkeit: \_\_\_\_\_  
 8. Familienstand: (Ehe, verheiratet, verwitwet, getrennt v. E., etc.) \_\_\_\_\_  
 a) Nationalität und Wohnung bei Einreise: \_\_\_\_\_  
 b) Nationalität und Wohnung bei Einreise: \_\_\_\_\_  
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